



*Dorothy Willing.*

A LOYAL MOTHER OF THE EMPIRE, THE BEGAM OF BHOPAL.

the child was a female, but as she did not live, it put an end to that dispute, but unfortunately did not put an end to Shah Jahan's anger with her daughter.

For three months Sultan Jahan was so ill that at one time her life was despaired of; but she recovered, and so great was the joy of Kudsia Begam that she sent a present of a lakh of rupees to the invalid and the same sum to each of her children. Thinking this might cause jealousy, she sent the same amount to Shah Jahan, also to her husband.

These two lakhs of rupees were at once returned to the old lady with a message, saying, "Her Highness desires me to state that, as you are displeased with her, she is not able to accept your money, neither is it fitting that her children should do so."

Sultan Jahan's eldest daughter, now four years old, was taken away by Shah Jahan, which was very hard to bear, but the ruler's word had to be obeyed.

In December, 1881, the venerable old lady Kudsia Begam died. At her death her properties were never properly inspected or valued, and it is hard to say what became of her money or jewels; little was ever accounted for.

At this time there was another Chapter at Calcutta, which I should not mention were it not that two unpleasant incidents marked that occasion. The journey to attend this Chapter proved an uncomfortable one for Sultan Jahan, as her mother would hardly speak to her, and when they arrived at Calcutta and found their carriage awaiting them at the station, Sultan Jahan was following her mother into it, as she always had done, but was told she was not wanted and must not enter the carriage. The Begam drove off, leaving Sultan Jahan standing on the platform, not knowing what to do next.

A hired carriage was sent for, and in this she

followed her mother to the house that had been engaged for them. On rejoining her mother, no notice was taken of her and no reference was made to the station incident, but of course it had not passed unnoticed.

On the evening of the same day Colonel West Ridgeway, the Government Under Secretary, called on the Begam to present her with the programme of the order of things to be followed at the Chapter. By the way, he is still living, and is now Sir West Ridgeway, with endless letters after his name, among them LL.D., which I once heard described by a small boy as meaning "long-legged devil"; but this could not apply to Sir West Ridgeway, as his legs are not unduly long. He was, and is, a clever diplomatist, and when he called upon the Begam did his best to smooth things over and prevent the unpleasantness from becoming a public scandal.

So successful was he that few noticed anything amiss except a few officials, whose business it was to think a lot and say little.

The next awkward moment was during the Viceroy's reception of the Begam. While His Excellency was busy talking to Sultan Jahan, Sidik Khan quietly slipped into her seat, which was nearer to the Viceroy than the one appointed for him. The Political Agent, ever jealous of the honours and dignity of Bhopal, told him to go back to his proper place.

Sultan Jahan thought no more about the matter until the evening when the Viceroy was to pay his return visit to the Begam. Then Sultan Jahan found that Sidik Khan had been given a seat of greater honour than her own as heir-apparent. To this she objected, and the Political Agent was called in to adjust the matter, but eventually the Viceroy had to settle it. Lord Ripon was Viceroy at this time.

These seem small matters to cause so much friction, but in India they are of importance, as all other States keep watchful eyes on these etiquettes, and form their own conclusions on any non-observance of State traditions and rules. Any alteration establishes a precedent, leading possibly, and probably, to future trouble.

Sultan Jahan was much worried at the way she saw the State's affairs being mismanaged under the influence of Sidik Khan. Bribery was rampant, and in addition to this Sidik was writing articles to the newspapers of a seditious nature, though they were supposed to be religious tracts. He also wrote some mischievous books at the time that we were having trouble with the Mahdi in the Soudan. His sympathies were not with Great Britain, and he expressed himself strongly.

Sir Lepel Griffin, Agent to the Viceroy in Central India, now had to take the matter in hand. First he spoke to the Begam, but she would not hear a word said against her husband; so Sir Lepel Griffin called a meeting of all the officials and nobles of the State, as well as demanding the attendance of the public who were interested, and called upon Sidik to explain his conduct. His excuses and explanations being very unsatisfactory, Sir Lepel said he would forward an account of the meeting and Sidik's explanations to the Viceroy.

After a few weeks Sir Lepel returned to Bhopal, and at a big public meeting announced that the Viceroy had given orders for Sidik Khan to be deprived of all his titles, honours, and his salute.

This disgrace was felt deeply both by Sidik and his wife. Nothing had been said casting any reflection on Shah Jahan's character, or any implication that she was responsible, though, of course, she was to blame



for having allowed her husband too free a hand. Both Shah Jahan and her husband laid the whole blame for the Government's action on the shoulders of Sultan Jahan and her husband. The Begam said her daughter had brought disgrace upon her mother, and that the salute of which they were being deprived was really a salute for the Ruler of Bhopal, and not for her husband in particular.

Shah Jahan journeyed to Calcutta to ask the Viceroy to reconsider the matter. Lord and Lady Dufferin received her very kindly, but the Viceroy told her plainly that the matter could not be reopened. The Viceroy was too wise and experienced to say, as we probably would do in England, "We will appoint an expensive Committee or two to enquire into the matter," and then let the man off to do fresh mischief.

