

CHAPTER III

INDIA IN THE EIGHTIES

AFTER about a month's voyage the old *Malabar* rolled into Bombay Harbour, and next day we were all free to disperse to our respective destinations. Many of us now became victims of that ignorance about India to which a reference has been made before. In the old days the whole of India was looked upon by inexperienced people at home as being intensely hot at all times. Now, on the contrary, visitors are enjoined to take exactly the same clothes they would wear in England, with bedding and linen in addition.

This is quite correct, for they may find themselves in the hills at any time, where all would be wearable, as they would be also in the cold weather of the Punjab and elsewhere. Really thin clothes, as necessary in the hot weather (and in places like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, at all times), can be obtained easily and expeditiously on the spot.

Some of us were from the Punjab—myself for Peshawar—and it was the middle of January. A good adjutant would probably have warned his officers that sheets, blankets, pillows, etc., as well as a valise, were very necessary adjuncts to one's kit; that railways, hotels and dak bungalows¹ did not supply them; and that Peshawar was extremely cold in the winter. Anyhow, I got no hints at all, and with the exception of a rug had no bedding. A pillow, as described in my account of the "Pandemonium," I had learnt to dispense with. But the cold that first night in the train was so intense that a long stoppage next morning was utilised to rush into a native Bazaar and purchase two Indian pillows and a couple of rezais (species of wadded quilt). For months my bedding consisted of

¹ Rest-houses.

these only. It never struck me to get sheets and pillow-cases until happening, more than a year afterwards, to stay with some newly-made friends in their charming Simla home, my hostess made me feel entirely ashamed by explaining what a dirty person I had been!

At Ambala a halt was made at the one existing hotel, very different from the modern ones to be found at the present day in many parts of India. It had, however, one compensating advantage, the charge was only five rupees a day, or about one-third of the present rates. Still, for the sake of health, cleanliness and comfort a great debt of gratitude is owed to the late Mr. Wützer. It was he who became the pioneer of improved hotel management and catering in India by establishing his celebrated Chateaufort Hotel in Mussoorie.

About dawn the second morning after leaving Ambala, Peshawar was reached, intensely cold, but looking green and fresh with delightful flower-beds all down the Mall. Driving from the station a few British soldiers were seen wearing over their uniform, not the celebrated "British warm," but a *pink* double-breasted wadded pea-jacket, which looked most strange. I learnt afterwards that no British soldier in Peshawar was ever allowed out without this garment in the winter between Retreat, at sunset, and nine o'clock in the morning.

I liked the look of Peshawar and was very sorry to hear, on arrival, that my stay would be extremely short, as the battalion was leaving on the 1st February for Ambala. Anyhow it was a novelty to look forward to, as the relief was to be carried out by route-march. This meant a matter of forty-four stages, a total distance of 470 miles, covering a period of about seven weeks.

Meanwhile getting out my scatter-gun, I haunted the Artillery jheel,¹ frequently in the company of Jack Ramsay of the Cheshires, afterwards Sir John Ramsay, Agent to the Governor-General in Baluchistan. He was even then a very fair shot, while my average for a snipe must have been about fifteen to twenty cartridges.

Colonel H. C. Patton commanded the 2nd Cheshires, and a better C.O. never walked, though he would have owned to some prejudices and a few fads. He was a strict disciplinarian, a very good drill, and most keen on cleanliness

¹ A swamp in India.

and sanitation. Especially was this the case as regards the barracks and married quarters; whereby he proved himself a good deal ahead of his time. His weekly inspection of the quarters of our married people, invariably carried out at odd times and with little warning, was a matter of great ceremony and often of much tribulation.

