

# GOING EAST

THE  
SOCIETY OF  
POONA.



L. E. COX

# GOING EAST

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF INDIA

BY

LILIAN E. COX

LONDON

EDINBURGH HOUSE PRESS

2 EATON GATE, S.W. 1

1026

## TO THE READER

**T**HIS book tells how Richard Thompson aged twenty-three leaves his job at a London draper's and sets out to make his fortune in the golden East. He has seen India on maps, and he has heard tales of rajahs and elephants and dancing-girls; now he is going to find out if India really is like what he has pictured.

*Going East* does not try to tell you all about anything; it is concerned simply with one ordinary young Englishman, what he saw and what he did, what he thought and what he felt, in his first three months out East. The things he saw are real things; if you come to Calcutta you can take this book in your hand and follow exactly the drive Dick took with Mrs. Laurenz that first evening, and see exactly what he saw. The events are true events. But Dick could not see everything, could not learn everything, so there is much left untold—even about that part of India which he saw. Some matters which are not written in the book are not far from its pages; you can read about these in other books—you will find some suggested at the end.

L.E.C.

CALCUTTA, 1925.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE VOYAGE OUT . . . . .	7
II. SIGHT-SEEING . . . . .	16
III. A DAY IN THE STORE . . . . .	26
IV. A PUJA . . . . .	34
V. WHAT DICK NEVER SAW . . . . .	43
VI. A SPINNING-WHEEL—AND OTHER MATTERS	49
VII. A RAILWAY JOURNEY . . . . .	58
VIII. CHRISTMAS . . . . .	67
SOME QUESTIONS TO THINK OVER . . . . .	78

## CHAPTER I

### THE VOYAGE OUT

A GENERAL atmosphere of expectancy pervaded the S.S. *Corona* and her three hundred passengers. If you wondered why, a glance at the small typewritten slip on the ship's notice-board would soon enlighten you. "Due at Port Said at 10 a.m." it read. So after ten days at sea everyone was busy finishing letters to post, and preparing for a few hours on shore.

Dick Thompson stamped his letter and dropped it into the letter-box. He had written rather a lot of letters since he had come on board at Birkenhead. He had played deck tennis a bit—his partner and he were getting on rather well in the tournament—and had walked round the deck or lounged in a chair and read; and had eaten a lot, somewhat lengthy and elaborate meals, with most of the men wearing evening dress for dinner every night. But a fellow as shy as Dick finds it difficult to live with a crowd of people of whom he knows not a single one, so he had been a bit solitary. At first, when almost everyone had been more or less sea-sick (they'd had a bad time in the Bay of Biscay), no one had been very sociable. But since Marseilles, sports had started, and dancing at night, and bridge. He *had* got drawn into the sports, and deck tennis (throwing rope rings over a net and catching them) was more fun than it looked. But at the dances, after one or perhaps two with Margaret Coulter, the girl who was his tennis partner, he used to feel rather out of it, and go off to smoke at the end of the boat in the dark quiet of the starlight.

The letter addressed to his mother at Rosemount, 16 Albert Terrace, Maxington, would start on its way back that very day. "The next one will be from India," thought Dick with a little thrill, as he went up on deck.

The second-class passengers at the back of the boat, and the first-class passengers forward, were watching the land with the interest of people who had been looking out to a horizon of water, water, water for several days. Dick leaned over the rail on the landward side, looking at the glitter of white buildings and the slender curved sails of the little boats already putting off towards the ship. Overhead the sky was very blue; a clump of palm trees silhouetted themselves against it, and it all reminded him vaguely of *The Garden of Allah*. Really the East at last!

"Going ashore?" The voice was Margaret Coulter's.

"Good morning." Dick smiled. "Yes, I suppose so." Then, reassured by the comradely way she came and leaned on the rail beside him, he ventured to let go a little. "That is, I'm awfully keen to go. It looks thrilling, doesn't it?"

The girl agreed. "Of course they make a living off tourists here, and I don't expect we shall really see much. But, look here, have you made any plans? No? Then you'd better come along with auntie and me and the Davisons. Auntie's been so often before, she knows the ropes. As a matter of fact, she didn't want to go much, but I persuaded her."

"Thanks awfully," said Dick gratefully. "But are you sure I shan't be in the way?"

"Good gracious, no! You are a fearfully retiring sort of person, aren't you? People won't bite, you know!"

So they went ashore in a vivid blue boat, and "did" Port Said under the direction of a gentleman wearing a

smartly-cut lounge suit and a scarlet "tarbush,"<sup>1</sup> who put to rout such of the innumerable sellers of necklaces, scarves, and picture post cards as were not of his gang. To Dick the afternoon was rather like a gliding cinema film—tall white houses with mysterious doorways, narrow streets where fruits of amazingly vivid colours were piled on wayside stalls, and one caught the shimmer of silks and the glint of brass from the dark interiors of tiny shops; donkeys bearing great loads; men of swarthy complexion in long flowing robes reminding him of pictures in an illustrated Bible he once won as a prize; occasionally the romantic veiled figure of a woman, her white or black draperies hiding all but the eyes.

They drove right through the town and presently entered a quiet courtyard before a domed building. "I show you mosque, Mohammedan mosque," their guide explained. "You put on these shoes." The "shoes"<sup>2</sup> were great cones of basket matting, and with each foot encased they shuffled in a clumsy line into the cool interior. It was a very quiet, pillared place; Dick looked round for an idol, but there was none, nor were there any pictures of heathen gods. A group of men sat on the marble floor in one corner round another who seemed to be teaching or expounding in a low voice. Beyond the central hall other men were washing their feet or faces in a wide, shallow basin of water—"like the fountain in the square at home," thought Dick. "It is holy bathing," said the guide. Back in the courtyard the party was almost surrounded by clamorous beggars, and as they

<sup>1</sup> Egyptian head-dress, much like what is often called a fez.

<sup>2</sup> The Mohammedan worshipper would leave his shoes outside on entering a mosque so that he should not defile the building, and if "unbelievers" are admitted they conform to this idea of sanctity by putting on over-shoes.

freed themselves and passed out Dick found Margaret at his side.

"Well?" she asked.

"I suppose they're heathens," said Dick, as if he were not very sure.

"Well," said Margaret, "they don't seem to worship idols; I think Mohammedans are different."<sup>1</sup>

Dick was silent for a minute. Then he said, "I shall remember it; and yet"—with an unusual burst of explanation—"I hated myself for going there like that, you know. It is a sort of holy place, isn't it? Like a church—at least to them. We'd no right to look at it, just for fun."

Margaret did not answer, but she did not disagree.

They had delicious coffee outside a café on the wide pavement of the central street, where a terribly loud gramophone brayed fox-trots over the marble-topped tables. They bought picture post cards, and Egyptian cigarettes, and Turkish delight—and finally got back to the boat to find its deck occupied by just such bargaining, picturesque salesmen as they had left behind!

"Is it really the East?" Dick asked a man who was pacing the deck with him later on that afternoon.

"What—that?" with a wave of his arm at the vivid panorama of Port Said. "Goodness, no! It's your first voyage out, isn't it? Well, if you're expecting romance—Chu Chin Chow sort of stuff mixed up with Indian love lyrics—the sooner you knock the idea out of your green young head the better. Dust, and flies, and fever—that's more the thing. Have a peg?"

"No, thanks," said Dick. (Men couldn't talk to each

<sup>1</sup> Mohammedans are believers in one great God, as taught by the prophet Mohammed. The worship of idols is hated by them.



other for two minutes on this boat, apparently, without drinks.)

"Sure? Well, I've been out there a good many years now; times aren't what they were, but I've managed to scrape a bit together—earned all I've got, mind you. Here's a word of advice for you, my boy: India's all right if you keep the natives in their place and don't let anyone or anything interfere with you. There, that's free gratis to you."

"Thanks," said Dick, a little dryly. He did not ask any more questions, feeling as a matter of fact rather irritated, he hardly knew why. Presently the man left him.

All along the twilit dock lights twinkled, and a fairy-land dusk settled down over land and sea. Afterglow of rose and purple quivered into blue velvety dark as the ship swung slowly round in the harbour. The ray of a great searchlight slung at her bows streamed out ahead like a silver finger pointing the way; and so she entered the canal, as the first stars came out. The gates of the East! . . . What lay beyond?

\* \* \* \* \*

Two more days of the voyage must be recorded, the first a broiling day in the Indian Ocean, the other the last day of all.

It was the prizegiving, arranged by the Sports Committee on the shady side of the deck after tea. Everyone, even the men, wore white or light clothes; Dick was just getting used to the "feel" of himself in white drill instead of navy serge.

"Deck tennis tournament, mixed doubles. First, Mrs. Langtry and Mr. Fellowes." A pretty little woman in pink and a tall, athletic man in a college blazer went

forward. They had beaten Dick and Margaret in a final, prolonged tussle.

"Second, Miss Coulter and Mr. Thompson"; and Dick escorted Margaret to the table, whence they brought back a big drum of Turkish delight.

"Sticky stuff!" laughed Margaret twenty minutes later. "Never mind, auntie will love it. Come along, let's present it to her."

Later on there was an open-air concert on the deck, and Dick found himself next to the secretary of the Sports Committee, a middle-aged, active man who got on well with everyone. He congratulated Dick on his deck tennis prowess.

"First time out?" he asked.

Dick had got to hate the question: it so often let loose streams of condescending advice. "Yes," he said briefly.

"What part of India? Oh, Calcutta. Calcutta is India, but of course it's different in a way." A song stopped the conversation, but when it was finished he began again.

"First time out—lucky lad, with all your troubles before you, and a few jolly good times, too! It's a great land, it was already a great land when we were painted savages. Great again one day, too, it'll be, when its men grow up into twentieth-century ways." He paused to relight his pipe. "Children now, mere children. Heard this Home Rule talk? Home Rule *now* would be madness—at each other's throats they'd be. Leave 'em to it, some people say. That's not my notion. Go on ruling them for their own good; one day . . . Anyway, a great land." He turned suddenly on Dick. "You're lucky to be beginning there, Thompson. Stick to it!"

"Everyone tells you something different about India," Dick said to himself; "it's awfully puzzling." Just at that moment the tall tennis champion passed them on his way to the platform to sing in a quartette. Dick glanced up at his pleasant face and envied him his quiet, easy manner. "He seems a fine sort of chap," he thought. "I wonder what *he* would say?"

\* \* \* \* \*

The unseen highway of the waters brought the *Corona* at last up the Bay of Bengal and, four weeks of steady steaming after she had left England, the long, low line of the Bengal coast appeared before her. Next morning Dick came on deck very early, to find a pearly mist rolling back from the waters of the widest river he had ever seen. Far away to left and far to right lay the low, palm-fringed banks, dim and blue in the morning light.

All that day they steamed up what Dick presently realised must be one of the many mouths of the Ganges. It was the last day of the voyage, and all the ship was a-bustle. Cabin luggage packed and the (to Dick) embarrassing business of tipping safely over, he and Margaret stood together watching the queer-shaped fishing boats with the huge oars, each plied by half a dozen half-naked men, and the thatched roofs which betokened a village huddled among the palms. Factory chimneys rose here and there on the banks, strangely familiar and yet vaguely incongruous. These gradually became more frequent, and by four o'clock the *Corona* was obviously drawing into the city, for there were docks on either shore, and tugs, dredgers, ferry steamers, and other craft crossed and re-crossed their path.

"I'm awfully excited," said Margaret—it was her first voyage, too; she was paying a six months' visit to her

aunt's home at Jamalnagar—"what is it going to be like?"

"It looks exactly like the Pool of London now," said Dick, "with that bridge, and the boats everywhere, and factories." He was not quite sure how far he could put into words what he was thinking, and it was with some constraint and many pauses that he went on. "I'm a bit muddled, to tell you the truth. It's only about four months ago I ever thought of coming out, when the firm gave me the chance of this job in their Calcutta branch. And then, of course, I looked up the map; India seemed just a small red triangular bit south of Asia. And yet there's a sort of feel about the word . . . India—elephants, you know, and rajahs, and gold, and queer strange gods, mysterious and exciting. Then I asked the girl at the public library for some yarns about India; they seemed rather different, somehow, sort of society-life-ish. And lastly there's the boat, and what people on board tell one about the country. What *is* India, after all?"

"We're going to find out," said Margaret.