Lord Dufferin sent his Political and Foreign Secretary to see the Begam, to explain to her as plainly and as kindly as possible that she had brought the trouble on herself, by departing from the traditions of her race in contracting a second marriage and selecting for her consort a man of alien race and low degree.

Sidik Khan then, I believe, left Bhopal and went to reside in Lucknow, taking with him a good deal which ought to have been in the Treasury. He died later of dropsy. The attitude of the Begam to her daughter was now most hostile.

Fresh sorrow descended on Sultan Jahan, for her little daughter Bilkis, who had been taken from her, died of typhoid fever. It was hoped that the death of this little child, over whom there had been so many disputes, would in their common sorrow make the relations between the Begam and her daughter more satisfactory. But unfortunately this was not the case.

When Lord Lansdowne became Viceroy he paid a

visit to Bhopal, and in reply to the Begam's speech of welcome he said :

“ It is a source of the greatest satisfaction to me to hear from Her Highness's own lips that I have, in her opinion, treated the different questions connected with the State of Bhopal which have come before me with that consideration to which Her Highness is entitled. The Rulers of Bhopal have always been conspicuous for their loyalty, their administrative ability, and their magnificent charity. The services rendered to the British Government by the mother of Her Highness, the Sikander Begam, during the Mutiny, when such services were most needed, are not, and never can be, forgotten. Her Highness the present Ruler of the State is a worthy inheritor of these traditions : she has contributed largely toward the welfare of the State by her generous support of many and useful works.

“ She has assisted liberally in establishing the railway system of this part of India, constructed roads, hospitals, and secured for the people an invariable supply of good water. She has also to-day intimated to me her desire that the Government of India should take advantage of an offer which she made some time ago—to place part of the military force of the State at the disposal of the Government for the purpose of Imperial defence.”

Altogether the speech of a kind and courtly gentleman who knew the lady had a sore heart. She had loved her man, and he had brought disgrace upon her ; but, like a true woman, she loved him none the less for his faults. The Viceroy had remembered this.

The idea of an Imperial Service Force had been under consideration during Lord Dufferin's Viceroyalty, and it was now directed that any ruling chief who wished to do so should maintain a body of troops, trained and equipped according to the regulations

of the Indian Army, and that these troops should be inspected by British officers, and they should be called upon to take the field when there was need of their services. The Begam at once expressed the wish to maintain a regiment of cavalry. As the State still used its own coinage, it was provided that in the event of the regiment being called up for Imperial Service, officers and men should be paid in the coin of British India, without any deductions being made.

Thus the Bhopal Victoria Lancers came into being. They are a magnificent lot of men, with a handsome uniform.

In September, 1894, Sultan Jahan's second daughter became very ill from heart trouble. A specialist was sent for from Calcutta; his fee was five hundred rupees a day, and he stayed in attendance on the child for two months. The patient appeared to be better, and the doctor returned to Calcutta with a *douceur* of two thousand rupees in addition to his daily fee.

Then came a relapse. More doctors were fetched, from far and near, but nothing could be done, and the little one died. The first Minister issued orders for the closing of all public places of business, but this was unfeelingly counter-ordered by Shah Jahan.

When Lord Elgin became Viceroy he paid a visit to Bhopal, and he soon saw what Sir Lepel Griffin had referred to as the bad management of the State when Sidik Khan had been in Bhopal. His own indigent friends and relatives who had been incapable of earning a livelihood elsewhere had been given posts they were utterly unable to fill.

The State Treasury was suffering, railways which had been made by the Begam were paying no dividends. It was now thought better for the State, both financially and commercially, that the coinage

current in British India should be adopted, and the Government agreed to take over the current money of the State at the rate of 124 rupees for £100 of British money.

Lord Elgin was not a great sportsman, which is what the Indians admire, and he was not at home on the back of a horse.

There was a story told at Simla that once when he was riding with a friend to Mushobera it was necessary to pass through a dark tunnel wholly unlighted, where droves of ponies were often met coming from the opposite direction. The companion riding with His Excellency made some remark requiring an answer just as they arrived at the mouth of the tunnel, so all the reply he received was, "Can't you see that I am busy riding?" Evidently there was neither time nor place for anything else at the moment.

When Lord Curzon became Viceroy he also paid a visit to Bhopal and reviewed the troops. After which a shooting expedition was organised. The bogs of Bhopal are the happy feeding and hunting ground of much game. Snipe are abundant, and on this occasion the result was the biggest bag ever made in the State, and that is saying a good deal.

The Viceroy made the top score. Whether this was the result of good marksmanship or diplomacy, I am unable to say. I think that all who know anything about India and its rule will allow that the representatives of our Crown in India do their utmost, according to their lights, to keep the princes and rulers of Indian States happy, and help them in all ways that are possible, while the Viceroys in their turn receive simply royal hospitality and unequalled sport from the princes and rulers.

Bhopal is noted for its sport, which it can, and does, provide for Her Highness's guests. Knowing this,

nearly every globe-trotter, and many women also, practically invite themselves to Bhopal, and the ever kind and courteous ruler shows hospitality and provides excellent sport for all Europeans, especially British subjects.