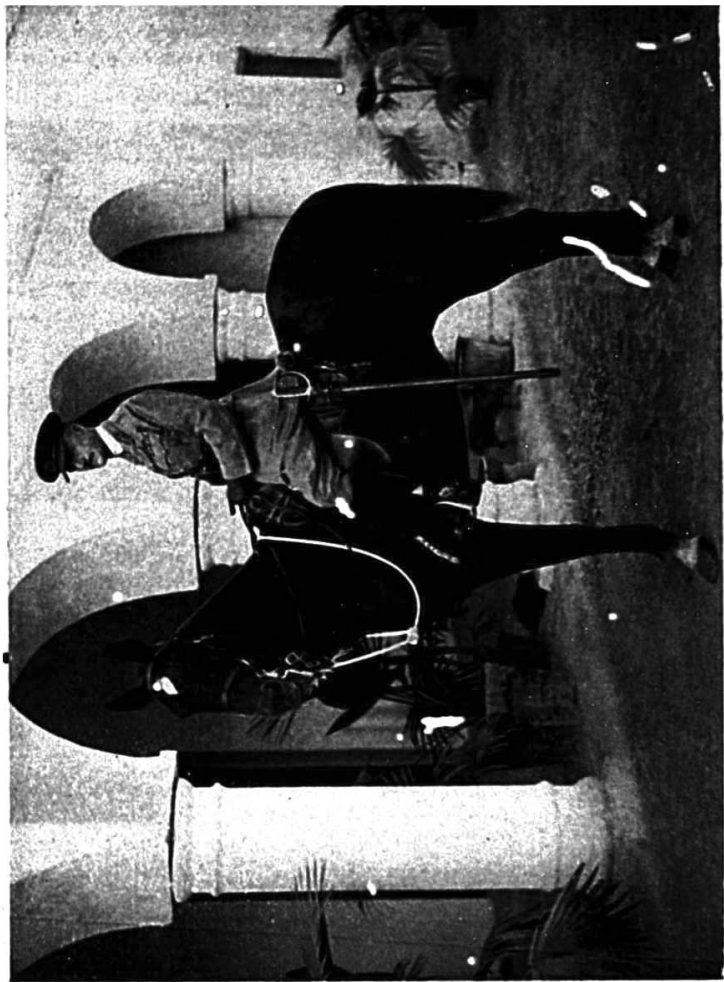
The first time my duty, as orderly officer of the day, gave me the privilege of joining the solemn cortège of second-in-command, adjutant, quarter-master, sergeant-major, etc., which accompanied the colonel on his rounds, an amusing thing happened. It was when we were walking through the quarters of a certain sergeant's wife, well known for her ready tongue and contempt of authority. The C.O. had long held the firm belief that at these inspections, rooms having been tidied in a hurried and perfunctory manner, all *olla podrida* such as dirty clothes, soiled linen, slippers, etc., were tumbled into the bed and the quilt neatly drawn over them. Rather distrusting this Mrs. Sergeant, and disliking her for numerous cases of impudence, in which he had often come off second best, the colonel pulled down the quilt of the large double bed with a jerk. There was nothing there, but the lady, with a loud sniff and in front of us all, snapped out:

"P'raps you'd like to get into it next."

In these days it is much cheaper and more convenient to rail troops than to march them, but in former times it was almost the invariable custom for reliefs to be carried out by road, both to larden the men and to show them to the inhabitants.

In 1884, the 2nd Cheshires, having been over fifteen years in India, had a very large number of old soldiers in the ranks who knew their way about, were as hard as nails and took everything as it came along in the jolliest kind of spirit. I was astonished to find so many officers, for we started on our long march with not less than thirty, many of whom had been in India some years. The colonel was new to the country, and a good deal in the hands of the quarter-master in all matters of interior economy.

The latter was a very knowing old bird and frequently asked me, on a guest night, after a generous share of wine, who I thought commanded the battalion? I maintained a discreet silence. He would then hiccough out:



The Just Page 43
THE AUTHOR, WITH G. O. C. LAHORE DIVISION, AND MOUNTED ON HIS HUNTER-CHARGER
"WARRIOR," WINNER OF SIX FIRST PRIZES IN THE RING, WINTER OF 1919-1920.