"Are we?" Dick said rather dreamily. Twenty yards away an Indian of about his own age was leaning over the rail gazing at the shore. He had been ill most of the voyage, and no one knew much about him. "What no one seems to have thought of is the *people*. When I think of home, I think of folk—my young sister, the fellows at the shop, the High Street on a Saturday night. Of course I do think of places a bit, but not so much. Look at that chap—what do you suppose he's thinking of?"

"I don't know," said Margaret. "Nobody seems to bother. He keeps himself to himself anyway, doesn't he?"

"So did I, till you hauled me out," argued Dick.

“ Yes,” she smiled, “ you wanted knowing.”

“ Perhaps so does he.”

The Indian went below, and before Dick realised it, Margaret had gone, too. What a silly he was!—he had wanted to say good-bye properly and ask her to write. . . . They were drawing in to the landing-stage now; he could see the crowds waiting, an occasional handkerchief fluttering. Almost everyone was on deck—an awful crush. Mr. Fellowes, the deck-tennis victor, paused as he elbowed his way through the crowd to shake hands and say good-bye. “ Anyone meeting you? . . . Yes, they’re sure to send someone.” Then, as if by a sudden impulse (he really hadn’t been very intimate with Dick, who had admired him from afar), he gave the lad his card. “ Look me up if I can be of any service to you. And if you get fed up with Calcutta, trot down to us for a week-end—we’re only seven hours out. Good-bye, and the very best of luck!” He was gone.

How slowly the boat drew in! The hordes of coolies were shouting and singing on the dockside; ah, they had the ropes across at last. He *must* find Margaret; yes, there was her scarlet hat. He pushed his way to her.

“ Good-bye, Mr. Hermit Thompson,” she said, and her handclasp was strong and friendly. She promised to write some time—“we’ll share our impressions!” The crowd around them began to move, the gangways were across. They had arrived!

Forty-five minutes later Dick and a cheery man “ from the firm ” were driving across Calcutta in a taxi. The fine road swept across a wide green place; away to the south a shimmering white dome floated like a bubble in a golden glow of sunset . . . India!

## CHAPTER II

### SIGHT-SEEING

DICK woke with a start. He had been dreaming of aeroplane races, and when he opened his eyes a white cloud still seemed all about him. Through it his sleepy eyes saw the dimmed outline of a sunlit door—it must be morning. He sat up: the “cloud” between himself and the doorway resolved itself into the mosquito-net, a kind of meat-safe of fine white net stretched on a wire four-poster about his bed, and tucked securely in under the mattress at the bottom.

His first morning in India! Dick’s wrist-watch announced a quarter past six, and Mr. Hale, the man from the firm who had met him and who lived in this same boarding-house, had explained that the bearer would bring *chota hazri* at about half past six.

“What on earth shall I say to the bearer?—bearer of what, I wonder?” thought Dick. After dinner last night he had received his first language lesson. “You don’t need to know much of the lingo,” Hale had told him, “and for a start you’ll get on all right with Jow, Ow, Dow, and Low.”<sup>1</sup> He had pronounced these mystic symbols as if they all rhymed with “How.” Dick was still rehearsing these rather nervously when the curtain in the doorway was raised and a man in white turban

<sup>1</sup> Jao (go), Ao (come), Do (give), Lao (bring).

and white coat entered silently and put a tray on a stool ; he set the stool and tray carefully by the bedside, straightened himself, raised his right hand to his turban and said " Salaam " gravely, and departed as silently as he had come.

Dick, feeling rather like a duke, enjoyed the " little breakfast " of tea, toast, and fruit thus ceremoniously offered, surveying meanwhile his new quarters. The room was very high after 16 Albert Terrace ; this feature of all European buildings in the East is for coolness, he soon discovered. The walls were whitewashed, the floor nearly covered by a large striped rug, and from the middle of the ceiling hung a thing like an aeroplane propeller.

There was electric light. Another luxurious touch, he felt, was the " bathroom " ; true, the bath was only a zinc tub (like the one his mother used on washing days) placed on a kind of concrete sink made in the floor, but the bathroom was his own, leading out of his room, to be used by him alone. He soon found out that this was a necessity, not a luxury, in that land of sticky heat.

Breakfast at nine was again, to Dick, a kind of Arabian Nights meal because of the three silent attendants, brown-faced and white-clad and barefooted, offering porridge (just like home,) and presently rice and curry (not a bit like home—hot, but distinctly pleasant, Dick thought). Mrs. Laurenz, who kept this small, quiet boarding-house, was an Italian-looking lady, plump, olive-skinned and kind.

" You'd like the dhobi, wouldn't you ? " she said to Dick as they rose from the table, and seeing he looked a little puzzled, she explained, " The washerman. I'll send for him and bring him along to you when he comes.

You pay him six rupees<sup>1</sup> a month and give him as much washing as you like each week."

"Him" again! All the work seemed to be done by men. The dhobi came in due course, a tall, unshaven man with a twist of red cloth round his head who squatted on the floor and sorted Dick's laundry under the stern eye of Mrs. Laurenz, counting "ek, dō, teen" (one—two—three) while Dick sat on the edge of his bed and made a list.

"Phooh! It's warm," exclaimed Mrs. Laurenz after the dhobi had gone off with the bundle on his head. "Close the shutters if too much heat comes in, Mr. Thompson. What about the punkah?<sup>2</sup>" She touched a second switch by the electric light button and lo, the "propeller" overhead began to revolve steadily, sending a pleasant breeze over Dick's perspiring face. "Have you all you want? If not, shout for a servant. I expect you want to unpack now; would you like the bearer to do it for you?"

"Oh, no!" said Dick hurriedly. "No thank you!"

"I've got my sister staying with me," Mrs. Laurenz went on, "and we shall be going out this evening as she wants to do some shopping. If you care to come, too,

<sup>1</sup> The Indian currency is based on the rupee; there are sixteen annas in a rupee, and you may reckon roughly that an anna is a penny. As a matter of fact, now (May, 1925) you have to give 1s. 6d. English money for a rupee, so an anna is rather more than a penny. Instead of farthings there are pice—four to an anna.

The chief coins are:

Pice	.	.	.	.	.	copper.
1 anna (round, fluted edge)	.	.	.	.	.	} nickel.
2 anna (square)	.	.	.	.	.	
4 anna (larger round, fluted edge)	.	.	.	.	.	} silver
8 anna (round, about size of shilling)	.	.	.	.	.	
1 rupee (round, about size of half-a-crown)	.	.	.	.	.	} alloy.
Rupees—1, 5, 10, 50, etc.	.	.	.	.	.	notes.

<sup>2</sup>Fan.



you would see a bit of Calcutta." Dick accepted gratefully. It was Friday and he was not to begin work till Monday, so he had time to "settle in."

"Evening," Dick found, meant after tea, and it was about five when he took his seat facing the ladies in a tikka gari,<sup>1</sup> a sort of shabby phaeton drawn by a dejected-looking horse, and having two "cabbies," one driving and one crouched behind. The air was warm but not too hot, and a pleasant breeze met them as they turned into a wide, straight street beside a very large park.

"This is Chowringhee," said Mrs. Laurenz, indicating the magnificent road, where trams ran close to the park, and motors passed and repassed. "And that," pointing to the green spaces of the park, "is the Maidan. The river, where you landed, Mr. Thompson, is away at the other side of the Maidan, beyond those wireless masts, which are at the Fort."

So Dick's first impression of Calcutta was of the splendid street, the wide green park, the stream of motor-cars.

Presently they came to shops, an arcaded pavement before them—expensive-looking shops, reminding Dick of the West End of London; they passed ranks of taxis, each with its swarthy Sikh driver, and then were held up at a crossing by a policeman in white uniform with a scarlet turban above his brown face. A bullock cart drew up beside them, just a rough framework of bamboos lashed above the axle of two wheels, drawn by a pair of stolid bulls at whose tails the driver, squatting low on the shaft, tugged to bring them to a standstill. In the motors and on the pavement were people white and brown and olive-skinned, many in English dress, some in strange "fancy dress." Trams rattled across the points directed by an Indian timekeeper

<sup>1</sup>Hired carriage. A taxi is called taxi gari; a train, rail gari.

in a khaki uniform; slim brown lads in dirty white waved newspapers and cried the latest edition in a clipped queer English or in an unknown tongue.

"We'd better go on by Government House and show it to Mr. Thompson," said Mrs. Laurenz, calling a direction to the driver. So passing more shops and tall offices they came to the big gates, and Dick had a glimpse of large shady gardens with flashes of scarlet flowers, and a huge palace of a building beyond. "The Governor of India?" he ventured.

"Oh, no, the Governor of Bengal. The Viceroy is at Delhi."

Soon they turned into a square, and the pool in the central gardens mirrored the white dome of a huge pillared building on the far side. Dick was just wondering if it was another palace, when Mrs. Laurenz announced it as the General Post Office.

"Up that way," said Mrs. Laurenz, pointing to a street of tall, dignified buildings, "are all the banks and big offices."

The gari turned into a narrower, hotter street where the trams and bullock carts nearly blocked the way. Here there were fewer European faces among the passers-by, the shops were smaller and often open-fronted, with strange Indian names written above them. Another turn, and a new scent pervaded the air—leather and other things; Chinese names were written above what seemed like a whole colony of shoe shops, and Chinese children peeped out from the doorways. A rickshaw passed them, a Chinese gentleman in English dress sitting on its red plush upholstery, a half-naked coolie running in the shafts and shaking as he ran the bell he carried on his finger.

So, making a circle, they came back again to Chowringhee.

"It's getting late," said Mrs. Laurenz glancing at the big clock at the corner. "We'd better get on with our shopping." Then "Newmarket!" she called to the driver. "You can buy absolutely anything in the Calcutta market," she said to Dick. "It's famous all over India. But you'll see."

Dick did see. As the gari stopped outside a large low building a crowd of coolies sprang forward, each offering his services as attendant and parcel carrier. Mrs. Laurenz ignored them, but the first one followed the party, his big shallow basket ready on his head.

Then began what was to Dick a bewildering and amazing tour up and down a covered town of streets, each devoted to tiny "shops" of one particular sort. In each shop the goods were stacked tightly into every available corner of space, and the shopkeeper shouted to them as they passed by. Down past the stationers (who also sold tooth paste and shoe polish), along by ironmongers' row—"Yes, yes, Sahib, I got it! What you want, please? I got it!" Then by the dried fruit stalls—"This shop sir! This shop, please!" and by the dressmakers, and the hat shops—"Sola topee,<sup>1</sup> sir, very good! Very cheap! This way, please, sir!"—and rows of shoe shops (here again the Chinese), to a central row of drapers and general outfitters where the invitations were most pressing of all.

"Silk y-stocking! 'Lastic! This shop, please!"

"What you want, sir? Very good braces, y-socks, Phoenix silk y-socks!"

"Please come this way, sir! Please!"

They stopped at a "cloth shop," for Mrs. Laurenz's sister wanted to buy some green muslin. They sat on benches while all about them on the floor rolls of gaily

<sup>1</sup> Special hat of pith covered with drill, worn by Europeans as a protection against the tropical sun.

coloured materials were unrolled till the tiny shop was a billowy sea of many-hued coloured muslins. The proprietor, being a Sikh, never cut his hair (his religion enjoined this custom), but wore his silky beard and long locks neatly rolled up and fastened out of the way. He squatted in the centre of the floor by the cash box, a couple of accountants beside him working long sums in strange symbols, while his assistants nimbly and deftly displayed the goods. ("If you ever ask for anything not in the shop," Mrs. Laurenz told Dick, "the owner will say, 'I have it, I have it!' and send a boy running to borrow it, from a neighbouring store whose proprietor he has similarly obliged many a time.")

In the end the muslin was chosen. "How much is this?" Mrs. Laurenz asked.

"This to you, madam, is one rupee, four annas."

"One-four a yard! Never! I'll give you twelve annas."

"Madam! The right price one-six, I say one-four to you. No profit for me, but you are a good customer. You give one-four."

"Certainly not. I'll give you fourteen annas and no more."

"One-three, then, madam" (coaxingly).

"No, fourteen annas."

"Madam, my cost price is one rupee. I lose this for you."

"Rubbish! I want two yards, please; here's one-fourteen; that's fifteen annas a yard, and much too much, too."

The muslin was already being wrapped in newspaper, and the proprietor took the money with politeness. As the bale was replaced on the shelf Dick noticed "Made in Japan" on its label; alongside of it was "Made in

Czechoslovakia," and the names of several well-known Lancashire firms. They left the shop with mutual salaams.

Dick's mind was already a regular jumble of impressions, and as he lay in bed that night he made up his mind to explore a bit by himself the next day.