I often wonder what these kind and courtly rulers must think when they come to this country, where occasionally they by no means receive the same courtesy and warm welcome. We mean to be everything the heart can desire, but we have not, I fear, the courteous instincts that seem to be peculiar to Eastern people, especially Indian potentates, though I have noticed that their children, owing to democratic enlightenment, have not the same delightful manners of their forebears, which is a pity, for manners bespeak the mind.

When Sultan Jahan's two eldest sons were twenty-two and twenty-three respectively, she felt it was time to think seriously about wives for them; and I expect they thought the same. Sultan Jahan's approval of the proposed wives was necessary, and, of course, she proved trying; but at last suitable wives were found that satisfied everybody, but the Begam declined to appear at the weddings when asked to do so.

In consequence of this, Sultan Jahan postponed her eldest son's wedding, hoping her mother might change her mind and grace the ceremony.

The following month Shah Jahan became very ill, and the doctors were able to do little for her. A specialist was sent for from Lucknow, and he at once recognised the seriousness of the case. The poor disfigured face told its own sad tale: it was cancer, that hydra-headed scourge. She was told the only possible hope lay in an immediate operation. To this she gave her consent. The room was prepared, hot water, bandages, etc., at hand, when she suddenly



changed her mind and would not allow the doctors to touch her.

One can only sympathise with the poor woman, for operations are unpleasant things to contemplate, and in advanced cases of cancer can only be more suffering and a forlorn hope.

Though refusing to be operated upon, and knowing from what she was suffering and that her days were numbered, she was very plucky, and began to put her house in order; but the rest of her life was a misery to her, for besides her pain, she found that many of those she had done the most for, and had regarded as faithful and affectionate subjects, now proved themselves to be nothing but time-servers, utterly indifferent to her sufferings and unhappiness.

When it was plain that the end was near Sultan Jahan's warm heart could not bear to think of her mother all alone, and she knew that her affairs were being managed in the most disgraceful way, so she thought she would go and try to see her. However, those around the Begam were not anxious that Sultan Jahan should see how things were being carried on, and they contrived to prevent her from reaching her mother, for the money that was being sanctioned for doctors and alms for the poor was finding its way into the pockets of the unscrupulous and the greedy.

Hearing a little later that her mother had not many more days to live, Sultan Jahan again determined to try and see her mother. So, taking her youngest son with her, she set out on foot. It was intensely hot, and there were few people about. The servants, no longer kept in order, were not at their posts, so she managed to pass through the gates unnoticed, and at last found her mother's room. Sitting by the side of the bed was a female attendant.

It was a shock to Sultan Jahan to see her mother,



only a shadow of what she had been, and she longed to throw her arms round the sufferer, but feared it might be resented, so she only walked a few paces into the room and waited.

Shah Jahan turned in her bed to see who had entered the room, and at first failed to recognise her daughter, so the Begam said, "Who is there?" Not daring to answer or give her name, Sultan Jahan made no reply. The question, "Who is there?" was asked again, followed by, "Why do you not speak?" The attendant then gave the name of the visitor.

With clasped hands and agony in her voice, Sultan Jahan said that she had come to see if she could be of any comfort to her mother, and to beg her to forget the past and to love her again; that she could not bear to think of her mother being so ill and no loving child near her.

Shah Jahan said: "Leave me. After my death you can come here."

Sultan Jahan could not bear to go away with those words ringing in her ears, so waited. The stern order was repeated, and she crept home with her heart heavy.

Eight days after this the Begam passed through the Great White Gate, entering into her rest on June 16, 1901, in the presence of the Political Officer and the First Minister of the State. The Begam's apartments were then locked and sealed, guards being placed at the doors.

When the news was conveyed to Sultan Jahan she at once set out for the Taj Mahal, her mother's palace, and as she went all her past life seemed to be crowding through her brain, as it has a way of doing in such distressful moments. She remembered the early days before she knew what trouble was, when she had been a loved child at her mother's side—remembered her father playing with her—then the shadows, after her

mother's second marriage, when the sunshine went out of her life, owing to constant friction and injustices.

Now this ruler over eight thousand square miles, where thousands had been ready to obey her slightest wish, whose word could make the poor rich, on whose rule the happiness and welfare of a million souls depended, was gone, and there was an oppressive and terrible silence.

On entering her mother's room from which none could now keep her, she stooped and kissed the marble cold feet, from whose path she had so long been banished, and her eyes were blinded with tears; but she endeavoured to control her feelings, for she had come to perform the last office her mother would ever require of human hands—to prepare her for her grave.

Many telegrams of condolence were received, among them one from King Edward VII. and one from the Viceroy.

According to kindly custom, Shah Jahan's faults were now forgotten, only her virtues being remembered. It is consoling to think that we may reap the same benefit of this kindly custom when our time comes.

In a *Gazette Extraordinary* there appeared a kindly epitome of her life emanating from the Viceroy, in which he pointed out how much good work she had done, and what her mother Sikander had done for us, adding:

“Among the many good things she did was the suppression of the abominable but deeply-rooted trade of kidnapping minors for immoral purposes.

