



GLIMPSES OF TRAVANCORE.

BY

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The Cape.

TO
ALL WHO LOVE
THE CANOE
AND
THE COCONUT TREE.

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INTRODUCTION.

Travancore occupies a considerable position among the feudatory states of the Indian Empire. Her area is not much, being only 7,593 square miles. There are indeed seventeen states larger in geographical extent than Travancore. But consider her revenue which is about two crores. Only three states can boast of anything bigger. Moreover, Travancore is one of the most densely peopled regions of the world. Her population is about 41 lakhs. Take population alone into account and Travancore is third in rank among the self-ruled states of India. The present average density is about 452 persons per square mile. If you exclude the mountains, forests and lakes, the density would rise to a little more than 686 persons. In some parts of the state it exceeds 1,500 persons per square mile.

But by no means is Travancore over-populated. The extreme fertility of the soil can be depended upon to stave off that contingency for a long time at any rate. The general high level of prosperity which obtains in the state and which has few parallels in India shows that the land can successfully contend with the rapidly-increasing demands upon its productivity. Therefore the ruler of the state who is ultimately responsible for its progress can well afford to defy the

alarmists who not infrequently smudge the future with gloomy forebodings.

I should like to mention another feature of Travancore before entering on the discussion of matters appertaining to the present time. None who knew Travancore ever omitted to acclaim its beauty. Here hills and lakes have leagued together to make a truly picturesque spot upon the globe. The pretty little realm is literally a rough-hewn block of beauty. Some have called it "a fairy-land", others 'the finest country in the world', and if such phrases seem the very height of hyperbole, it can only be pointed out that truth wears strange garbs and often appears to be the reverse of itself. A land so rich in scenery and so diversely beautiful is seldom seen.

Let me at the outset describe briefly the present administrative machinery of the state. If the government is even now conducted in the name and under the immediate control of the sovereign, there is a progressive willingness on the sovereign's part to concede that the people's voice is the voice of God. I say 'progressive willingness' advisedly, because, the state has yet to achieve the real, Simon-pure sort of parliamentary rule. The sovereign is still the ultimate authority. The Diwan is the one and only minister of the sovereign. As a rule no order in any official matter proceeds directly from the latter. The sovereign speaks, except in exceptional cases, only through the Diwan. As there is no executive council the Diwan is really the hinge on

which the administration turns. Despite recent achievements in the decentralization of the Diwan's authority and the devolution of it among the heads of the several departments such as Agriculture, Excise, Education etc. the volume of work done in the Huzur Office is prodigious. If an outsider wants to know how Travancore is governed he can hardly do better than study the Huzur, which makes the resultant administration spick and span. The Diwan's authority is, in a word, great, but great too is his responsibility. He has often many irons in the fire. He has nearly always to work double tides. The Diwanship of Travancore is really no bed of roses.

The law-courts, however, stand altogether outside the cordon of executive authority. The Durbar may be sued by any one. The party has but to give three months' notice of his intention to do so. The High Court of Travancore is the highest tribunal in the land, and no appeal lies from its decisions to any judicial authority in the world. In this respect Travancore is a full sovereign state. It must be admitted that the administration of justice in Travancore leaves little to be desired. Law's delays are universal and if those delays are often found to be unduly long here, that is because there is luxuriant litigation in the country—a fact over which none can enthuse, but which testifies to the people's faith that the sword of justice is impartial. The reign of law in this ancient land is truly above the reign of the Maharaja.

I have stated above that the sovereign is still the final arbiter of the people's destiny. Let it not, however, be understood that there are no popular institutions in the state. A Legislative Council was brought into existence as far back as 1898 although without prejudice to the sovereign's supreme prerogative to pass laws on his own initiative. This Council was thoroughly reconstituted in 1921. This enlarged legislature contains a substantial elected non-official majority and is endowed with considerable powers. The qualification for the franchise is made so low as to assure the representative character of the Council. This reformed Legislative Council has, besides the usual power of interpellation both original and supplementary and moving resolutions, been given the right of voting on all heads of the budget "except a few which have been reserved for very special reasons."