"I'll walk," he decided. "You don't somehow get at grips with things from that crawling old horse-bus, you just see traffic and huge buildings. I'll walk to-morrow."

Accordingly the next day he put on his topee and went out alone. It was Saturday afternoon, and most of the European shops were shut; in each blank doorway at least two or three men slumbered, some of them wrapped in filthy rags. Here and there some worn-out pilgrim or lazy coolie slept peacefully on the pavement itself, heedless of the passers-by. Dick passed Englishwomen in the daintiest of summer fashions; Bengali gentlemen, bareheaded, wearing a long tunic of fine white stuff made exactly like a collarless shirt, and instead of trousers some intricate graceful drapery of the same white muslin; coolies (workmen), their dark brown bodies bare and a twist of old rag serving as a pad for the huge loads they carried easily on their heads. An Indian in well-cut English clothes and a huge pink turban asked to be allowed to tell Dick's fortune; a dwarf and two beggars with hideous sores begged his alms. Everywhere the pavements were spotted with red; at first Dick had vague sinister thoughts of blood-offerings to idols, until he saw that many of the Indians were chewing something (which he discovered later to be *pan*<sup>1</sup>) that turned their saliva scarlet and necessitated frequent spitting.

Wandering towards the Newmarket again, he passed a branch post office. Outside several men were squatting

<sup>1</sup> Little packets of betel and lime, each wrapped in a leaf.

on the pavement, official letter-writers for those who could neither read nor write; one of them had an Onoto pen with a gold band, Dick noted with a grin. He walked right through the market and out the other side; and there, opposite a bit of waste land where a score of small merchants had spread their goods on the ground, the brightly coloured hoardings of a Picture Palace flamed before him. The "pictures!" Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin—the familiar names gave him a sudden sharp pang of homesickness. Then it struck him he might as well go in. Why not?

So he paid his money and found himself in a familiar plush seat, with people packed in the dark all round him and a fan whirling above his head.

And in some ways "the pictures" were the queerest part of all. The films were exactly like those he had often seen in the Palais de Luxe at Maxington—slapstick comedy with a funny fat man who kicked everyone, a drama about one woman and two men, with an adventuress and a villain thrown in, Pathé gazette, and so on. When the lights went up Dick saw that three-quarters of the audience were Indians, chiefly young men, but here and there was a family party with a girl or two in a swathe of silk or muslin.

"What on earth do they think of it?" Dick wondered, "and what on earth does it make them think of us? I wonder how many of 'em imagine the pictures show the way we always go on at home!" He had to leave a little early, and in spite of all his efforts to be in time for dinner, lost his way and was very late.

The next day was Sunday, and Dick wrote home finding it rather difficult to give his "impressions." The phrase coming into his head reminded him of Margaret Coulter; he wondered if Jamalnagar were at all like

Calcutta. Hale had asked him to go off somewhere and play tennis, but Dick, too shy to explain that he couldn't play and never had played, had pleaded a headache. It was a true excuse—reaction, probably, and also a rapidly growing nervousness about the next day and his start at work. By evening he felt so blue that he couldn't think of anything better than to accept Mrs. Laurenz's suggestion and escort her to church.

They went to the Cathedral; he had seen its slender spire pointing above the trees near the Maidan. It was full, and the hymns, the stately yet intimate prayers, the organ and the stillness after an "Amen" were just—home.

"Lighten our darkness we beseech Thee, O Lord" . . . how beautiful it was. And Dick walked back to the boarding-house feeling quieted and braced.

## CHAPTER III

### A DAY IN THE STORE

RICHARD THOMPSON was twenty-three, and his life story so far had not been specially exciting. When he left the Landon Street Council School at fourteen he went as errand-boy at the Maxington Co-operative Stores, and later, by luck and partly perhaps because he had a rather quiet "way with him," he rose to a junior position in the piece-goods department. When he was eighteen his elder brother married and was anxious for his mother to live with him and his wife at 16 Albert Terrace. So Dick not unwillingly began to look out for a job in London, and in 1921 became one of the thousand and more servants of the public in a huge store that was out to be superlatively English on American lines—"THE Store," they called it.

If our hero had come up to London with any dreams of a Dick Whittington career and a speedy fortune, these dreams were not realised. But at the Store he had had varied experience, and in fancy goods, bargain-basement, gents' outfitting, and silk goods (changes were frequent and part of the organising principle of the Store) Dick learnt the art of salesmanship. At various times he had been to evening classes, and he had always belonged to a public library.

As he strolled along Chowringhee to work one morning about ten days after the Cathedral service, he was thinking of the Store. "It seems like another world," he thought, "and I can hardly believe it's Dick Thompson



here in a white suit and a topee. Supposing it is all a dream . . .”

He was entering the shop door at this point, and the show-cases and counters, the general air of space and luxury were so exactly like the Store at home that the dream theory seemed quite feasible!

Again and again during the first week: “Why, it’s just like England,” or, “We do it that way at home,” had been the obvious comment. Where was the land of rajahs and elephants, of gold and dancing girls and strange gods? Not here apparently! Dick was beginning to think that perhaps India didn’t quite come up to his expectations.

He had already discovered that the beginning and end of the day were the two busy times; ladies did their shopping in the cool of the morning, or waited till after tea. His first customer to-day, however, was not a lady, but an Indian man. He was wearing the inevitable white shirt; and below it a cloth of checked cotton was wrapped into a kind of skirt reaching to his feet; on his head was a tiny round pill-box cap of white embroidered muslin, soiled at the edges. He had slung on his shoulder a cardboard box wrapped in a piece of cloth; it was a lady’s dress box, and contained his present stock-in-trade. He held out a crumpled piece of paper and a pattern of blue crêpe-de-Chine.

Dick looked enquiringly at the next assistant as he turned to match the material.

“Who’s he?” he asked.

“*Dhirzi*—a tailor and dressmaker,” he was told. “I expect the mem-sahib<sup>1</sup> he’s working for needs half a yard more material to complete her dress. They usually patronise the market, these chaps, but he’s probably

<sup>1</sup> A term used to refer to any English lady.

got to match it. Let's see the paper . . . yes, half a yard."

"Half yard," agreed the man. He waited without embarrassment, unwrapped some money from the folds at the waist of his cloth to pay for his purchase, and moved away with quiet dignity, an everyday but picturesque figure.

"Fearful place, Calcutta," said the other assistant, a married man. "You'd actually have to pay a chap like that as much as two chips (rupees) a day; he'd be twelve annas in the country."

Dick was thinking what this would be in English money: two rupees—about three shillings a day. "It doesn't sound much," he said. The other laughed.

"Oh, you've still got your English trade union notions! Why, how much do you suppose is a living wage out here? What do you think the house servants earn? Anything from sixteen to twenty-four rupees a month and keep a wife and family on it. . . . Yes, madam, what can I do for you?"

Dick's customers that day, as every day, were chiefly Englishwomen, for the most part the kind he had been accustomed to call "high-life," with manicured hands, fashionable clothes, and an airy way of signing their bills with a flourish instead of paying cash. Dick served them with the same polite attention and patient display of endless samples as he had been used to show at home, heard the same complaints and the same more-rare polite remarks. Most of them were rather pale, or else daintily pink in a way he knew spoke more of art than of nature. They were part of the illusion that "out here" was just the same as "back there."

But other customers joined the *dhirzi* in a procession

of strange newness. Two Parsee<sup>1</sup> ladies spent a long half-hour judging his finest, softest silks. Their faces, pale olive, with very regular features, were framed by a fold of the silken drapery that swathed them—*sari* Dick had learnt was the name of the garment—and they each wore a number of gold ornaments. They spoke to Dick in faultless English, and as he spread out his silks before them he could not help thinking how beautiful their costume was, with its graceful folds and draperies. In the end they bought a six-yard length of shimmery apricot, and the elder one opened an exquisite Parisian handbag to get out a hundred-rupee note in payment.

Dick cut the length, folded it, and called "Bearer!" An Indian shop-boy sprang up, and took the silk to pack it. Dick wrote the bill, and politely took the money. "Bearer!" he called. The Indian took the bill book and the money to the cash desk and returned with the change; Dick took it from him, and passed it and the invoice to his customers. They rose to go; the Indian followed them, carrying the parcel out to their waiting motor; then he returned and began folding up the various rolls of material that covered the counter. Dick was only just getting used to this business of having a "private fag" to wait on him and on the customers; he still felt a little like an unreasonable Aladdin every time he called "Bearer!"

His next customer was a slight girl with a pale brown skin wearing a frock of white organdie muslin with a floppy black hat and a black sash.

"May I see your cream fugi?" she said, with an accent that held both a drawl and a faint clipping of some

<sup>1</sup>The Parsees are a small but highly educated and influential community, whose centre is Bombay. Their religion is a form of fire worship.

consonants. Dick reached down the washing silks, and eventually sold her half a yard. He watched her thoughtfully as she went daintily out; very graceful she was, and yet not quite—ordinary. Nothing perplexed Dick more than these crowds of girls and men with English names, English speech, English dress—and a paler or darker flush of brown in their skins. Almost all the shop assistants belonged to this army, and not in *that* shop only but in the other big shops into which he had been. Mrs. Laurenz, too . . . he thought at first she might be Spanish or Italian; but they couldn't all be Spanish or Italian. After several days he had asked Hale, and now Dick knew that all these folk had both an Indian and an English ancestry, that a mother or a grandmother or someone away back in the past, had worn a *sari*.<sup>1</sup>

A girl came in with a bundle of letters from the mail order department. A recurrent phrase in the orders had struck Dick before and he thought he'd ask to-day.

“ ‘Please send V.P.P.’—what does ‘V.P.P.’ mean, Miss Sylvester? ” he asked the clerk as he measured out some georgette.

“ ‘V.P.P.’—why, don't you know that? Don't you have it at home? ” she asked in surprise. “ V.P.P.—Value Payable Post; we send the goods, the customer pays the postman, and in a few days the postman here pays us. Simple, isn't it? ”

“ Simple! Yes, but it's a great idea,” said Dick. He chuckled quietly suddenly remembering the last words of a chap in the Store when he was saying good-bye: “ Well, if you will go to a heathen land of naked niggers and howling wildernesses I don't suppose we'll ever see

<sup>1</sup> The total Anglo-Indian community in India was at the last census 113,000; of course the greater number are found in the big cities.

you again." If only young Robinson could see the Parsee ladies, and the General Post Office, and know about V.P.P. !<sup>1</sup>

The day wore on, and at noon a hush seemed to fall over the shop. Customers were few, the assistants checked stock-lists slowly or waited limply, the bearers slumbered in odd corners. Things brisked up again, however, soon after four.

Two Indian youths, their thick black hair parted beautifully, their white garments of spotless and fine muslin, had been walking round the show-stands for several minutes before they came up to the counter and asked for pink silk. They were obviously nervous, and spoke to each other in their own quick musical tongue, and to Dick in quite passable English. Dick showed them a good variety of silks ; they fingered them, and seemed rather critical and hard to please.

" Perhaps if I knew for what purpose you want it," Dick suggested pleasantly.

" For *sari*," said the taller lad.

" I see," Dick answered, making conversation as he took down another roll. " For your mother, perhaps ? "

The lad looked a little astonished, and spoke a few Bengali words to his companion. Then the taller answered in his careful English, pointing to the younger :

" It is for the mother of his son."

They examined the new silk.

" It's a very fine quality," Dick assured them ; evidently he was dealing with wealthy folk, and money was no object.

" It is fine," the younger lad agreed gravely. " But show me some more fine, show me damn fine."

<sup>1</sup> Our own C.O.D. has come in since these pages were written.  
—Ed.

In the end they went away unsatisfied, though they had nearly bought a silvery rose brocade of miraculous softness. The other assistant chuckled as they turned away.

“ ‘Damn fine’—that’s good ! ” He laughed loudly.

“ ‘Sh, they’ll hear you ! ” Dick warned him.

“ Well, and what does it matter if they do ! I expect he thought that was jolly good English. What a joke ! ”

“ I suppose he heard some Englishman say it, ” said Dick, not laughing. The other stared, shrugged his shoulders, and said : “ Oh, probably. ”

Dick served several other Indians before six o’clock, business men on their way home from their offices or lawyers returning from court ; apparently they were shopping for their womenfolk. Indeed, it struck Dick quite forcibly that while his English customers were women, his Indian ones were almost exclusively men ; where *were* the women in this queer land ?