“When we look back upon all this great ruler did for her State and the Empire, it is difficult to understand the unfortunate episodes which disfigured her otherwise meritorious reign: the treatment of her daughter and her family, the deplorable conduct of

her second husband, Sidik Hassan Khan, and the corrupt administration of Muḥshi Ali Khan (one time First Minister)

“Like other women, not far to seek, she was wilful and obstinate. Once she made up her mind about a thing, she could not be dissuaded. The charges made against Sultan Jahan and her husband were believed; there was nobody to tell her that they were untrue, because she would not allow anybody to talk to her on the subject.

“The mischievous writings and acts of oppression of Sidik Khan were equally outside her control, but for years she was ignorant of both. That he was engaged in propagating disaffection towards British rule was not known to her, until the matter was brought to her notice by the Government of India; then she was infinitely shocked, and tried to influence her husband.

“When he saw how much in earnest she was, he threatened to divorce her. There could be no more powerful weapon than this; for a Mohammedan lady of high rank the idea was terrible—impossible.

“Happily the Government never associated her for one moment with her husband’s wrong-doings, for which they punished him; indeed, at that time she received expressions of sympathy from the Viceroy and the Secretary of State for India.”

Certainly Shah Jahan did good work for her State when she was left alone to do it, and not interfered with by Sidik Khan; and it was sad that there should have been such endless trouble in the family. Her love for Sidik Khan was wonderful, but unfortunate. Human nature—poor human nature—none of us are all good, or all bad, and when we love people we do not fix our attention on their faults; sometimes we shut our eyes, for the faults of those we care for may be,

and sometimes are, very lovable. In this particular case of Shah Jahan, we must remember the limitations by which Eastern ladies of noble birth are surrounded.

Sultan Jahan now became ruler of Bhopal. I wish I could describe her, so that my readers might see her as she is, but she is not easy to picture, beyond being a dignified figure, a little under medium height, with brown eyes, at times sad, at others flashing, when describing anything she thinks wrong; but her smile, that is her great charm, combined with old-world courtesy of manner and expression. It is the face of a woman with a nice mind, and very capable withal, as will be seen from my efforts to describe her years of reign.

It has been said that Eastern people cannot see a joke, that they have no sense of humour. People who think that should know Sultan Jahan Begam: she thoroughly enjoys a joke and is quick to grasp one.

As I have endeavoured to point out, many years of her life have been spent surrounded by intrigue, political difficulties, just and unjust people, in consequence of which she has acquired a broad-minded outlook on things and people in general, by no means common in the East or West, but a valuable asset.

She is surprisingly ready to make allowances for people holding different religious views and temperaments, and at all times ready to forgive those who have made mistakes. I would like the people of this country to know her better, for she is a lovable woman, with great pride of race and a dignity all her own.

Immediately after her mother's death the Indian Government asked her to take up the reins of government of the State of Bhopal; and exactly at noon on June 28, 1901, her rule began; but she could not feel elated, the depression of her late mother's attitude

towards her was still present, and the unhappiness of many years was not easily forgotten and laid aside.

Little sleep came to Sultan Jahan the first night of her rule and entry to the palace. In the early dawn of the next day, when she turned over a new clean leaf in her life on which to write her best endeavours, she arose, but without joy in her heart, and performed the ablutions which before prayers are part of the ritual of the Islam faith; then prostrated herself before the Ruler of all rulers, praying earnestly with outstretched arms for help in carrying out her new duties, so that she might be a just and good ruler.

She found that, owing to her mother's illness, there were arrears in State affairs which must be attended to at once, and she spent many hours daily looking into the irregularities which had crept into many departments; but she decided to take no hasty measures, and to introduce reforms by degrees, after she had become thoroughly conversant with her new work.

The 4th of July was settled for the installation, to which a vast number of guests were invited, and, of course, there were the usual number of Government officials to make speeches. A letter of congratulation from Lord Curzon was read by the Political Agent, to which Her Highness replied :

“I ascend the throne of my ancestors to-day, and my grateful thanks are due to His Majesty the King Emperor, and the Viceroy of India, who have graciously recognised my rights. You are aware that in my veins runs the blood of these valiant predecessors of mine, who earned distinction and renown by serving the British Crown in time of doubt, danger and difficulty; and that being so, nothing, I assure you, can be dearer to my heart than to walk in the footsteps of my forebears and keep the glory of their names untarnished.



“The financial condition of the State is unfortunately exceedingly unsatisfactory. It is never easy to restore financial prosperity, and I well realise that a difficult task awaits me in this respect. The population has decreased by nearly one-third, and large tracts of land need to be brought under the plough. I am, however, hopeful, and feel sure that the Ruler of all rulers, who has entrusted the State and its people to my care, will help me in my undertaking. May Almighty God keep me and my children steadfast in our devotion to the British Crown, and bless and strengthen the ties which unite me to my people.”

The next great event in the State was the proclaiming of the Begam's eldest son as heir-apparent. After receiving the Government's approval a document was prepared and signed by him in which, among many other things, he promised never to leave Her Highness's territory without her permission, never to hold any correspondence with the Viceroy except through the usual channels, which were the Political Agents, and that he would ever be mindful of his obligations in relation to his younger brothers.