The first reformed Legislative Council was dissolved early in the year 1925 after the termination of its apportioned length. The second has been summoned and has already held three of its sessions. The work of the first Council has proved beyond doubt the success of the great constitutional experiment which was inaugurated in 1921. Twenty Government Bills and one private Bill were introduced of which seventeen have become law. This large volume of legislative achievement includes such important measures as the Nair Regulation Amendment Bill and the Ezhava Bill which are calculated to

promote the welfare of two important communities in the state. "The budget and other administrative work of the Council have been equally substantial. In regard to the budget no necessity arose for the Diwan to exercise any of the reserved powers vested in him under the Regulation. The government accepted the decisions of the Council as a rule. On occasions when they felt that such decisions could not be given effect to without much sacrifice of administrative efficiency, they went back to the council with supplementary demands and asked for a modification of the earlier decision." Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Council is the Village Panchayat Bill which has now become law. This Bill seeks to erect self-rule of an advanced type in the rural area. Democracy in India cannot develop aside of Village Panchayats. The tradition of the village system of self-rule, a system that can successfully wrestle with the shifting vicissitudes of political fortune is still a living influence in India. To make the village a true unit of autonomy and to evolve larger groups consisting of such units held together by community of interests and common ideals must be the endeavour of those on whom rests the duty of setting India on the path of self-government. If any Indian state such as Travancore achieves complete local autonomy to build a superstructure of larger democracy upon, it would not only have done a great thing to itself but also chalked out a plan for British India to follow. With regard then to the resuscitation of the Panchayat which formed for centuries

the basic factor of political life in India and the remodelling of it to suit the advanced ideas of the present day, Travancore is certainly in the van of progress.

Besides the Legislative Council there is the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly which affords the representatives of the propertied interests a yearly opportunity of expressing direct to the government their wants and views regarding the administration of the country. As in the case of the Council the Assembly also is presided over by the Diwan. Most of its members are elected although the property qualification fixed for the franchise is perhaps a little too high. Constituted in the year 1904 the Assembly has to a large extent been superseded by the Legislative Council of 1921. It may usefully develop into a second chamber in a bicameral constitution for the state. Meanwhile it affords the Diwan a year-end occasion to make a public statement of the Durbar's intentions and achievements during the preceding twelve months. These addresses of the Diwan of Travancore to the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly are widely circulated in and outside the state. The Assembly opens with a holiday, and sports and public lectures make things brisk in the capital while it is in sessions. It gives a democratic bias to a benevolent monarchy at the cross-roads.

Travancore enjoys the largest measure of constitutional reform ever yet inaugurated in an Indian state-

Of course Travancore has reason to be proud of its relative position. But, for a modern compact state with a high percentage of literacy such as obtains in the state, the constitutional progress so far made may be reckoned by some to be inadequate. They may say that the executive is not yet really responsible to the Council. It cannot, however, be denied that the Council exerts great influence upon the administration. The heads of the various departments are generally anxious to please the Council and earn its favourable opinion. This is a factor of the utmost importance and is almost as good as ministerial responsibility to the representatives. There is no doubt that the institution of the Legislative Council marks an important step in the evolution of true democracy in the state.

Educationally Travancore is the most advanced part of the Indian Empire. It lavishes a larger percentage of its total revenue on education than most countries in the world. Travancore can rightly pique itself on the phenomenal expansion of literacy which it has achieved in recent years. Indeed, the light of knowledge is fast reclaiming the most benighted sections of her people. 968,133 persons are to-day literate out of a total of 4,006,000. Leaving children under five out of consideration 279 in every thousand can read and write. There are five literate females against 12 males.

The following table speaks volumes for the proud position of Travancore :—

Provinces or States. Number per thousand who are
literate excluding persons
under 5.