When Dick came out of the shop that evening he made for the open green space of the Maidan. The wonderful light of an eastern sunset was beginning to shine across the city, and out on the grass ; with the noise of the trams coming from the distance, one could easily imagine Battersea Park or St. James’s. Besides, if he were quick there was another attraction—the babies ! Indian nurses (ayahs in the books, he remembered) brought their little charges every afternoon after tea to enjoy the cooler air ; and there beyond the trees you could walk past as if you were going somewhere important, and all the time be watching the antics of the liveliest English toddlers, chasing and tumbling and quarrelling, while the ayahs sat in little groups and talked, keeping a watchful eye on their *babas*. If he were late, the groups would have broken up and the ayahs would be trailing homewards, and there

would be no laughing English four-year-olds romping beyond the trees.

Wednesday : English mail must be posted to-morrow. Dick cut his walk short and returned to his room. He finished his weekly letter to his mother, paused and then with a grin dashed off a page and a half to Robinson. Poor Robinson ! " Naked niggers and howling wildernesses " indeed ! " It is quite good fun to enlighten him ! " thought Dick as he signed a flourishing " R. Thompson " at the end. Then a thought struck him, and he added a P.S.

" Tell the commissionaire at the costumes door that the chappie here (he's called a *durwan* or something) is an ex-soldier, too, and has more medals than he has ! "

" Naked niggers " !

## CHAPTER IV

### A PUJA

DAYS passed quickly, and Dick was surprised to find how soon the novelty of things wore off. After a couple of weeks he felt quite the old inhabitant . . . until suddenly some new and perplexing feature would make its appearance, and once again he had to display his ignorance of the customs of a new land, or else ask for information on matters that everyone but himself seemed to take for granted. "One thing I wish," he thought to himself one day on the way home from the shop, "is that people would not use Hindustani in ordinary English conversation. There are one or two outlandish words that are always cropping up and I can't get the hang of them at all. Now *puja* . . ." He went over in his mind some of the phrases that he had heard :

"There'll be two *pujas* next week." . . . "Oh, yes, I went there in the *pujas*." . . . "It's no good going to the market to-day, it's a *puja*." . . . "What's that image? Probably something to do with a *puja*."

"Sometimes it seems to mean Bank Holiday," he reflected; "a day when most of the shops is shut is a *puja*, apparently. And you hear a lot about the *puja* holidays, which seem to be just over. But what can that have to do with an idol? It's very puzzling."

Two days later he realised that another of these queer irregular holidays was falling due, and that the banks would be shut on the following Tuesday. It was



unpleasant to appear ignorant, but still worse to remain ignorant, so Dick summoned up courage to ask Hale, "What's a *puja*?"

Hale rather misinterpreted the question, taking it that Dick was enquiring about the specific *puja* of Tuesday. "*Diwali*,"<sup>1</sup> he answered briefly, and added in explanation, "There'll be fireworks and illuminations; you ought to take a gari and drive round after dusk. It's worth seeing."

This was interesting, but the original question was yet unanswered. Dick put it again, in desperation. "But what is a *puja*? What does it mean?"

"*Puja*? Why, it means worship; a *puja* is a special day of festival and worship for the Hindus. Like Christmas for us, you know, or Easter, or even saints' days in the Church."

"I see," said Dick, enlightened at last, and trying to fit this meaning into various contexts. "But there are a great many *pujas*, apparently; why does business have to stop for all of them?"

"The banks don't close on every *puja*, as a matter of fact," said Hale. He reached for an almanac, a cheap one printed in red and black with a month on a page. "Look at that. The dates in red are *puja* days." Dick counted nine red dates in October. He tried to remember how many saints' days fell in that month according to his own church, but was rather chagrined to find he had not the least idea! Apparently special days mattered more in the "heathen" religion of India.

"I expect you've heard us talking about the '*puja* holidays,'" Hale went on. Young Thompson seemed interested, and he was ready to enlighten a youngster as far as he could. "To a Bengali, at all events, the greatest

<sup>1</sup> Literally "a row of lamps."

festival of the year is *Durga*<sup>1</sup> *Puja*, and that comes in the autumn, late September or early October. That is the chief *puja* season, and they come thick and fast, as you can see. Well, that's why we have holidays in the autumn; the law courts shut and the hill stations like Darjeeling have their great season, crowded with people, chiefly from Bengal. The different *puja* days are for worshipping different gods and heroes, and I suppose every day has its own customs. I don't pretend to know very much about that sort of thing."

"And what about this one next week?" Dick asked.

"*Diwali*? It is a Feast of Lights, and I have heard that it is something to do with Lakshmi—she's the goddess of chance. Look here, if you want to know more about it, why not ask Mr. Norville? It's more in his line than mine."

Mr. Norville was a fellow-boarder at Mrs. Laurenz's house, a quiet man of rather more than middle age. Dick had classified him rather vaguely as a scholar, perhaps even a professor, and had heard that he wrote books. Accordingly to Mr. Norville he went, that very night after dinner. Mr. Norville did better than deliver a lecture; he seemed genuinely pleased at being approached. "I've got to go out to-night," he apologised, "but I can lend you a good book or two on the subject. And supposing you go out with me next Tuesday evening to see what can be seen? It's one of the prettiest festivals to look at, and I could tell you more as we go along."

The books offered such a mass of information on Hinduism that Dick was completely overwhelmed; the numberless new and strange names, the intricate relationships that apparently existed between god and god,

<sup>1</sup> A name of the Mother-Goddess, sometimes called Kali.

the varying forms, each with its name, under which one god might appear . . . these were quite beyond one's grasp at a first reading, and Dick gave up the struggle. "I'll ask Mr. Norville to tell me," he thought, "perhaps he will be easier to follow."

"We might have a *gari*," said Mr. Norville as the two of them turned out of the gate on Tuesday, "but if you really want to see things I should suggest tram and then a walk."

Dick agreed with enthusiasm. The marvellous eastern sunset light was bathing street and Maidan with pure gold as they waited for the tram; it deepened perceptibly as they watched, and in less than ten minutes gave place to a blue twilight. "Be prepared for some bangs," said Mr. Norville, as the car clanged its way through the crowds; the words were hardly out of his lips when a loud report made Dick sit up and glance quickly out, just in time to see the grinning face of the urchin whose cracker, carefully laid on the line, had been exploded by the car. Dick himself grinned back; evidently the small Bengali was not so unlike certain imps who made the most of Guy Fawkes Day at home! "Is that part of the *puja*?" he asked with a smile; and then enlarged the question to: "What is this *puja* business, anyway? I couldn't make much of the book, but I do want to understand. Who worships, and what do they worship, and how, and why?"

"Those are rather big questions! However . . ." There was a little pause, as if Mr. Norville were seeking for the best starting-point. "You and I are Christians . . . of a sort," he began. "Well, most of the people of this land are Mohammedans or Hindus. The two are absolutely different—get that firmly into your mind at the beginning. How different? Your Mohammedan

worships one God and your Hindu many gods—at least, God under many forms. In July you could see a great Mohammedan festival, when the whole stretch of the Maidan is white with figures bowing in prayer as one man, rows and rows and rows. . . . Or in August there is another, with torchlight processions all night long. But *Diwali* is a Hindu festival. What were those questions of yours? Who worships? All Hindus, or strictly, I suppose, all Hindu men, though the women have their share of the fun. What do they worship? At this festival they worship the Goddess of Good Luck—they call her Lakshmi—and the Demon-Mother Kali; and I rather think they at least commemorate their ancestors. But the exact origin of *Diwali* (at least as the people of Bengal observe it) is a matter on which scholars do not agree. How? Chiefly in their homes; there is not any uniting together in the temple for worship in Hinduism, like a Christian service in church; instead, people offer flowers and sweets and money to the symbols of the goddesses in their houses, and the priest comes and says some prayer-sentences. Yes, individually they do go to the temples to make offerings and ask boons, especially on feast days.

“Hindu mothers will be telling stories to small children to-day. One is that the goddess Lakshmi visits earth on this holy night, riding about on her owl on a tour of inspection, and entering such houses as please her. . . .” The tram stopped, and they got out.

They found themselves on the edge of an excited and good-humoured crowd, whose chatter rose up in a confused babble. The flare of torches lit up a scene that vaguely reminded Dick of Bank Holidays at home. . . . “Why, it’s a fair!” he exclaimed. Yes, it was a fair; on a waste plot of ground the sellers of sweets, of clay

dolls and tin whistles, of gaily-coloured pots and glass bangles and drums and fans had squatted down, their wares spread out on the ground before them, and the merry buyers bargained and chattered, and got wonderful treasures for one or two pice. The children were here, there and everywhere ; it was their great day, evidently, and most of the goods seemed to be for their delight.

“ What fun ! ” said Dick, as they stood for a moment looking on ; the spirit of festival was in the air.

“ Yes, the *puja* days are the holidays of India. You see, almost every detail of a Hindu’s daily life is ordained by his religion—how he eats and how he sleeps and how he bathes and so on—and his fun comes into it, too.” They moved on, down a fairly wide street lined with shops. Here the holiday air was still more apparent. Everywhere was light, and the passers-by seemed in happy mood. Small boys were letting off squibs and catherine-wheels in the middle of the street, heedless of the traffic, or lurking in doorways where garlands of green leaves hung, studded with yellow marigolds. And—the lights !

The lights ! Every house seemed to be outlined with little stars, every ledge, every verandah, every window-sill, had its line of tiny twinkling points of light. Yonder, a wealthy merchant’s house was blazing with electric fairy lights of different colours ; but for the most part the traditional clay lamps were used. (Twelve for an anna you can buy them, tiny, boat-shaped saucers of clay ; pour a little oil into each, add a twist of cotton for a wick, and your lamp is ready.) The poorest hut had its half-dozen ; some of the biggest blocks of flats and offices blazed with line after line. Below, in the street, the traffic and the crowds ; above, the deep soft eastern night, the sky blossoming every minute with the

scarlet fire or golden rain of rockets sent up from scores of little back courtyards.

As they walked on, Mr. Norville pointed out that though most of the shops were open, buying and selling was only going on in the firework and sweet shops. "No one carries on ordinary business on *Diwali* night, for that would be unlucky. But friends and customers drop into the shop, and the merchant feeds them with sweet things. *Diwali* is a great time for sweets. Did you notice at the fair that they were selling horses and other toys made of sweets?"

They turned into a side street, and then turned again, wandering through quieter streets where still the lights of tiny flickering lamps lit the quiet dark. Dick couldn't help wondering what was going on inside these houses. "Feasting and fun!" said Mr. Norville. "*Diwali* is one of the happiest *pujas*. The children have a great time, what with the good things to eat and the fireworks. And another great feature is gambling."

"Gambling? Why on earth should that come in to a *puja*?" asked Dick in surprise.

"Well, it is supposed to give the goddess a chance; she is the personification of good luck, and it pleases her; so at her festival to gamble is a real merit." At this moment they turned another corner, and the two by common consent stood silent at the beauty of the sight. The road widened into a square, and before them lay the still dark waters of a rectangular lake or tank. All round, the illuminations gleamed like garlands of stars, and the black waters reflected every one with equal radiancy. A green and gold rocket scattered its fire-flowers in the dark above—and green and gold blossomed, too, in the water below. Someone beyond the farther houses lit a red "fire" so that the buildings stood

silhouetted dark against a glow of crimson ; and below, the pool flushed like a rose. *Diwali* . . . Feast of Lights . . . the magic East indeed !

It was as they neared home again that Dick, recalling the original puzzle about the meaning of *puja*, felt that really he had not yet understood. "*Puja* means worship," he said slowly. "We don't seem to have seen much worship to-night."

Mr. Norville stopped. "Thompson," he answered impressively, "don't you ever forget that you haven't seen everything. We have walked round the streets—how can we see what goes on inside the homes of the people ? We've watched the lights, but how do we know what it all means to them ? You just remember you don't know all about it, and you'll be far safer from the sin of scorning what is sacred to your brother than most of us." They walked on in silence. "I've spent most of my life in this land," went on Norville, "and the more I learn the more I realise how much there is yet to be understood. Hinduism ! One man will describe it to you as a high and elaborate philosophy ; another calls it chaos. One man asks how thirty million gods can be truly worshipped, especially when many of them are entirely immoral characters ; another sees in them just symbols of the highest and best in its various aspects. One man . . ." he went on and on, growing rather excited ; for the most part Dick found it hard to understand and follow. He listened attentively, impressed at any rate with the older man's earnestness ; and finally, in a pause, put rather shyly his last question :

"But Hinduism is a religion, isn't it, sir ? And a religion is something which—well, which helps a chap along ; keeps him up to the mark, and lifts him over rough places, and—oh, more than that ! I can't explain

properly. I suppose that does come into Hinduism, too? Any ordinary chap could be gripped by it?"