Sultan Jahan found that many had made themselves rich during her mother's lifetime, and all that was left in the Treasury was forty thousand rupees, and about two lakhs in the bank, a sum of about five lakhs being unaccounted for. When the latter was inquired into the State Treasurer declared that he had handed over the money to another State official, who in turn denied ever having received it—receipts were not forthcoming. The accounts in general were in a hopeless state of confusion, and told their own tale. A large amount of jewellery was missing, and the Begam was told that her late Highness had given it away, but there was no entry of anything of the kind.

The accounts had been kept in the antiquated



system of the days of the Moꝑul Empire, abounding in loopholes, lending themselves to abuse.

In consequence of all this, Sultan Jahan had some difficulty in finding money for the monthly salaries of the State employés. For the moment matters were bridged over by a loan from the bank of the State, but there was the future to be considered. The first important step must be the cutting down of expenses—never a popular measure, for while all call for it, none like it when applied to themselves.

It was now considered proper time for the marriage of the Begam's eldest son, Nawab Nasrulla Khan. The day was fixed and invitations sent out. The Nawab consort, ever a helper to his wife Sultan Jahan, gave his personal attention to all the preparations, arranging the programmes and so forth. The Begam also was very busy sitting up late at nights writing and attending to business. A few nights before the wedding was to take place—it was after one o'clock and she wanted to consult her husband on some matter—she sent a servant to see if the Nawab was still up. Hearing that he was busy writing, and it being so late, she postponed until the morning what she wished to say to him, and she went to bed.

In the morning, when her early breakfast was brought to her, she heard that her husband was not yet up, which was unusual at that hour, so after a short time she went to his room to awaken him. Approaching the bed, she called him by name. There was no answer. She called him again, once or twice—still no answer—a horrible silence. Her heart seemed to cease beating, and a stunned feeling took possession of her.

Leaning over her life's partner, she placed her hand gently on his face—still no response. Surely he did not breathe? She felt for his pulse, but could not

find it. Frantically she called to her sons. Her second son, Obaidulla, was the first to answer her call; he asked excitedly what was the matter.

“Your father!” she gasped. “He does not breathe and his pulse is not beating.” The eldest son now entered the room, asking the same question as his brother had done, and received the same reply. All stood mute and motionless. What did it mean? Could it be——? Oh no! Impossible—it could not, must not be.

Then something told all present that the Reaper with His sickle had visited them during the night. Big drops of perspiration stood on their brows; it seemed so impossible to believe that he who but a few short hours ago had been with them, entering into all the wedding arrangements, had gone—that they would never hear his voice again. Why and how had this terrible thing happened?

The doctor who had been sent for now arrived. All eyes were riveted on his face as he examined the figure on the bed. They were waiting, longingly, for him to say he still breathes: instead of that he turned and faced them all, saying, “God’s will be done.”

Many of us know what is felt when all that made life lovely to us, and those who have our hearts in keep, are suddenly taken from us, without our having the chance of saying a last loving word to them. At first we are stupefied with grief, then feel resentful—how the slippers by the bed, the pipe on the table, the hat in the hall, never to be wanted any more, are an agony to us almost unbearable; and how at last tears, God-sent tears, come to relieve our brains and save our reason.

In the case of the consort’s death it was the morning gun signifying that the fast of the faithful had begun that brought the mourners out of their grief-stricken

stupefaction and reminded them of the necessity for action.

Round the widow gathered her sons, with streaming eyes, knowing the futility of words; all they could do was to stand close to her and mingle their tears. The youngest son, Hamidulla, only seven years old, had not been awakened; when he heard the sad news his grief was so great and uncontrolled that his mother and brothers had to control their own grief and try to console the little one.

The Political Agent, on hearing of the sorrow in the palace, at once went there, taking with him a doctor. The latter pronounced the Nawab's death as due to heart failure, and that he had probably died peacefully in his sleep.

By the side of the bed stood a half-smoked pipe and a glass of drinking water. Both these were sent by order of the Political Agent to Bombay, for chemical examination. This was considered desirable, but nothing was found to cause death.

For some years the Nawab had complained of pains in his side and chest. The doctors told him it was indigestion, and there was nothing wrong with his heart. In spite of this, he always maintained it was his heart that caused the pain, and that it would eventually be his death.

The poor Begam—it was hard for her that, just when everything pointed to their having peace and happiness, her husband, who had been so loving a help to her and to whom she was devoted, should be called away so suddenly, before he had time to enjoy this new era.

The wedding, of course, had to be put off. Islam lays down very strict laws to be obeyed by widows. During the time of mourning, which lasts four months and ten days, a widow is not permitted to wear

ornaments or new clothes. The use of hair-oil is forbidden, and, except for absolutely unavoidable circumstances, she is prohibited from leaving the house in which her husband died, also from holding conversation with anyone outside the circle of her nearest relatives.

The observation of this last rule is not incumbent on a ruler, but all the other laws Her Highness complied with.

Fortunately, I think I may say, the Begam's attention had to be given to State affairs; some serious grievances of her people were calling for attention and redress. It was good for her to be occupied with other people's troubles, as in a measure it prevented her dwelling on her own; but now she had no one to advise and help her. The other members of the family were useless in this; the older ones, whose experience would have been useful, were gone, and the younger ones had not yet gathered experience.