“ Why, the quarter-master, of course. 'Ow can the colonel move without me, 'ow can 'e-send away heven 'arf a company, 'ow can 'e horder a single round on the range, without coming to me ? ”

One night, being more confidential than usual, he informed me that a quarter-master's post was a very lucrative one, in something like the following words :

“ 'Ow do I carry on, you say, with a wife and seven childer, a hay-one bungaler, two ponies and a buggee ? 'Oo der yer think pays the bungaler rent—me ? Not much. Why, the punkah-coolie contractor does that, as-well as supplying a cook, kitmatgar (table servant), hearer (body servant), bhistic (water carrier), sweeper (low-caste menial), ayah (woman servant), together with a mali (gardener) and two coolies for the gardin. Bread ? 'Oo supplies that, you say ? Why, the ruti-wallah¹ ; meat, the butcha ; ponies' gram² and grass, the coffee-shop wallah, together with vegetables, flour, sugar, and all the mem-sahib wants for the 'ouse thrown in. No, Wudyet, I 'as to keep my pay for the childer. My four sons 'as to git into the Ryle Engineers or the Church, for John is to go to Hoxford ! ” Most of which duly came off !

He was an excellent quarter-master for all that, both in barracks and in camp. The Cheshires never lacked for anything, everything was up to time, while his stores and accounts were models of neatness, accuracy and care.

In his cups he loved to be asked to sing. He had only one song, which had only four verses ; and after thirty-seven years I can still bring to mind his great shining bald head and his jovial red face as he stood up and bawled out :

The Duke of York and 'e
'Ad ten thousand min.
'E took them up a 'ill
And brought 'em down agin.

Repeated *ad infinitum*.

Our transport train was of enormous length, and consisted of elephants, camels, and hired country carts. The men

¹ Really roti (bread) wallah, the last word denoting trade, profession or occupation.

² Grain for horses.

had what were called E.P. (European Privates) tents, sixteen men to a tent, with an allowance of six tents to each of the eight companies. An elephant carried one E.P., which weighed ten maunds (over 7 cwt.), and was never asked to carry anything else, because it was a doctrine that ordinary baggage was derogatory to his dignity.

On the second morning I happened to be orderly officer and, having to rise very early to inspect rations, I shall never forget the beauty of the camp as the sun rose and threw its rays across the green sward of this halting-stage named Pabbi. At the back was the large tent of the officers' mess with the colonel's Swiss cottage and neat Union Jack on one side, and the second-in-command's on the other, while other senior officers continued the line right and left. Behind were the servants' "pals," and behind them again all chargers, hacks, polo ponies and a small bazaar; lastly the rear guard.

The tents were beautifully pitched according to plan with every row of pegs in line and every corner a right angle. The colonel was dreadfully particular about this, and would have had even the huge mess tent down at once if improperly put up. But officers and men all knew this, and the latter, as I've said, were mostly old stagers, so there was no trouble. All the Government tents happened to be a new issue, being the Peshawar allotment of those manufactured to make good the losses of the second Afghan War. As the mess, and most of those of officers, were recent purchases, the camp looked delightfully white, and spick and span.

On one flank was assembled the heterogeneous transport, at this hour quite still, except the attendants. On the other, and some little further away, was a picturesque mass of brightly coloured bell-shaped tents, some blue, some pink, some red, some green, many striped in two or three colours and all, at this time, tightly closed. The evening before, this camp had puzzled me greatly, until my friend the quarter-master explained that it was the regimental establishment of native women who were marching with us to Ambala!

Shades of Exeter Hall! What would be said of such a practice in these days! Fortunately for me I am not called upon to uphold or condemn the policy which prompted

the existence of these establishments, and permitted their presence even in camp. I may add, however, that there was very little venereal indeed in the 2nd Cheshires. Also that, from direct knowledge, I can give testimony to the truly awful results which followed the abolition of these regimental establishments a few years later.

Such gaily coloured tents were, perhaps, a mistake, as was brought home to some of us at a halt when the second-in-command brought over his wife and some ladies to tea. It was then that a voluble spinster persistently enquired from a particularly modest subaltern: "But who lives in those charming little coloured tents?"!

When we got to the Beas river there was no road bridge, so we had to halt on the near bank. The next day the transport and baggage passed over the railway bridge, the battalion marching across it the day after. But the elephants had to swim the river, and it was amusing to watch them, for it is no joke for the mahouts at all. An elephant, in deep water, may take it into his head to dive, and stay below a bit, with only the tip of his trunk showing!