	<i>Persons.</i>	<i>Male.</i>	<i>Female.</i>
Travancore ...	379	380	171
Burma ...	317	510	112
Cochin ...	214	317	115
Baroda ...	146	240	44
Coorg ...	144
Delhi ...	122
Ajmere-Merwar ...	113	185	26
Bengal ...	104	183	21
Other States and Provinces ... Below	100

“ It will be seen therefrom that in the literacy of both sexes put together and in the education of males, Travancore takes the second place among the British provinces including Burma and Indian states, while in female education it occupies the first place. The phenomenally advanced position of Burma, as compared with Travancore, in regard to male literacy, is the result of its indigenous system of free education, evidently of a religious character imparted in monasteries. If the standard on which the statistics collected for literacy

had been a higher one, the relative position of Travancore and Burma, with regard to male literacy, would have been materially altered since, as is seen from para 354 of the Census Report of India for 1911, 'there are comparatively few in Burma who have received a University Education or studied in a High or Middle School.'"

Indeed in Travancore, the premier Indian state of the Presidency, the government and the people are at one in their warm appreciation of the blessings of education. The government grudge no amount of money or earnestness in meeting the ever-increasing demand for education. The people spare no pains to make the demand outrun the achievement of government. The students' strike of some years ago occasioned by a slight increase in school fees is at once an indisputable evidence of the aspiration of the people to keep education within their reach and of the anxiety of the government to devise ways and means to meet the educational expenses which go mounting up from year to year. Although the strike rapidly fizzled out as it deserved, and fees at the revised rates began soon to be levied, a generous system of scholarships makes it possible for the poor and the depressed to share the blessings of education. The result is that in point of literacy and general standard of living Travancore yields to none of her sister states or British provinces, and Trivandrum is undoubtedly the literary doyen of South Indian cities.

Therefore, there is no denying the fact that Travancore leads India in education to-day. The eight provinces into which British India is divided together spend about seventy lakhs on education or about $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of the total revenue. The total educational expenditure for Travancore for 1924-'25 was Rs 3,864,725 or about 20 per cent of the state's revenues. The following summary will give an idea of the progress of education in Travancore in the last half-century.

	1880-'81	1912-'13	1924-'25
Total number of Durbar schools ...	251	828	1,087
Total number of recognized private schools. ...	438	935	2,339
Total number of pupils in the Durbar schools. ...	14,485	132,616	221,752
Total number of pupils in private schools. ...	20,969	72,355	232,713
Total number of Schools (Durbar and private.) ...	689	1,763	3,426
Total number of pupils under instruction. ...	35,454	204,971	454,465
Percentage of school-going population. ...	10	40	66.1

This is, of course, an eloquent record and no government can be blamed if it is inclined to advert to it with

complacency. The government of Travancore are certainly doing their best to speed up the progress of mass education in the state. Universal primary education is their goal in view and they are within hail of it.

In Travancore there is little distress among the people. The agriculturist leads a contented life with what his labour brings him. The incidence of land-revenue assessments is undoubtedly moderate as is shown by the remarkable rise in the value of land all over the state in recent years. The trading classes are on the whole well off. Various cottage industries such as weaving, coir-making, oil-squeezing etc. dissolve want and make life supportable even among the depressed classes. In this respect Travancore is, beyond doubt, a progressive country. Perhaps, there is a fly in the ointment and that is the educated unemployed. The educated young men of the state are to-day a drug in the market. The government cannot obviously absorb their large and rapidly increasing numbers in its service and their education is not of much use elsewhere. The government are keenly alive to the situation and the men who now run the education department are most anxious to make education a less uncertain investment by putting into the hands of the educated the competence to make their livelihood.

Such are a few of the salient features of Travancore to-day, and it cannot be denied that they constitute a

commendable picture. But it is not yet finished. It is, as it were, still in the making. And the queenly regent, as we shall see, has hitched her waggon to the star. Under her sisterly reign the pace of progress has been considerably accelerated and the picture will soon be enriched with lovely hues.



Glimpses of Travancore.

I. Kerala: A General Survey.

Kerala or Malabar, the land of the Malayalam-speaking people, is an interesting country and has a distinct unity of its own. Its geography is as fascinating as its civilization is unique; and lying, as it does, in the extreme southwest of the peninsula, cut off from it by the cloud-capped heights of the Western Ghats, a stranger is apt to exclaim, "O life unlike to ours!" amidst the scenes and sights that surround him.