The First Minister could not be relied upon, valuable servant as he was to the State, for he resented any interference with his authority, considering it quite out of place for the ruler to interfere in the work of administration.

It being one of the laws of Islam that all who can afford it, and are physically strong enough, should once in their lives make a pilgrimage to Mecca, Sultan Jahan considered it obligatory, and now in her sorrow thought she would find comfort in visiting the Holy Shrine; so she asked the Viceroy if he would give his consent to her going, and stating that she wished to take her two youngest sons with her.

Consent was given, but the Viceroy asked the Begam if she would postpone the journey until after the celebration of the King Emperor's Coronation Durbar on January 1, 1903. To this she agreed.

The Mohammedan year is a lunar year, and is shorter than ours by ten days, twenty-one hours, and fourteen seconds; this makes the exact transfer of Mohammedan dates into dates of our own calendar a difficult task.

Being unable to start for Mecca until after the Durbar, the Begam turned all her attention to putting everything appertaining to the State into working order. The most urgent reforms needed were in connection with the land settlement. The situation in 1902 was most difficult, as no trustworthy information could be obtained from the registers, the Patwaris (village accountants who collect the State revenues) being in many cases utterly incompetent. These posts were regarded as hereditary, training and experience counting for nothing, so in their books were found entries of five-year-old children and infants having succeeded to their fathers' posts, the actual work being done, after a fashion, by substitutes nominated by their families.

Some of the accounts were amazing. One village would be shown as producing a thousand rupees per annum, while in another book the same village would be shown as representing only one hundred rupees, and this had been going on during a period when there was a Settlement Officer drawing a big salary from the Treasury, with an army of subordinates under him and a huge office establishment.

This had to be corrected, and the Begam sought advice from the old State servants and consulted her sons. All agreed that short provisional settlements would answer best, and at the request of the Begam the Indian Government put a responsible man in to collect the revenues; the Government also lent her a man to collect the arrears of revenue.

Owing to the number of complaints constantly



reaching the Begam from the villages, she decided that a tour of the districts would be advisable, to ascertain the facts. Being unable to go herself at the time, she sent her two eldest sons, with instructions to forward to her particulars from each district visited, and told them to encourage the people to explain their grievances to them.

They received sixty thousand applications for consideration, and these were duly forwarded to Her Highness. What a formidable post to deal with! Happily they did not all arrive together.

The Chief Minister disapproved of this inspection of the districts, thinking it deprived him of his power, and he sent in his resignation, couched, of course, in diplomatic florid language. Her Highness was in a measure sorry to see the old man go, but realised that it would be much easier for her in the future to carry out her reforms without his opposition and resentment.

The time had now arrived when Sultan Jahan's sons required separate residences. so she sanctioned a total of 1,40,000 rupees, to be divided between her three sons: Nawab Nasrulla Khan, Rs. 62,661-0-3; Sahebzada Obaidulla Khan, Rs. 53,500-1-6; Sahebzada Hamidulla Khan, Rs. 30,807-0-6. Sultan Jahan would of course say, as we all do, that she loved her children equally, and had no favourites. We may say that as long as we like, and perhaps ought to do so, but, in fact, we cannot help feeling more drawn to those who especially appeal to us, either from their charm of character, their delicacy, temperaments, a thousand things. Mothers often have a leaning and a tenderness for the baby, the last of the family, and I think Sultan Jahan loved her baby the best, the present Hamidulla Khan—he is the apple of her eye.



The Coronation Durbar now claimed the Begam's attention, she having received a letter from Lord Curzon saying, amongst other things :

“ In instructing me to hold this Durbar, His Majesty desired it to be known that he is anxious to afford the princes and chiefs of India the opportunity of testifying their loyalty to his Throne and person, and that attendance there will be regarded by His Majesty as equivalent to presence at his Coronation in England.

“ I request the honour of your Highness's presence on this auspicious occasion. Due notice will be given through the usual channels of the particular date which your Highness will be expected at Delhi.

“ I remain, with much consideration,

“ Your Highness's sincere friend,

“ CURZON.”

Only those who have been to India can have any idea of the amount of chatter and fuss there is among Indian servants when there is any travelling to be done. On so great an occasion as this, when the Begam's retinue consisted of five hundred and seventy-five people, words fail to describe what the pandemonium was like: the coolies shouting and gesticulating, quarrelling as to who should carry which, and what; chuprasses giving orders at the top of their voices; luggage being put into the wrong places and having to be brought out again, while those who put them in the wrong places and those who retrieved them call each other names, and referring in undignified terms to their female relations.

Fortunately four hundred and thirty of this crowd preceded Her Highness, taking with them the big State *shamiana* (tent), with the furniture belonging to it, the Victoria Lancers, a battalion of State Infantry,

the band, and last, but not least, the State elephants, with all their gorgeous trappings carefully packed and carried by themselves. They proceeded by road, doing the journey by stages.