At Lahore we were camped near the historical Shalamar Gardens, and the next day being a halt, I tried to add to my stud by the addition of a decent polo pony, the maximum height being then 13'2. A waler (Australian bred) was then unknown on the polo ground, and even an Arab, as far north as Peshawar, was quite a novelty. When young George Wombell, of the 60th Rifles, brought one up from Bombay during my next sojourn there, some two and a half years later, we used to form parties to go and look at it! Lahore was a little dearer than Peshawar, where the average price for a likely country-bred was about one hundred and fifty rupees. I remember getting into terribly hot water in the mess because I paid Rs. 250 at the latter station in 1886 for something extra special.

Knowing nothing of the language there was a good deal of difficulty in bargaining at Lahore, but eventually a deal over a certain hay seemed settled, when on paying out the money (Rs. 125) it was evident there had been confusion between *pāchēēs* (Rs. 25) and *pāchāss* (50). Insisting on the former, the argument got so heated that the dealer went off in a huff. For the rest of the day the merits of

that bay kept coming to mind, until after dinner the yearning being so strong I set off alone to the city in a 'ticca gharry¹ to try and come to terms.

Arriving in the main serai about 11 p.m., my friend was soon found squatting with his syces in front of a row of some twenty ponies; but, alas! the bay had been disposed of already. The dealer tried to comfort me by the assurance that he would bring something even better to meet me at Ambala. He was as good as his word, for there a well-bred looking chestnut mare, capable of even time for four furlongs, became my property in exchange for two hundred rupees. It has been a matter of wonderment to me since, that no thought of any danger or unpleasantness in chatting at midnight in the main serai of Lahore City ever occurred to me then. Where ignorance is bliss!

We knew that a month or two after reaching Ambala, four companies and battalion head-quarters were to move on to the little hill station of Solon, thirty-one miles short of Simla. I was delighted to know, however, that my company was to remain down, for with my two quads I was much looking forward to commencing polo, and playing hard all the hot weather. Imagine then my dismay and disgust when the adjutant came to tell me that I had been transferred to B Company and was for Solon.

Demanding to see the colonel, I told him, almost with tears, about my purchases, how my own company was remaining down, etc., etc., and begged to be allowed to remain. He only laughed at me, remarking that, knowing my people, he was not going to be blamed later if I lost the pink out of my cheeks! Pink out of my cheeks, forsooth; I might have been a girl. However, he was adamant, and I had to console myself with the thought that I'd get the ponies into good fettle by trotting along the cart road, and perhaps there might be a chance of Ambala later on. Little did I realise what a damnably monotonous business is "posting" on a pony along a curly tonga road.

Among other units at Ambala we found the 9th Lancers and the 9th Bengal Lancers, the former commanded by Colonel (now General Sir Henry) Bushman, and the latter by Colonel Power Palmer, commonly known as "Long P."

Horrible shaky four-wheeler cab.

The latter was afterwards Commander-in-Chief in India before Lord Kitchener. The former I see frequently at our club, looking wonderfully young and robust. He often reminds me of the fact that although he once sold me a horse at Ambala, we are still on speaking terms!

My chestnut mare proving pretty fast was put into training, and I received a lot of information from the 9th Lancers, especially from "Jabber" Chisholm, who was then adjutant, regarding the mysteries of the Indian Turf. The leading gentlemen riders were then Lord William Beresford, the Viceroy's military secretary, Frank Johnston, late of 11th Hussars, and Bertie Short, an ex-police superintendent, all three bold and fearless horsemen.

The night before each day's racing, "lotteries" took place, and a word about this method of gambling, now abandoned, may not be out of place. This system of gambling is quite unique, so far as I know, and is called "the double lottery." You needed to watch this name to prevent getting let in, for every bid you made at the auction meant double the amount named.

Lottery meetings used to be run somewhat as follows: The owners and punters having assembled after dinner, before the day's racing concerned, a prominent racing man was usually nominated to the chair with the race secretary beside him. The lottery was then filled, that is, a hundred tickets were usually sold at a price varying, at different meetings, from four to ten rupees a ticket.

The president, or race secretary, would call out, "Now then, gentlemen, fill the lottery."