There is a legend in the country which tells you how the country was made. It goes back to the very beginning of time when the Arabian Sea foamed at the foot of the Ghats. Parasurama, that Brahminical tower of strength of old, who, in his ensanguined fits, "rid the Earth thrice seven times of the royal race" throwing his battle-axe from the heights of the Sahyadri caused the sea to recede, and made Malabar which he gave away to the Brahmins in expiation of his horrible sin of matricide committed in dutiful obedience to an ultra-suspicious father chafing at an imaginary transgression on the part of his mother. But one must not make too free a use of the name of this Rama with the

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axe, for he is a *chiranjivin* and is now doing penance on the Mahendra Mountain.

A legend is a legend "for a' tha'" and you may dismiss it with a contemptuous shrug, if you like. Geologists, however, say that time was when this narrow strip of land did not exist and that the whole of it was probably raised from the depths of the sea by some violent volcanic disturbance. If you care to read *Keralolpatti*, or *Keralamahatmyam* where it is set down in all the seriousness of an erudite historical composition and remember what the geologists say, you will certainly think twice before you brush it aside with scant respect.

Malabar or *Malayalam*, as it is called in popular parlance, is the country extending along the west-coast of the Peninsula from the Cape to the Chandragiri river. It is a land of hills and dales and plains, swift-running brooks of sparkling hue, a sandy shore with here a creek, there a lagoon and wide river-mouths emptying the waters of the mountains into the sea whose surf beats against the beach in one unending boom of rhythmic fury. And as the sea heaves and rolls and breaks on the shore, one may well fancy that it is even now seething with rage at the magic of Parasurama that so deprived it of a part of its unbounded dominions. "Ever since, the maddened old creature, with its hoary crest of foam, continually weeps

and laments like King Lear exposed to the fury of the elements."

If you ascend in an aeroplane above the din of this work-a-day world leaving your cares behind and survey some of the parts of this land, you can see what beautiful things Nature has bestowed on Malabar. The long, curving littoral is an undulating green of cocoanut groves of varying height, and beneath the green are little dwellings scattered broadcast, each with a compound round it teeming with the richness of luxuriant vegetation. As you slowly move above the green, you will now and then come to a break in it, and there, instead of trees and houses, you have the rippling waters of which Travancore may well be proud. They are the *Kayals* or lakes, and some of them, in point of beauty, stand alone and unmatched. One such, in Central Travancore, is the Ashtamudi Kayal so named after the eight incurves that it makes far into the land around. As you look at it from a distance you may mistake its brackish blue for crystalline freshness. In the evenings the scene donneth all its glory and is no less than a beatific vision. The cocoanut palms that hedge in the lake lean over it everywhere and with their heavy bunches of tender nuts hanging from amidst their clustered tops seem to tantalize the waters below. Numberless shoals of happy fish rise to the surface making

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a muttering sound with their yawning little mouths and sink and rise again like the little shy stars. Country-boats move to and fro and *splash, splash*, sound the primitive oars ; the disturbed water twinkles and sets physicists a-thinking. Now perchance comes into view the belated line-boat speeding along the deep middle of the calm inlet with passengers craning out their heads and glancing at some of the fine houses that rise above the nestling green, or a stray motor-boat rushes swiftly past, and the canoes rock in its wake. The moon uprises and casts a silver hue of enchantment over the scene. What an inspiring sight it is, viewed from the commanding grounds of the Thevalli Palace of His Highness the Maharaja ! Ashtamudi is the Loch Lomond of Travancore.