Silence. "I—don't—know," said Norville very slowly. And Dick was left with a doubt in his mind.

*Note.*—It is most important to heed Mr. Norville's words. This chapter does not begin even to outline Hinduism. Dick got one little glimpse of one of the ways in which the religion of India finds expression among the common people.

For a short outline of Hinduism see Chapter III of *Jesus Christ and the World's Religions* (price 1/- net), by W. Paton, and Chapter VI of *India and Her Peoples* (price 2/- net), by F. Deaville Walker. (Obtainable from all missionary societies and booksellers.)



## CHAPTER V

### WHAT DICK NEVER SAW

EVERY morning the great business tide flows into Calcutta: from the suburbs by bicycle, train, tram, and recently by bus, come the crowds of clerks and other workers in office, bank and warehouse, till the streets near the central termini are a stream of dark faces and white clothes, London Bridge or Liverpool Street's panorama of white faces and dark clothes reversed. But the typists and accountants and clerks are all men; there is not an Indian woman among them.

Every day at a street corner you may see a little crowd gathered about a conjuror, a snake-charmer, a seller of fruit. Nineteen out of twenty in the crowd are men.

Every evening in such parks and gardens as Calcutta possesses the people of the city walk or sit, enjoying the coolness of the twilight. Walk through the green space of a square, and slim, white-clad youths will be chattering all around you; probably you will not meet a single woman.

*Where are the Indian women?* Dick asked himself more than once. English women, yes; Anglo-Indian women, yes; but Indian women . . .? It was when he was trying to think of something about them to tell his mother in his home letter one Wednesday evening that it struck him with special force.

"I believe I could count on my fingers the times I've seen Indian women," he realised suddenly. "One, the ayahs looking after the English kiddies on the Maidan of an afternoon. Two, a few customers like those two ladies who bought the apricot silk. Three? Let's think—oh, yes, there were a few at the pictures that

night ; but at home there'd be more girls than boys at a cinema any day. Any more ? ” He racked his brain. What about the streets ? He tried hard to remember, but couldn't recollect anything more than a few bent old women and several who sold *pan* at street corners. And then he thought of the shopping hordes at the Store, and of Maxington High Street on a Saturday morning. Where *were* the Indian women ?

That very week two small “ occurrences ” (hardly big enough to be called incidents) added to Dick's wonderings on this question.

It was Saturday afternoon and the European shops had shut at one o'clock. Dick had not yet made up his mind to tackle tennis, and he had refused an invitation to go to the races at Barrackpur. “ Be a sport and come along,” the other man had urged. Dick had blushed, and hadn't liked to explain he was too short of cash to stand an afternoon of that sort. But he'd got out of it somehow, and to his relief the other chap hadn't turned nasty.

Starting off about four o'clock without any very definite plans, Dick finally took a tram going southwards. “ I'll go all the way, and walk back if it's not too far,” he decided. It soon became apparent that he would not lose his way if he did walk, for the tram route followed a wide main thoroughfare nearly as straight as a ruler. Presently the shops on each side grew more Indian-looking and there were few Europeans on the pavements. The tram terminus was a big depot, and the service seemed frequent. Dick decided to go a little way back in the tram, past the most crowded part of the street, and then walk.

It was just after he got out of the tram that he saw three or four groups of women. First, he noticed four women following a tall bearded man, in garments rather

reminiscent of a brigand, who strode along with a little lad in his arms. The women wore long kilted skirts of gay colours, and shawls of turquoise and yellow and cerise; their draperies were pulled low over their faces, heavy silver anklets tinkled on their bare feet, and large gold rings hung from their noses and their ears. They looked dusty and travel-weary; indeed their home was in a distant part of India. Their faces were set to the south.

A few minutes later another group passed him. This time the costume of each was a *sari* of white muslin, the typical dress of a Bengali woman. But again it was pulled well round the drooping face. Dick wondered if they were blind, for, afraid of being lost in the bustling street, each clutched tremblingly a fold of the garment of the one in front of her, and thus in a timid, frightened line they threaded the crowded pavement. They looked pathetic and forlorn. "Someone ought to be looking after them," thought Dick.

And then these chance encounters reminded him that, now he came to think of it, there had been one or two more such cloaked timid women in the tram. Where did this road lead to? Why this coming and going of helpless-looking women upon it?

The next day was Sunday. The early mornings in India were delightful, sunny and fresh, like a perfect summer's day at home, and Dick went out for a stroll before breakfast. He was passing along a quiet residential road, his thoughts miles and miles away, when a glint of something white in a gateway on the other side of the road caught his eye and recalled him to the present. And thereupon he saw about a hundred Indian girls all at once, for they came out of the gate two by two and turned along the road in the direction in which he was walking. He went slowly, so that he could watch without

being rude. How fresh and graceful the long procession looked, each girl's crisp white draperies touched here and there by the hint of a vivid-coloured border, their bare feet walking so silently, a little soft sound of conversation coming across the sunny air. At the back of the line they were obviously quite children, funny little things in drapery like the bigger ones, and a few in short frocks. The long line of white-robed figures turned down a side street and Dick walked on.

When he got home he found the postman had brought the Sunday treat: letters from England. There were three; one from his mother, one from Alf, and—from whom was the other? He didn't know the writing. He read the two from home first, and then turned to the other, scrutinising the address again, and opening it with no little curiosity.

"Dear Mr. Hermit Thompson," it began. He picked up the envelope again and looked at the stamp; it was Indian. Of course—Margaret Coulter!

"DEAR MR. HERMIT THOMPSON,

"According to promise I am writing to 'give you my impressions.' I like Jamalnagar very much, it's such fun having servants to wait on you. I go to the club quite often and we have tennis and bridge and dancing. It isn't a bit too hot really except outdoors in the middle of the day, and I rest then.

"I have met some very jolly people. There are three missionaries here, all very nice, and not a bit like clergymen. I mean, the men don't wear black clothes, and the lady is awfully good at tennis. Auntie took me to call on her the other day and she was having what she called 'a *purdah* party,' a number of Indian ladies who don't go out in public. Such lovely

silk clothes they had, of most gorgeous colours, and simply heaps of jewellery. I never saw anything like it, and yet they didn't look over-dressed somehow. One pretty youngish woman talked English and told me she had visited England with her husband. She had actually been to a Buckingham Palace Garden Party! Another of the guests was an Indian woman doctor from the hospital. I hadn't realised there were any educated Indian women, people you would call 'ladies,' had you? Aren't the brown babies darling things! I always want to hug them.

"How are you? I hope you are quite well. Don't be a hermit, will you? I am quite well, and so is Auntie.

"Yours with kind regards,

"MARGARET COULTER."

Dick put the letter away carefully.

\* \* \* \* \*

This chapter is headed "What Dick never saw"; of course there are tens of thousands of Indian women in Calcutta. If Dick had been free to watch certain big buildings at ten in the morning he would have seen girls arriving at school or college; if he had been very early astir in the Indian bazaars he would have seen a few older women shopping, and others returning from their bathing in the sacred waters of the Ganges, each bearing a little brass vessel of the precious water with her. But the average Indian girl goes neither to school nor to market; her life is her home.

And what Dick never saw was a vision of the millions of wives of India, whose wifedom is their occupation, their religion, their all; each wife finding her highest privilege and joy in the sacred task of preparing her husband's food; living not each in a home of her own,

but often many relations together in one clan, a colony where jealousies and petty strife are not unknown; spending day after day, year after year, within the same four walls that bound the world for her—bearing and tending and teaching the men who build India.

And what Dick never heard were the stories such little mothers tell their daughters by the firelight, the stories that hold their deepest faith and most sacred belief. He never heard the most loved story of all, of the lovely Princess Sita who followed Prince Rama through all the hardships of his exile; of how she was carried off by an evil demon; of how she suffered unjust and wicked suspicions and a cruel punishment at the hands of her beloved; and of how in the end the gods proved her spotless purity by bringing her unhurt through the fire, to be the ideal and example of every little Indian maiden ever afterwards.

And Dick never knew (or not till long afterwards) that the travel-stained women on the main road south out of Calcutta were pilgrims to the shrine of the Demon-Mother Kali, whose altars, a stone's throw from the tram terminus, ran daily with the blood of goats. . . . Nor did he know either that the line of white-robed girls were the pupils of a mission boarding school on their way to church, a jolly set who played badminton, and worked for Matric. in English!

*Note.*—This is a short chapter, but supplementary information is very easy to find. Much of interest about women is given in *India and Her Peoples*, *Village Folk of India* and *Girls of India*,<sup>1</sup> and in missionary magazines, etc.

For group work, if the material seems scanty, it would be a very good plan if one of the members were to tell the story of some great Indian woman, e.g. Pandita Ramabai (see *Heroines of Healing*<sup>2</sup>) or Chundra Lela (see *Heroines of India*<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> See p. 80 for prices, etc.

<sup>2</sup> These two books may be obtained (1s. each, post free 1s. 1d.) from all missionary societies or booksellers.

## CHAPTER VI

### A SPINNING-WHEEL—AND OTHER MATTERS

DICK had scarcely been a month in India (he had landed at the beginning of October) when the Christmas spirit raised its head in the shops. Notices saying "Post early for the home mails" enticed customers to a gay and glittering array of just the same sort of calendars, fancy goods, and "novelties of the season" as are spread out in shops at home. The problem of Christmas presents for his mother and young sister (not to mention his brother's two kiddies) caused Dick a good deal of thought.

"They can buy all these anywhere," he said to himself with dissatisfaction. "I must send something in the foreign line—they'll be expecting it."

He explained the difficulty to Mrs. Laurenz one day at breakfast. "Curios, that's what you want," she agreed; "only don't you go to those shops in Chowringhee; out to make a living off the American tourists, they are; and ruinous prices they do charge! No, you'd do much better in the Newmarket, or even in the bazaars. You get the things quickly, and I'll sew up the parcel for you."<sup>1</sup>

Having a free day that week, Dick decided to devote it to Christmas shopping. He had a few words of Hindustani by this time, and rather leaned to the idea of getting his presents in the real native bazaar. Unfortunately Mrs. Laurenz had not been very definite, and Calcutta was

<sup>1</sup> For the long journey between England and India parcels need to be sewn up in calico—brown paper is insufficient.

a big place. However, Dick did know that the Indian part of the city lay northwards. "I'll take a tram going that way," he thought, "and get off in a likely-looking spot, and walk. If I don't find what I want I can always go to the Newmarket afterwards."

He alighted at a cross-road, and turned westwards down a street where trams jolted and shops lined each pavement. There were cloth sellers, and sellers of musical instruments, and chemists, and presently furniture sellers. Here and there a tiny booth, like a packing-case on end, displayed a dozen bottles of vividly-coloured fizzy drinks, and packets of *pan*; you could also buy cigarettes at such stalls, little brown native ones or the cheapest Western kinds; and a smouldering string hung somewhere handy for a light. But nowhere was there the sort of shop Dick had in mind as suitable for Christmas shopping, with a choice of bizarre "foreign" knick-knacks spread out for his choice. Apparently it would have to be the Newmarket after all.

By this time Dick had walked a good way, and crossing over he saw the road was leading to a bridge over the river. At the same time he realised something special was about to happen. Crowds were beginning to gather on each pavement; already they were thick by the bridge.

"I may as well see the fun, whatever it is," he thought, edging into a corner where an overhanging verandah threw a little patch of shade, "though I do seem to be almost the only European about!" He felt a little awkward when two small boys stood still surveying him seriously as if he were a strange animal, but no one else took any notice of him; all eyes were towards the roadway. A general atmosphere of excited anticipation hovered over the growing crowds. What was it all about?



"Perhaps the Governor is coming," was one idea that occurred to Dick. At home there'd have been a stalwart man in blue one could ask, but he didn't feel equal to enquiring of one of the impassive Indian policemen. Obviously everyone else knew what they were expecting; for the first time Dick really felt the irritating smallness of a man who cannot speak the language of the land he is in. English had always seemed quite enough, with a Hindustani order or two for the servants. Now he ached to be able to enter into talk with one or other of the waiting lads near him.

A band at the corner struck up, first a familiar ragtime, then after a pause they began a stranger air, and a group of excited lads, apparently some special society or club, took it up with loud voices, till its minor cadences swelled into a high triumphant climax. Then the hum of conversation rolled back again. A cow pushed through the crowd, which made way before it; it was extraordinary to Dick how cows (being held sacred), wandered at will through the most busy parts of the city. There was a surge forward: the great man, whoever he might be, was surely coming now. A wave of shouting, of acclamation, began far away and travelled along towards Dick, till it surged all round him, and he, too, was seized by its emotion and wanted to shout with the rest.