I must pause here for a moment to speak about elephants. I have often seen them taking part in big shows in India, and always thought them the most impressive part of any of the processions, and they are so obedient and knowledgeable. I was present once when a big camp was being broken up, and saw a mahout tell his elephant, in Hindustani, to sweep up the straw, empty tins and débris. The animal at once picked up a broom with his trunk, and swept everything up into a heap—leaves, straw, tins, and goodness knows what else besides. When some of the tins and things refused to stay where he put them, he placed one of his little dainty feet upon them, reducing them to order at once. The broom was then handed to the mahout. The elephant's eyes looked so wicked, but his conduct so courtly.

Now to return to Her Highness: she, with one hundred and forty people, travelled to Delhi by special train on the morning of December 24, leaving Bhopal at 10.30, reaching Delhi the following morning at 8 o'clock. Trains travel quicker now in India than they did when first I went out there, and my husband said that he could kick his hat faster than the train we were in was going. He told me a story of a family who were going a short journey by rail, when one of the children fell out of the window, but reached home sooner than those in the train. A traveller's tale, no doubt, but being young and innocent at the time, I was expected to believe it.

An early hour had been fixed for the holding of the Durbar, but as the day happened to coincide with a religious festival of the Musalmans who congregated

for prayer at an early hour, the Viceroy altered the hour for the opening of the Durbar out of consideration for the convenience of the Musalmans.

There is no occasion to describe this Durbar; it was much the same as the previous ones. This event being over, the Begam, before starting on her pilgrimage, made a personal tour of a good part of the southern and eastern districts of her territory, so that all grievances might be inquired into and settled at once.

In former times these tours had often been dreaded by the people, owing to the amount of oppression and cupidity shown on the part of some of the ruler's entourage. This time the Begam issued a notice saying that anybody taking presents, or not paying in cash for anything they wanted, would be severely dealt with.

It was a strenuous tour, and the Begam did not spare herself, working from seven o'clock in the morning until late at night, with a very short time for rest and food in the middle of the day. The difficulties of the agricultural classes troubled Her Highness, for they could not obtain supplies of seed, grain, or manure for their land, owing to the insolvency of the cultivators in general, and also because of the Court of Justice being so far from satisfactory in its workings. In consequence of the corruption of the subordinate officials, there were hindrances to the advances being made by the State.

She issued orders limiting the amount of interest which money-lenders might charge, and granted the concession of suits arising out of these transactions being filed without any payment of court fees. This made things easier, and the cultivators felt encouraged. They were also granted privileges in the way of timber from the forests for the building of their houses.

A complete Forest Manual had been drawn up some years before this, but its rules and regulations had been entirely disregarded. Now orders were issued for the observation of this Manual's rules, action being threatened in the event of default. This produced the desired effect, and the people ceased to help themselves to anything they wanted.

Quite two-thirds of the State of Bhopal is forest, providing excellent sport. Almost everything is to be found there to rejoice the hearts of sportsmen, except lions, which do not patronise India to any extent, though there are a few in Baroda and the southern States. Indian lions do not indulge in manes, which robs them of their impressiveness. Tigers abound, also bears, panthers, sambour (elks), cheetahs, spotted deer, blackbuck, and savage wild dogs, which hunt in packs. A reward of fifty rupees is offered by the Government for every wild dog that is killed.

Among the winged game are peacocks, a dish much appreciated by Musalmans, while Hindus in a neighbouring State regard the birds as sacred. There are no pheasants in the Central Provinces, but Bhopal has plenty of partridges, the red-legged variety. There is also the beautiful painted partridge with its glorious colouring, duck of every description, and snipe galore.

Snakes are not game, but amongst the inhabitants of the forest I must mention them, and they do not confine themselves to the jungles, but pay frequent visits to the villages and houses, as it pleases them.

Colonel Ottley, late Military Adviser to Her Highness, was driving home to his bungalow one night rather late, and when walking into his verandah to fetch the lamp left there alight for him by his bearer (body servant) he saw a silvery-looking thing beside it, so he dare not touch the lantern, as the silvery-

looking thing was a cobra busily eating frogs that had come to eat the flies attracted by the light. He fetched a big stick, and before long the cobra received its *coup de grâce*. Cobras are generally to be found in pairs, and the following evening, when returning home, his car ran over another cobra just inside the gate. Presumably it was looking for its mate.

Quite a pathetic story, but it is not easy to create romance about these wicked-looking, flat-headed, repulsive reptiles, which are responsible for many deaths amongst the natives. But these people have a remedy of their own, if only they can apply it quick enough. It is called soap-stone, and they have great faith in it. It is, in fact, a sort of soft stone, which, if applied at once to the poisoned spot, has been known to save the lives of those bitten.

Maybe it is a case of faith-healing—I do not know; but this I do know, that the snake-charmers always carry some of this soap-stone about with them, and they have been seen catching and handling wild venomous snakes with naked hands. If bitten they at once apply this remedy, and many have appeared to be none the worse for their experience.

I must not forget to mention the alarming pythons found at times in the forests; they run to about fifteen feet in length. I have never heard of them attacking a human being, but they will attack cows, and more especially the luckless goats, about whose bodies they wind themselves, squeezing the life out of their prey. There is also found the innocent-looking but deadly krait.