In the uplands there are other things equally glorious, if of another type. It is one stretch of wavy ground of rice-fields and pepper-plantations that once attracted a horde of foreigners into the land at so early a period (witness the earliest European fort in India at Monambam near Cranganore built by the Portuguese and now conserved by the Travancore Government as a historical relic) and beyond these are wooded highlands with a thick undergrowth of herbage where the plants of the cardamom grow wild, whose ripe capsules the wandering squirrels eagerly covet—in vain. And as

A FAMOUS TEMPLE.

you approach the Palghat Gap—the natural avenue to this Temple of Parasurama (for, so too, Malabar is known)—you come to a country most remarkably beautiful and resembling some of the finest parts of Bengal. Its lofty trees, numerous palms and paddy-fields often swelling into an eminence crowned with houses, are edged by the steep, naked mountains throwing down cascades of soaring heights on one side and the towering forests of the Travancore hills on the other. Here are the homes of hundreds of wild elephants that scare the farmers and roam about little thinking of the pitfalls in their way or of their imminent doom to become the dumb servants of struggling man.

2. A Famous Temple.

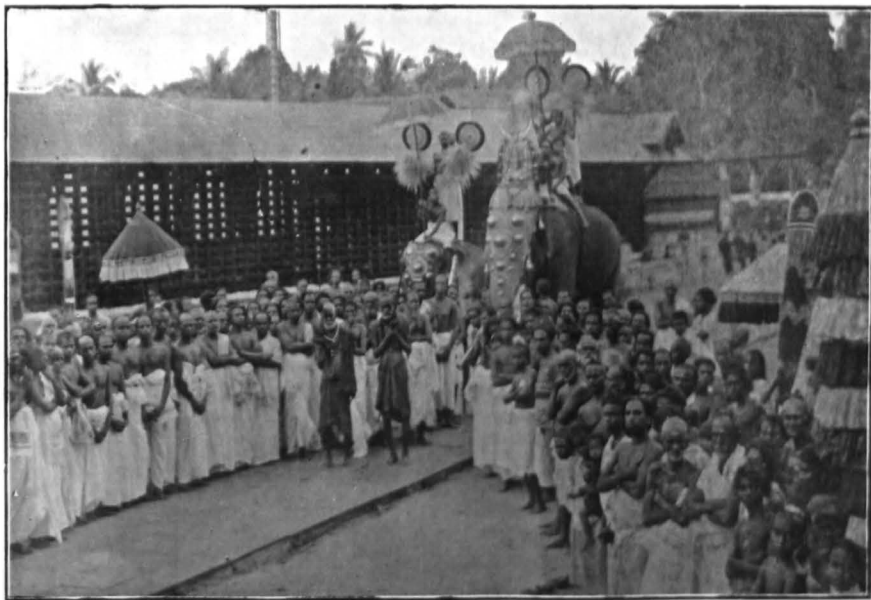
Away from the hustle of busy life, in a quiet corner jealously guarded by a line of hoary mountains and an angry sea, lies the beautiful, restful land of Travancore. It is the classic land of charity. Hospitable India has no worthier offspring than pretty little Travancore. This is the far-famed land of feasts and festivities, the merry land where the hungry have excellent fare, and the idle rich, the luxury of eye-filling sights all the year round.

This is the land primeval of fanes and shrines.
Ye gods and little fishes, preserve the glory of this

GLIMPSES OF TRAVANCORE.

uncontaminated nook of ancient Ind ; for ever, preserve the honour of this crown of hospitable Ind !

In the celebrated temple of Vaikam in North Travancore, dwells the omnipotent deity, Mahadev, who is the lover of feasts as well as the Lord of the Universe. Therefore, there is no easier means of access to his holy heart than the feasting of hosts of the beloved of the Mighty One—the twice-born Brahmin! The grander the feast, the easier the access, the warmer the reception. Indeed, there is hardly anything beyond the reach of one who can thus please the puissant Lord. But feasting is not an easy thing. It means an unquestioning faith and munificence beyond measure. Imagine a concourse of people big enough to consume one hundred paras (about 20 lbs. make one para) of cooked rice at a single meal! And rice is only one of the various items, and not the most important of them, that go to make up the feast technically and euphemistically called the *Breakfast*. No amount of pain is thought too big, nor any expenditure too extravagant to make the sacred *Breakfast* the glory of gustatory delights. The variety in the vegetable menu beggars description, and few are the mouths that can resist moistening when the air is thick with their appetizing fragrance. Truly has cooking been developed into a fine art in the temple.