Two motors drew near, the first one wreathed and garlanded with flowers. The shouts redoubled, rising in sudden frenzies; Dick tiptoed to see the man who was evoking such enthusiasm.

The flower-laden car drew level, and passed. *It was empty.* Only on the seat a specially thick garland was wound around some wooden object about a couple of feet long, a plain unpainted thing with a handle and a wheel.

A rumour was passing through the crowd from mouth to mouth, a rumour of explanation. Dick's longing to understand and share was almost unbearable. The shouts rose again, echoing down the road as the motor passed on its way. What did they mean?

If he could have understood, the crowd were shouting :  
 " Victory, victory to the Great Soul ! Victory to the spinning-wheel. Victory to Gandhi ! "

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning Dick came down early to breakfast in order to seize the newspaper. It explained to a certain extent, though it took a lot for granted. Apparently a Mr. or Mahatma Gandhi (Dick knew he'd heard the name before as that of an Indian political leader) had come to Calcutta yesterday. Wishing to avoid a public reception he had left the train at the station before the terminus ; and the crowd awaiting him, failing to find their leader in person, had bestowed their garlands of welcome on his spinning-wheel and taken it in triumph to the place where he was staying.

It all seemed extraordinary to Dick. Why on earth should garlandings and spinning-wheels be mixed up with Home Rule agitations ? (He had an idea Gandhi was head of a Home Rule party.) No, the paper was rather tantalizing. " Papers always assume you know more than you do," Dick thought, " at least they do out here." He scanned the headlines. " I don't know half of what it's driving at. Wish I'd got a *Daily Mail* ! "

The Home Rule question lingered at the back of his mind, and on the way to work he considered it again. " Why not ? People ought to be allowed to look after themselves." Memories of Empire Day celebrations at school and of Wembley rose in protest. " India the brightest jewel in the British crown "—surely he'd heard

the phrase somewhere. That was all right, of course ; but there was Canada—that was part of the Empire, and didn't it have a sort of Home Rule ? It was all rather difficult. He'd never been very great on politics.

But the memory of those shouts, the mystery of the politician with the spinning-wheel, would not leave him. That night he went round to the Y.M.C.A.—he'd found he could get good billiards there—and went first to the library.

" I want a book about Indian politics," he said to the clerk, secretly rather nervous, " a small, plain sort of a book."

The clerk looked doubtful, as if the existence of such a book was uncertain. A tall Englishman whom Dick had often seen about the place was standing at a bookshelf near by, and turned round at this moment.

" Good evening ! " he said in a friendly way. " Big subject you're at ! Done much at it ? "

" Nothing at all ! " Dick confessed, feeling a fool. Then, because the man, without any outward display or fuss, seemed unusually interested, Dick ventured to explain the situation : yesterday's happenings, and the inadequacy of to-day's paper.

His new acquaintance listened most attentively. " So you really want to understand ? " he said. " That's what I don't mind telling you so many men don't care twopence about. Look here, I know a chap who'd tell you all you want to know. Shall I introduce you ? "

Dick hesitated. " Won't he think me an awful duffer ? "

" Not at all ! He'll receive you with open arms and yarn to you by the hour. Come along." He led the way out of the library, and having exchanged a word or two in Hindustani with the hall porter, said : " He's in

the writing-room—I thought so,” and ushered Dick into a smaller room, nearly knocking over a slight Indian who was leaving the room at the moment they tried to enter it.

“Chatterji! The very man. Are you going?”

Mr. Chatterji stopped, laughing. “You nearly knocked a fellow down! No, I’m only just wandering out—nothing special.”

“May I introduce Mr. ——”

“Thompson, Richard Thompson,” Dick supplied.

“Mr. Thompson—Mr. Chatterji. Mr. Thompson wants to know something about politics, Chatterji, so I decided to turn him on to you. Deal gently with him!” and he went off with a cheery nod leaving the two together.

“You were going out,” said Dick. “Don’t let me stop you.”

Mr. Chatterji smiled again, a quick, pleasant smile that lit up his bronze face. He spoke almost perfect English, but was a little shy, like Dick.

It was hot here; I was going out,” he said. “Do you care to come too?”

Five minutes later the two were drawing deep breaths of the cool night air, the Maidan a shimmery moonlit space all around them. Conversation languished; then Dick came with a jerk to the centre of the matter.

“It was Gandhi,” he said. And at that the gates were opened.

“He is our hero, our Great One; Mahatma, we call him—that means Great Soul. He is simple and true and very religious, and he has always worked for his fellow-men. All India loves him; poor village men and rich merchants all listen for his slightest word. You can hardly understand . . .” He broke off.

“What does he want?” Dick ventured.

“Oh, he wants India to find her own soul, to be free

and great in her own way. He thinks Britain hinders India from being her truest self."

"I see—he's a sort of rebel."

"Yes, a rebel. But he will never fight or let his people fight; he says force is always evil. He calls us to let Britain and British things alone. But you know all this."

"No—go on!"

"Well, he says if we boycott British courts and schools and never buy things made in England, especially cloth, then in the end Britain will just *have* to go, leave India. And then we develop our own way, become great, build beautiful buildings of national life on the foundations our fathers laid."

"Where does the spinning-wheel come in?"

"Oh, that! Mahatma says if we all spun cotton as in the old days and wove our own cloth, this would be a much better way than buying English cotton—better for our souls. He asks everyone, *everyone*, to spin half-hour each day. It is symbol to him of our country fitting itself for freedom, I think—each man working with his hands."

There was silence a little while. Far ahead the marble dome of the Victoria Memorial lay like a sleeping flower under the moon. The lights of the busy main road seemed far away. Richard Thompson was soaking in what Dherin Chatterji had said, finding in it much of strangeness and yet something that fed the fires of hero-worship. In the end he asked abruptly:

"What do *you* think?"

"I? I am a son of my motherland, I think of India all day, I long for her freedom." He turned to Dick almost fiercely. "And *you* taught us that longing," he said, "you gave us English education and gave us English books to read, all singing the glory of freedom. . . . But there are so many, many barriers in the way. . . Did

you have sports at your school? We did—I once went in for Obstacle Race—one difficulty, and then another, and then another.” Dick almost laughed at the memories called up, but Dherin was not laughing. “Like that,” he said sadly. “One difficulty, and another, and another.”

“Tell me some.”

“It would take too long; already I’ve talked much. Caste, for instance.”

“What does that mean?”

“Oh, a Hindu is born into one of hundreds of little subdivisions of society, and he will not eat with a man of other caste, or marry. It cuts us up. And the lowest of all, they are untouchable, they defile a man of high caste by their presence even. There are thousands of thousands of them. And some of us are Hindu and some are Mohammedan—quite different religion, different way of life, different thoughts, different everything. And in India we speak three hundred different languages. I am Bengali, my friend is Marathi, another Telugu, another Tamil. And most of us are so poor—how few can read or write! Oh, how can we be one, be free?”

They walked a few minutes in silence. Dick had one more question.

“And what’s England doing about it?”

“She says: ‘Be patient. One day you will be fit and ready, but now you are only children.’ She says: ‘You may look after *these* parts of the Government, and I will look after *those*.’ That is called Dyarchy. Here in Bengal the leaders refuse to try this. They say: ‘We must have *all*—this is trifling.’ I do not know.”

They were reaching the line of lights again, the noise of carts and taxi horns. Chatterji faced Dick squarely.

A SPINNING-WHEEL—AND OTHER MATTERS 57

“ I do not know,” he repeated. “ But you, you really *care*? Do you believe that one day it will be? ”

And Dick, feeling up against forces far bigger than he could understand, gripped the other's hand.

“ Good-night,” he said. “ Thanks awfully. And yes, I *do* care. And—I believe.”

*Note.*—Mr. Gandhi's influence in political life is much less than it was, but he still retains his place in the religious and moral life of India, and in the affections of the people.

## CHAPTER VII

### A RAILWAY JOURNEY

"WHERE are you going for Christmas?"

"I don't know yet," Dick answered.

"As it comes on a Monday this year we get quite a decent holiday," said Hale. (This was after dinner one evening in November.) "One can get away on the Saturday evening; and the shop won't open till Thursday. Gay times in Calcutta then, if you want to stay."

But Dick was not at all sure he did want to stay, though where he could go he had no idea. Strangely enough, that very night, while turning over the contents of his letter-case in search of a missing stamp book, he found something that acted as a suggestion. It was a rather soiled visiting-card, and at first he stared at it blankly.

THE REV. T. L. FELLOWES

*Mission House,  
Asaripur, Bengal.*

Fellowes—Fellowes . . . *Mission House* . . . a sudden light dawned.

"Why, the man who won the deck tennis, and gave me his card at the last minute! I've never thought of it from that moment till this. Fancy him a missionary! Anyway, he's a decent chap, and didn't he suggest I might run down some time to his place?" This was an idea which Dick turned over in his mind for a few days, and then he wrote to Mr. Fellowes asking if he might



come down to Asaripur for Christmas. By return he received a cheery postcard: "Do come, if you don't mind a swarm of kiddies"—and a charmingly friendly note from Mrs. Fellowes, of whose very existence he had been unaware!

The Christmas rush at the shop was very tiring, and by the last day or two Dick was almost inclined to back out of the arrangement. However, he enquired about trains and bought a ticket (cheap Christmas excursion rates); one train left at nine-five in the evening, another at ten in the morning, and Dick consulted Hale as to the chances of catching the first.

"You'd do it if you had everything packed and ready beforehand," Hale said. He also added advice as to what "everything" included; there must be a hold-all with rug and pillow for the night in the train and sheets and other linen for his visit, as well as the suit-case of clothes Dick had planned to take as his sole luggage. "And reserve your berth," Hale advised, "there'll be crowds travelling."

So at half-past eight on Saturday evening Dick arrived at the big railway terminus, and half a dozen coolies sprang forward to his taxi before it had really stopped, swooping upon his luggage. With what seemed the fiercest language all but two were driven away, and the luggage hoisted on to the heads of the remaining couple, who seemed to carry it perfectly balanced with the utmost ease. The station was a fine large place, and the noise of train whistles, escaping steam, and the gongs announcing the departure of trains, made a din "just like home."

But the people! A few Europeans or wealthy Indians passed swiftly across the crowded stage, but the whole open space in front of the barriers was one mass of would-be travellers sitting or lying on the floor, waiting. Here

a family group squatted around tin boxes of luggage and the family cooking-pots ; there a couple of tired pilgrims lay on the hard ground fast asleep ; yonder half a dozen men in queer robes gambled by a pillar. The Indian who cannot read time-tables or railway notices is content to go to the station and wait there till there is a train to the place he wants to go to, and at almost any station, at any hour of the day or night, you may see such travellers sleeping, resting, or merely waiting.

Dick and his two coolies steered a way across the crowded station and passed the barrier. The train was in, its long bare third-class compartments already crammed with Indians, and late-comers were hoisting luggage through the windows and following themselves. "Inter"<sup>1</sup> class came next, with slightly more comfortable seats and less of a crowd, at twice the price. Dick passed two or three "firsts," and finally came to a second-class compartment with his name on a ticket on the door. The coolies were dismissed—clamouring, of course, for more baksheesh!—and Dick inspected his quarters. Three wide seats ran parallel with the windows of a large square carriage, and above at the sides were two cushioned "shelves" that could be let down for extra berths ; there were electric lights, fans, and a bathroom. Very comfortable, Dick thought.

Three other men and their belongings—"everyone has an awful lot of luggage in India!" thought Dick—entered the compartment before the train started. Seeing one of them begin to make preparations for the night Dick followed suit, and spread his rug and sheet and pillow on the lower berth he had appropriated. He was dead tired, but although they turned out the light in the carriage he could not sleep at first, for the train rumbled

<sup>1</sup> Intermediate.

and shook, the seat was very hard, and every time he was dozing off they seemed to stop at some noisy lighted station. It was cold, too; Dick got up and threw his overcoat over the rug as a second wrap. At last, however, he did drop off to sleep.

He awoke with a slight start. The light was on, and the train was at a standstill; there were no signs of a station outside. One of the men was still snoring loudly, another was sitting up looking ruffled and annoyed, and the third was leaning out of the window at the doorway.