Leeches, so dreaded by sportsmen in the jungles, are, of course, plentiful, though in Bhopal they are much smaller than the specimens found in the Terai. It is well to put some salt inside the stockings in these parts: leeches do not like the flavour.



In the Terai, when leeches fasten themselves upon you, they look very mean little things, but before long become disgusting bloated objects of repulsive appearance.

I am afraid that the attraction of the Bhopal forests have led me away from the Begam and her work. Finding that the weights in common use in the bazaars (shopping centres) were in many cases faulty, purchasers being defrauded of their proper measure, Her Highness had new proper ones cast under State management, and the police had orders to see that they were used and proper measure served to the people.

Owing to the manner in which Sultan Jahan administered the State, at the end of her first year's reign there was an increase in Treasury receipts of rupees 2,72,915-6-9. In the second year an increase of rupees 6,97,586-7-9.

Considerable anxiety was caused at this time by the plague having broken out in an adjoining State. Orders were given for quarantine, and precautionary measures were taken. All this was new to the people, who regarded these measures with suspicion. They were not sure which to be most frightened of, the plague or the precautionary measures.

Many petitions were received by the Begam to discontinue these new-fangled notions; but she was firm, in everybody's interests. Nevertheless the scourge visited Bhopal, and the people were terribly frightened and in a state of panic. In their simple minds they thought their ruler could stop the plague if she liked—she was all-powerful and could tell it to cease—but at the same time objected to her methods of doing this. In fact, they behaved like spoilt children.

More drastic measures became necessary, such



as evacuation of infected localities, segregation of patients, all of which measures being disliked and resented, while all sorts of extraordinary allegations were made against everybody.

Sultan Jahan was very patient with her people instead of being annoyed with them, she tried to soothe them by explaining that, owing to the light of experience elsewhere, it had been proved that dampness and uncleanness were contributory causes of the plague spreading so rapidly, and that proper sanitary measures were the best preventatives.

The State surgeon was strongly in favour of inoculation, but the poor ignorant people were frenzied at the idea, and thought they were going to be killed at once, or have some evil spirit put into their bodies. After a while the plague died out, but not before many lives were lost.

The Unani system of medicine has been in vogue in India for centuries. As far as I can gather it chiefly consists of treatment from vegetable products, roots of plants, fruit, and flowers, poisonous drugs being avoided as much as possible. The population have the utmost faith in the curing properties of the Unani system, yet they tell you that it is so harmless that even liniment prescribed for external use may be taken internally with impunity—no harm will come of it; also that double the prescribed dose may be taken with no harmful results.

I think we may take it that the potions are entirely innocuous; perhaps it is again a case of faith-healing—and, after all, what could be better?

In Bhopal a Unani physician is maintained in every district. There is, however, one shortcoming in the system which is acknowledged by the Begam—namely, that there is no particular test or examination by which the Unani healers have their knowledge tested—

therefore there is some risk in placing full confidence in the skill of these doctors.

It had long been the wish of Sultan Jahan to raise some memorial to the memory of her little daughter, Asif Jahan, who had died from heart trouble, and she thought there could be no more appropriate memorial than a Unani medical school. This was quickly built and endowed, the Begam taking special care to include surgery in the curriculum, and made it compulsory for all physicians of the State to obtain the diploma of the institution before being allowed to practise.

Complaints were constantly reaching Sultan Jahan, regarding the inferior quality of the Unani medicines being sold in the bazaars. Her Highness opened a shop in the city for the sale of these medicines and drugs, under the direct supervision of the State's chief doctor. This proved a great success and benefit to the people; it also brought other druggists to a sense of their responsibilities and obligations.

Sultan Jahan now established a Legislative Council, as she considered that though laws and rules restricted personal power, they were a blessing to the people, who are generally the victims of misrule from personal power. This Council consisted then, and consists to-day, of five persons. All deliberations in Council have to be put in a complete form for the ruler's assent before being promulgated.

For years the legislation had been conducted mostly on personal likes and dislikes, now it is on an entirely different footing. Personal rule imposes tremendous responsibilities as compared with constitutional government, which provides for bodies of representative opinion sharing responsibility with the Crown. But in these days Crowns are so frightened of the unrestrained and turbulent public that they simply give way to everything demanded, thinking the line of least

resistance advisable, and the poor taxpayers suffer. It is surprising how long-suffering they are—perhaps foolishly so.

Sultan Jahan is great on the subject of education for women, as they are more than half of the community. She is also a believer in the purdah system for Musalman women, regarding it as a protection for them, the majority not being sufficiently educated to be able to throw it on one side and face the temptations of the world.

Personally, I should have thought that education would have jeopardised the system : that as the women learned more of the world and its ways, outside their own little kingdoms, they would resent such close confinement, cut off from the companionship of men, and having to remain the slave and chattel of one man's whims.

A Musalman of good birth and education told me not long ago that the purdah system was dying out, and that before long it would be defunct.

Turkey has now entirely ruled out purdah by law; probably the same will follow before long in India. Meanwhile Sultan Jahan maintains that there is only one remedy for many ills, and that is *education*.