If you were keen on a particular number, you tried to secure it, but one generally tossed for four or more tickets with dice. The loser paid for the tickets, but both equally shared the profits. Each punter usually kept a tally on forms provided by the race secretary, and placed all round the table. The race secretary, of course, kept the official record of all transactions and you had to call out to him the result of the tossings. For instance, I would toss Bill Beresford for ten tickets (that's nothing for an impecunious subaltern!) and, losing, would call out, "Woodyatt to Beresford, ten, numbers 24 to 33." Putting my name first meant I had lost, and would have to pay eventually, but we both shared profits equally.

When the lottery was full, the horses were drawn by putting their names in one hat, and the ticket numbers in another. We generally used gun wads, and the people drawing called out the ticket number, and then the name of the horse, both of which were at once recorded.

Then came the compulsory sale of horses. Supposing tickets had been ten rupees each, the chairman would call out: "A thousand rupees in the lottery and 'Pretty Polly' for sale."

Then you bid away so long as you had taken a ticket, and it was an ordinary auction with the peculiarity that, if your bid were successful, you had to pay the amount (that is were debited for it) twice over, namely, once to the lottery fund and once to the drawer of the ticket. The owner had a right of claiming half so long as he did so on the spot. That is to say, he got a half share of the purchase, and had of course to take a proportionate share of any profit or loss.

Several times when I had bid up higher than I meant to, and been successful in my last bid, I remember with what relief I heard the cry: "Owner half!"

At times one got splendid odds. Once at Simla I had the chance of winning over £150 on one race, and couldn't lose more than £5. Naturally I lost the fiver! One disadvantage of the system was that you did not know what the odds were until all the horses were auctioned. Anyhow, you got it then by putting the price of all the tickets sold to the auction total, and deducting the double price of the horse about which you wanted the odds. There would also be the lottery percentage, which goes to the race fund, to deduct. It used to be five per cent.

With no knowledge whatever of racing, everything was new to me, and the rather strange things that happened seemed very peculiar!

Bill (Lord William) Beresford wielded an enormous influence on the Indian Turf. Possessed of a very charming personality, he was a universal favorite in spite of a very rough tongue when his somewhat hasty temper was roused. Personally I always found him most helpful and kind, but if a man got the wrong side of him he could be extremely nasty. The arbitrary way in which he ruled the roost at

lotteries, when he always took the chair, was very astounding. Some punger bidding up a pony whose chances Bill himself wanted to secure, would be asked sarcastically if he wanted to buy the pony outright. If a young speculator, he would then probably dry up altogether.

Ambala was then the Aintree of India, with fences like fortifications. The first chase I saw rather astonished me as I stood next Jabber Chisholm, with glasses glued to eye, on the lower steps of the Grand Stand. There were about seven starters, and when the field had covered about half distance, and were on the farther side of the course opposite the Grand Stand, there were only three in it. These were horses ridden by, let us say, A, B, and C. A and B were leading nearly abreast. C was about three lengths behind. At this stage I could see with my glasses that A and B were having an animated conversation. Eagerly calling Chisholm's attention to so strange a proceeding, he merely remarked, quite unperturbed :

"Of course they are, it's blue ruin to either of the three to win, and they are discussing what sort of ramp they can put up. Very interesting indeed, very interesting." I gasped, but it was too exciting to say more.

On rounding the bend into the straight, A ran out into the paddock. B and C took the last fence together and B *deliberately* threw himself off. Now, I thought, what the devil will C do, for even I knew that he was desperately hard up, and there wasn't another horse within two furlongs of him, while his own mount was full of running. Down the straight he sailed—no occasion for glasses any longer, but what on earth is he doing? Is he trying to unfasten his girths? No, he was only busily engaged in *throwing away his weights!*

Frank Johnston was a smart-looking fellow with a very fine tenor voice and with command of about the best vocabulary of Billingsgate imaginable. After singing "Come into the garden, Maud," with a pathos which brought tears to one's eyes, he would, without a moment's hesitation, launch out into the most blasphemous abuse of the native servant because of the weakness of his brandy and soda!

Poor fellow, I last saw him, some ten years later, doing superintendent to a small agency that ran pony tongas from a railway terminus to a hill station. Very ill and worn out

he looked, but as debonair as ever and wearing a 11th Hussar tie. He died shortly afterwards.

Bertie Short went to Bihar, where he soon gave up riding, became correspondent for the *Planters' Gazette*, and lived no one quite knew how. I refer to him again later on.