"What's up?" said Dick. Nobody seemed to know. He pushed up the window beside him and put out his head. Several lanterns were moving about in the dark, and other heads leaning out of other windows threw dark silhouettes against the light streaming on to the side of the track.

"Signal against us," he suggested, and lit a cigarette. His watch said half-past two. A quarter of an hour passed.

"Something's happened," said the man who was up first, pulling on his boots. "I'm off to see." He opened the door, and stepped down into the darkness. In a few minutes he returned.

"I should jolly well think something *has* happened. There's a goods train off the rails three hundred yards ahead of us!"

"Phew-w-w!" one of the other men whistled. "Is there much damage done?"

"Nothing very serious; a couple of lightly-loaded trucks jumped the points and piled themselves up right across our track. It will be an awful business getting the mess cleared up, though."

"What a beastly nuisance! How long do you think we shall be held up?"

“Guard says there’s no knowing. They’ll have to bring down a train to the other side of the wreckage and we shall have to tranship, I expect.”

“Well, meanwhile, I propose slumber: at any rate, we shan’t be jolted out of our skins. D’you mind shutting the window?” he said to Dick. “It’s beastly cold.”<sup>1</sup>

His suggestion seemed the best advice under the circumstances, and Dick shut the window and then his eyes. But sleep refused to return. After all, this was an Adventure!

Dawn broke—Christmas Eve, the strangest Dick had ever dreamed of! Mrs. Laurenz had provided him with a thermos of coffee and some biscuits, and the other men producing various eatables, they shared out and had a queer kind of *chota hazri* together. Then they strapped up their bedding and performed some sort of a toilette. One of the men suggested an exploring party, and eventually he and Dick clambered down into a morning of crisp freshness and sunshine.

“Heavenly!” said the young man, sniffing in a great breath of the cool air. “There can’t be a better climate in the world than North India in December. I don’t mention May,<sup>2</sup> or September.<sup>3</sup> Come along, let’s inspect the damage.”

A road, little better than a field track, ran parallel to the railway, and a couple of primitive carts, roofed with matting and drawn by stolid buffaloes, were plodding slowly along. “I travelled three days’ journey in one of those once,” said Dick’s companion, whose name was Watkin. “Average speed, two m.p.h. There are heaps

<sup>1</sup> It is not always broiling hot in North India; mid-winter nights are quite chilly, and by contrast with the heat feel really cold.

<sup>2</sup> The hottest month.

<sup>3</sup> Moist heat at the end of the rainy season.

of places still where it's the only way, though Ford buses or lorries are coming into fashion. Ever been on an elephant?" He chattered on. Dick listened, and looked first at the bullock cart and then at the train. Who had introduced trains into this land of bullock carts and riding elephants?

At this point they arrived at the scene of the disaster. Someone had evidently been working while they slept.

Coolies were busy, and a very much toil-stained Englishman in shorts called cheery directions in fluent Hindustani. He turned and wiped his face as they came up. "Good morning," he said, "merry Christmas. S'cuse me a minute." He gave some swift orders and a foreman started forward, clearing the line of the coolies as he went. Another man picked up the small instrument with which he had tapped the telegraph wire beside the track. "O.K." the Englishman directed briefly.

He turned back to the two men. "You from the up-train? I've got a relief coming down now; you'll be transhipped in about an hour and a half. We've cleared the down track and the mail will be along now in ten minutes." He shivered. Dick noticed he was looking wretchedly ill. "You don't feel your best and brightest at 6.30 a.m. when you left your little bed at half-past three and brought your malaria along with you," he apologized. "Coming!" and he strode off in answer to a call.

Dick's question was answered. Who had brought trains to this land of bullock cart, elephant, and palanquin? They were Britain's gift to India, given by the hands of men like the lad (he was little more) in khaki shorts. Men who worked through fever and sunstroke, heat and sweat, who took hardships in their stride and were at the end, as at the beginning, true Englishmen.

Roads, railways, canals, telegraphs, law-courts, schools, hospitals—all Britain's gift to India! Had Dherin Chatterji remembered these?

"An hour and a half," said Watkin. "What about it? Shall we go on a bit?"

They left the railway line and struck out across fields of short stubble set in hard baked clay. "What's the crop?" Dick asked.

"Rice, sure to be," answered Watkin in some surprise. "Never seen it growing? The greenest green you can imagine when it's young, and yellow when they cut it. Bengal's nearly all rice. I live out in East Bengal; the whole land goes under water every rainy season. They sow the rice in the mud, you know, when the rains begin, and it grows up through the water. You see the native boats apparently sailing across green fields, the said fields growing in water. You go everywhere by boat out there; I'm on a steamer company."

They were nearing a clump of trees; a curl or two of blue smoke and a thatched roof proclaimed a village. Watkin was for turning back.

"No, let's go on," Dick suggested, "I've never seen a village out here."

"Oh, all right," Watkin agreed. "Not that there's much to see."

So, with a picture at the back of his mind of the rose-framed cottages of a Sussex village he had once visited for a week-end, Dick came to his first Indian village.

Most of the houses were low mud huts, with thatched roofs, built with one door and often no window. Outside some a raised mud platform under the jutting eaves made a kind of verandah that afforded shelter from the hot Indian sun. Here and there apparently a house was built on the courtyard principle; an open gate showed

a glimpse of further buildings beyond. A swarm of naked small children who were laughing and playing merrily stopped their game and stared at the amazing spectacle of two white men. A couple of women carrying earthenware water-pots pulled their tattered *saris* over their faces and turned away. As far as Dick could see from glancing in at the doors, there was no furniture; or at most a string bedstead and a box, with two or three pots and jars. Cows shared the quarters with their owners, and a few hens and goats wandered in and out.

Beyond they came to the "tank," a square pond, its water greenish and in places overgrown with weed. A flight of stone steps led down to it at one end, and a man was beating clothes on a stone and rinsing them in the tank, while two women filled their water-pots and carried them off.

"They don't—drink it?" Dick asked in horror.

"Of course they do—wash in it, bathe in it, and drink it." Dick turned back with a shudder.

The tiny village seemed so *poor*, poorer than he had known men could be. The people looked so thin, so unkempt, although happy in a way. It was more of a shock to Dick than Watkin guessed. Calcutta with its fine streets, its shops, its cinemas—and this! Which was the real India? Which was the real, and which was the exceptional? . . .

They passed a pointed stone at the foot of a tree, the stone decked with wreaths of marigolds. "God," said Watkin laconically. And so they crossed the stubble fields again, towards the train. After some little silence Dick ventured his question. "I suppose after all," he said, "the majority of people live in towns?"

"My dear man, no!" said Watkin. "Nine-tenths

of them live in villages. You're in Calcutta, aren't you? Calcutta, Madras, Bombay—they're almost England. India is—this."

Dick knew that this was too general a statement to be altogether true. But somehow his heart sank.



## CHAPTER VIII

### CHRISTMAS

It was half-past eleven that morning, only six hours late, after all, when Dick clambered down on to the platform at Asaripur and was hailed cheerily by a Bengali in Scoutmaster's kit.

"Mr. Thompson? I'm Guha, from the mission. I run the Industrial School. Mr. Fellowes is awfully sorry he couldn't get along to meet you, and he sent me and the Tin Lizzie instead. This your luggage? Any more? All right, come along."

As they rattled along through the bazaar of a small town, Dick enquired anxiously how long Mr. Guha had had to wait. "Oh, I'd only just arrived," he explained. "When Mr. Fellowes came down to meet the morning train he heard what had happened, and got the station-master to promise to send up word when the relief train was due." They soon came out on to a dustier country road, and Tin Lizzie groaned and bumped terribly, rather ominously, Dick thought.

"Vile roads," said Mr. Guha cheerfully. "But we can do twice the work now we have the bus." They turned in at a tall gateway, into a compound<sup>1</sup> where three or four buildings showed vaguely behind the trees, and grass—dried up, but still grass—stretched between.

"Girls' School—Weaving Shed—Carpenters' Shop—Boys' Hostel," indicated Mr. Guha, and finally drew up

<sup>1</sup> The enclosed land (garden or "grounds") round a building or group of buildings is known as the compound.

in front of a low bungalow. Three small boys immediately charged down the steps, the last one (being tubby and only having two years to his credit) achieving the descent by a rapid process of sitting on each step in turn. Two of the three wore jerseys and blue knickers; the third was dressed as a self-respecting small Bengali should be, in shirt and *dhoti* (draped loin cloth.) Mr. Guha was unroping the luggage from the back of the car, so Dick faced the three alone.

The brown-faced five-year-old Bengali said something in his own tongue, to which Six-years replied in the same language with some scorn, and then turned to Dick. "He says you weren't killed, and how funny! Of course you weren't killed; Daddy said it was just an adventure. *Was it an adventure?*"

"Rather!" said Dick. He would have enlarged on this to his eager audience if Two-years, who had remained seated on the lowest step staring solemnly at the newcomer, had not suddenly broken into a seraphic smile and held out his arms, saying sweetly, "Melly Chlismas!" So when a minute later Mrs. Fellowes appeared on the scene, it was to find Mr. Guha, Six-years, Five-years, Dick, and Two-years (on Dick's shoulder) coming along the verandah wishing each other "A Merry Christmas! A Merry Christmas! A Merry Christmas!"

From that minute Dick knew that he was at home. And when Mr. Fellowes had arrived by motor-cycle from the village where he had been preaching, and they all sat down to tiffin together, the jolly "family feeling" was almost too much for Dick.

"Off to bed, my chicks," said Mrs. Fellowes when they rose from the table. "Yes, and Uncle Dick, too. People who have adventures at three a.m. must be tired. Tukra, you'd better run back to school now." She showed Dick

his room, and left him to sleep as long as ever he felt inclined. Tukra pattered off, and soon the chatter of the children was quieted, and a silence and peace settled down over the place. "Sunday in the country" was Dick's last dreamy thought as he closed his eyes. And he slept till four—and even so was quite ready to go to bed as soon as ever he had finished helping Mrs. Fellowes to fill small khaki stockings with sweets and little toys that evening.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was quite dark. Suddenly a moving patch of light fell under the curtain of the verandah door and across the floor of Dick's room. He stirred in his sleep. A tiny sound of bare feet scuffling, and the light steadied into a yellow bar, as if the lantern had been put down; a moment's silence—then :

" Hark ! the herald angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King ! "

Dick woke to find the dark ringing with triumphant music ; sometimes it was a strange eastern air, sometimes a hymn tune to which dear familiar words sung themselves, and presently the louder voices were stilled and from shrill baby throats the old children's carol came floating :

" Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head."

What did it matter that the words were Bengali ? " It makes it all the lovelier," thought Dick, as the lantern light wavered away and the singing grew fainter in the distance. And a snatch of a hymn they used to sing at Sunday School in Maxington came into his head :

" Far round the world Thy children sing their song."

Why, it was actually true, TRUE ! He had never thought of missions meaning that—the darkness quivering with little children's voices, in India and China, and Africa, welcoming the Baby Christ to earth.

So Christmas Day dawned, and its sunny hours, with their burden of so much that was strange and so much that was old and dear, brought Dick nearer to complete happiness than he had been for very many months. There was the rush of the excited children to display the treasures of their stockings, and to bring him their present—a brass ash-tray—and a small framed picture "From Mummy and Daddy." Dick was very touched. There was the walk to church in the radiant morning. And there was the service.

The church, a whitewashed building, had been wreathed from end to end with palm branches and marigolds. It was packed to the doors and beyond, so that the preacher, a tall Indian, looked down over a sea of eager brown faces, men on his left and women on his right. In front were the boarding school children, boys and girls, flanked by the compact ranks of Boy Scouts and Girl Guides. Many a mother had brought her baby ; every one was wearing his or her best clothes, and joy shone on every face. They stood to sing, and the shout of joy rang again and again ; they knelt to pray, and the "Amen" was a deep rolling note that thrilled. They were worshipping in their own tongue, and Dick, who understood not a single word, was caught in the atmosphere of praise.

Mrs. Fellowes was by him, and at a pause followed by a slight stir among the congregation she whispered "Thank-offerings." At a word from the leader nearly a quarter of the congregation seemed to be rising, here a schoolgirl, there a Boy Scout, yonder a mother carrying her baby, and again an old bent man ; and as each came forward

Dick saw that they were bringing offerings. They waited quietly in front ; the minister went to each in turn ; a whispered word, and then he proclaimed aloud :

“ Amila gives thanks to the Lord Jesus that she has passed her examination.”

“ John gives thanks that his foot has healed.”

“ Konock’s mother gives thanks for her new daughter.”

“ Farmer Ganarajan gives thanks for his good crops.”

And from each he took the thank-offering—a few coins, a garland of flowers, a great pumpkin, two eggs, a fowl, a pot of rice—and laid them before the altar. When all were finished and the minister said, “ Let us all praise God,” to the tune of a triumphant *Te Deum* the whole congregation gave their gifts.

And Dick thought, “ I didn’t know missions were like this,” and something like shame seized him.

The sermon followed. Tukra, the five-year-old Bengali who was Jackanapes Fellowes’ boon companion, was sitting with them and had sung most lustily. But now the little dark head drooped, and a little brown hand slipped into Dick’s and lay there limply. Soon he was fast asleep. Dick feared he was rather cramped, and lifted him gently on to his own knee ; and Tukra with one sigh nestled his head into Dick’s curved arm and slept on. Here and there in the congregation a baby cried, or a child slipped from its mother and ran to the door. But to Dick, holding the soft warm body of Tukra, these were not interruptions of worship ; wouldn’t the Baby Lord understand, he thought ? And again : “ I didn’t know missions were like this—a tiny brown chap nestling into you, as if you were his big brother.”

The service ended, he watched with critical admiration as the Scouts formed up and marched off. “ They’re boys in Mr. Guha’s Industrial School,” Mrs. Fellowes explained ;

"village lads learning to plane and hammer, or weave or carve, or plough, while they learn to read and write and to be men. They have to hurry, for they're off to a distant village to run the Christmas festivities there."

In the afternoon Dick found himself in the last place on earth in which he would have pictured himself: in the inside of a Girls' Boarding School! "Would it be too much to ask you if you'd come and help rig up their Christmas tree?" Mrs. Fellowes had asked. "A man is *such* a help on these occasions." And so Dick had gone. The Christmas tree was a great bough of acacia, its feathery foliage almost prettier, he thought, than the conventional fir; but the "flowers" were real Christmas candles, and the "fruit" scores of delightful dolls and bags and toys sent by children in England. And what a merry party it was! First, carols, sung in the blue twilight while Dick and Mrs. Fellowes lit the candles on the magic tree. Then games—"Oranges and Lemons" and "Hunt the slipper"—as well as Indian ones that were new to Dick, but looked very jolly. And then the presents given and received; till the candles burnt down to the sockets and the tree was bare. And even then all was not over, for the girls insisted that they could not eat their Christmas feast unless their elders tasted it first. So Dick sat down cross-legged with the others on the floor before a brass plate, and ate strange but delicious foods with the fingers of his right hand—rice and savoury hot curries, and flat "pancakes," and finally balls of white sweetstuff served with bowls of curds.

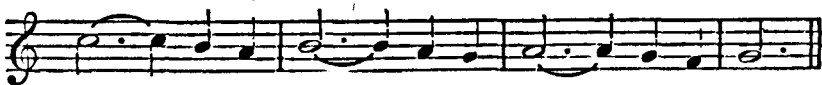
After that he had to manage another feast, this time the English Christmas dinner at Mrs. Fellowes' bungalow, followed by more games, and charades, and uproarious mirth. And last of all the noise died down and Mr. Fellowes read once more the story of the first Christmas,

and they all thanked God for the joys of the day that was ending, as it had begun, to His praise.

At dusk the next evening Dick stood with Mr. Guha at a street corner in Asaripur. The sunset rose and gold shimmered in the very dust clouds stirred by the home-coming bullocks, and from every courtyard went up the acrid blue smoke of the evening fires. Beside them on the platform outside a small and shabby temple an old man played with a tiny roguish girl. He was the priest of Shiva, the Destroyer, and she his grand-daughter. Over the huddled houses and dirty street the sunset lay like a magic spell. Then from afar came the sound of singing, with an underlying emphasis of drums that stirred one's pulses. And up the narrow street they came, the men and lads who had heard Christ call and were trying to follow Him in Asaripur. Once they had gathered with drum and cymbal to yell the songs of the old gods; now they were singing the praises of Jesus through the same street. The leaders sang of His love, the crowd took up the stave and repeated it again and again; the leaders told a new triumph and they all re-echoed the words. The foremost carried torches, and the fitful light fell on the faces, almost transfigured with rapture, of men who leapt for very joy as they sang. And as the band came nearer the hymn gave place to an outburst of the most exultant faith and triumph:

"Joi! Jesu Joi! Jesu Joi! Jesu Joi!"

"Victory! Victory to Jesus, to Jesus, to Jesus!"



Joi..... Je - su, Joi..... Je - su, Joi..... Je - su, Joi

And again, and again, and again.

The little maid stood up beside the temple gateway and clapped her hands ; and the old man smiled at her, and let her beat the time on his head as on a drum while she, too, sang :

“ Victory! Victory to Jesus, to Jesus, to Jesus ! ”

In the midst of the singing crowd as it swept by, Dick caught sight of Mr. Fellowes, his face shining and a great fire of love in his eyes.

“ Victory! Victory to Jesus, to Jesus, to Jesus ! ”  
Something caught in Dick’s throat. Once more he thought, “ I didn’t know missions were like this.”

The dusk deepened into night, and Guha and Dick walked homewards in silence. Dick stole a glance at his companion, who to-day was wearing Bengali dress and loomed beside him white in the soft dark. He wondered about his home ; perhaps he was the father of another lovable five-year-old like Tukra ! Impulsively he turned to him and asked :

“ Mr. Guha, are you married ? ” Silence. Then, “ Yes,” he answered slowly. “ But my wife is dead.”

“ Oh, I’m awfully sorry,” said Dick in distress. Mr. Guha put a hand on his shoulder.

“ All right. I don’t mind telling. We were married when I was Hindu, and of course we lived in my father’s house, Hindu way. And we had a little son. Then . . . Oh, I can’t tell all the story, but I heard Jesus Christ’s voice and I had to become Christian. And my father was very hurt, and very angry. He beat me, he thought it was his duty. But I could not change. And at last he turned me out. There had been poison in my food, and I was dying. Then long weeks in hospital ; I did not die. And when I came back to find my wife and son,



they were not there. They had been sent back to her own village. I went there. It was too late. Cholera. Too late."

The shout still rang in Dick's head, and he was humming the stave of triumph, unconscious that he did so. It was Guha who took it to crown his tale; after a moment's silence:

"Victory to Jesus!" he said.

## AFTERWORD

The first boy who read this book wrote :

“ I want a bit more about the Indian. I’ve only met the Indian out shopping, the Indian at a national meeting, and at a Christian one, and the enthusiast who instructs Dick. How about the millions who lead quite ordinary lives and would stand on the edge of the crowd at a service and laugh or not care? I would like to hear more about the Indian.”

If *you* feel like that, try “ Village Folk of India,” by R. H. Boyd, or “ India and Her Peoples,” by F. D. Walker, or some of the other books mentioned on p. 80.

L. E. C.

*Some Questions  
to Think Over*

Here are some questions that you can think over yourself or discuss with your friends. You will probably not want to discuss all the questions, but will choose those which appeal to you most.

## CHAPTER I

1. What's your idea of India? Have you ever known anyone who's been to India? If so, what did they think of it?
2. How far should you think it is to India? (Guess first, then look up your map and see how far out you are!) How long does a letter take to get to Calcutta? How much is the postage?  
How long does a telegram take? What is the cost?  
What route did Dick go? (Follow it on the atlas.) How long did he take? What was his fare, roughly?
3. "Heard this Home Rule talk?" asked one of Dick's friends. Have you? What else have you noticed about India in the papers? (Collect for next time.)
4. Do you agree with what Dick felt about the mosque? What do you feel about your own church?

## CHAPTER II

1. Compare as far as you can from hints given in this chapter the life Dick lived in the Calcutta boarding house with the sort of life he probably lived at home.  
Dick paid 150 rupees a month at the boarding house. How does that compare with the prices of lodgings at home?
2. What films did you see last time you went to the pictures? Do you think they would be (a) interesting; (b) helpful to an Indian audience? Why?
3. Who is the Viceroy of India? What does the title mean? Who chooses him?

## CHAPTER III

1. What do you spend your wages on? What would an Indian workman spend his on? How do you think the wages of a mill hand in Lancashire would compare with those of a mill hand in Bombay? What effect would this have on the price of cloth?
2. Have you ever known any Asiatic men or women to speak to? What were they like? Should you care to meet any?
3. Why didn't Dick laugh with his pal over the bad English of the younger Bengali boy?
4. Write the letter Dick sent to Robinson.

## CHAPTER IV

1. How far are holidays in England associated with the Church (a) officially (b) in the ordinary man's mind?  
If a Hindu asked you the meaning of Easter Monday or Christmas, how should you explain?

2. The Hindus do not often meet together for united worship; Christian Churches make such meetings central. Why do people go to church rather than worshipping at home?

#### CHAPTER V

1. What can you see to admire in the life and ideals of an Indian woman?
2. What could missionaries do for Indian women? If *you* were a missionary, what should you want to do first? What difficulties do you think you might be up against?
3. Write Dick's answer to Margaret Coulter's letter.

#### CHAPTER VI

1. What newspaper do you read? Why do you read it? Does your newspaper help you to be a Christian?
2. What are the barriers to freedom in India? Which do you think is the chief?
3. Have there ever been such barriers in Britain? Have they been overcome? How?

#### CHAPTER VII

1. Which of Britain's gifts to India do you think even a keen Indian nationalist would accept? Are all these *unmixed* blessings?
2. Bengalis would tell you they have six seasons:
  - Grisha—the hot season (April, May, June).
  - Barsha—the rains (June, July, August).
  - Sharat—the autumn (August, September, October).
  - Hemanta—the dewy season (October, November, December).
  - Shit—the cold season (December, January, February).
  - Boshunta—the spring (February, March, April).
 Discuss which months would be (a) best for sowing rice; (b) best for reaping rice; (c) hottest; (d) coldest; (e) wettest. If you were an Englishman in Calcutta when would you most want a holiday?
3. Why do you think Dick felt depressed when he was told "the real India" was like the village?

#### CHAPTER VIII

1. "What is India, after all?" Dick had asked on the boat. He thought over the same question as he sat in the train on the way back to Calcutta, and in the end this is the answer he gave himself: "India's just—people!" What did he mean?
2. Find out from a missionary magazine or a report of your missionary society the answers to the following questions:
  - (a) What is my Church doing in India? How many missionaries—where—what different kinds of work?
  - (b) What are Indians doing to preach Jesus to India?
3. What can we do (a) to learn more about India; (b) to help other people to learn about India; (c) to help India?

## OTHER BOOKS ON INDIA

If you would like to hear more about the Indian you will be interested in the following—

**Village Folk of India.** By R. H. BOYD. 1s. 6d. net; post free 1s. 8d.

Dick discovered that nine-tenths of the people of India live in villages. Here is a very interesting description of village men and women in Western India by someone who lived and worked among them for many years.

**India and Her Peoples.** By F. DEAVILLE WALKER. 2s. net; post free 2s. 2½d.

This book carries you through the cities, through the villages, into the homes, into the temples of India. It has some wonderful photographs taken by the author himself.

**Girls of India.** By M. H. DEBENHAM. 1s. net; post free 1s. 1d.

An interesting account of the life of women in India through girlhood, wifehood and motherhood. The book includes several true stories of Indian girls.

**More Yarns on India.** By SHORAN S. SINGHA and A. P. SHEPHERD. 1s. net; post free 1s. 1d.

These thrilling stories have been written by Mr. Singha, whose home is in India. They are all true, and most of the people in them are alive to-day.

## FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

If you are a Sunday School teacher you will find these books helpful—

**Talks on Friends in India.** For boys and girls aged 9-13.

**Story Lessons on India.** For boys and girls aged 8-11.

Each book 1s. net; post free 1s. 1d.

## GIFT BOOKS

Boys and girls will be delighted with the following—

**The Three Camels.** 1s. 6d. net; post free 1s. 7½d.

For the little ones of 3-5 years. A coloured picture at every opening.

**The Picture Game of Prema.** 1s. net; post free 1s. 1½d.

A picture game for the very little ones. Prema is a fascinating brown baby of India.

**The Book of an Indian Baby.** 1s. net; post free 1s. 1d.

More stories and pictures about Prema for rather older children.

**Children of India Painting Book.** 1s. 6d. net; post free 1s. 7½d.

Pictures of boys and girls of India at work and at play.

**Children of India Postcards.** 6d. per packet; post free 6½d.

Six charming greeting cards similar to those in the Painting Book above.