Vaikom Temple Procession.

A FAMOUS TEMPLE.

All this sedulous manufacture of pleasures is meant to minister to the comforts of the thrice-happy Brahminical tribe. Blessed are they, for they enjoy the good things of the world, and the dreaded Lord of Destruction, the great Mahadev, is their preserver, and patron. This mighty Lord often strays in stilly nights into the houses of the sceptical rich to round them up and wring from them promises of performing the sacred *Breakfast* ceremony in the temple. These nocturnal calls of the omnipotent deity are so successful that the day without the *Breakfast* is a rare thing in the Vaikam temple. And remember that many have seen this Invisible King going his round of visits on darksome nights in the guise of a tall, old Brahmin walking with a crutch, with his head bent down as though with the burden of his flowing snow-white beard.

It was only the other day that a pious pilgrim to the holy shrine was robbed of a goodly portion of his hard cash and some valuable jewels. That ardent votary, therefore, began to moan the loss of his wealth in vociferous imprecations against the daring thief who ventured to despoil a devotee of Mahadev and that under his very nose, and in ceaseless supplications to the all-powerful for the restoration of his stolen things. Never did a believer in *Vaikathappan* suffer long or pray in vain. The old Brahmin with his snow-white

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flowing beard appeared and behold! the money and the jewels lie at the feet of the weeping votary. Many caught a glimpse of him this time but none so fortunate as to have more than a glimpse.

Such wonderful happenings are bruited about far and near. Few dare question their veracity and with the vast multitude hearing of them is believing in them with absolute unreserve. Then does the number of the Faithful go boisterously mounting up and the fame of this epicurean divinity has nearly reached the ends of the Earth.

Such is the Mighty One of Vaikam. Small wonder, then, there is no end to the numbers of seekers of truth, lovers of feasts, worshippers of indolence, sufferers from disease and several species of uncritical humanity flocking to the temple at all seasons of the year. You have no idea of the miraculous cures that are wrought in the temple. Even the unfortunate victim of the most obstinate dyspepsia who is dead to all kinds of gustative enjoyments, who never enters his dining room without his scales and who never eats a morsel without emulsifying it can fearlessly gorge himself with the puddings and pickles and the heavy preparations of the holy *Breakfast* that never fail to tickle the gastric nerves and cause an overflow of gastric juice! Then does he

A FAMOUS TEMPLE.

know the glory of emancipation and what it is to eat with an appetite and digest the food without the aid of a score of bitter pellets and a dozen doses of the tongue-deadening tincture gentian! In the temple horror of eating is cured by gluttony.

What is the secret of this apparent magic? The merciful Lord never allows his gifts to sit heavy on the stomachs of his devotees. There is none but profits by them. From within the sacred temple one can swallow a mouthful of strychnine and yet death may not claim him.

There is a story the veracity of which none dares question, that long, long ago, during a grand *Breakfast*, when it was time to serve up a costly dish of pudding, the cooks made the horrifying discovery of a dead serpent floating in the huge vessel in which the liquid delicacy had been prepared and kept! These rascally scullions decided with reckless promptitude to keep the serpent story a secret and to serve the pudding as though nothing had happened. The unsuspecting Brahmins ate it with great gusto, but no sooner had they finished eating than Death's grim messengers snatched them off with terrifying suddenness. There they lay! But the Lord of the Temple appeared in the familiar figure of aged Brahminhood with a cup of magic water which he sprinkled on the dead and lo and behold! they came

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to life, everyone of them, and fell to finish off their meal as if nothing at all had happened. Indeed, they knew neither the tragic tale of their death nor the wondrous tale of their resurrection.

In the meanwhile these murderous cooks were watching the whole scene in simulated sympathy and dismay. A terrible fate was in store for them, they feared! But the mighty One is also the merciful One, and He did no more than neck them out through the western gateway whose massive doors closed on these roguish fools with an angry clanging bang. That gateway stands closed to this day as a monument to the treachery of cooking humanity and the vindication of the omnipotence and omniscience of the great divinity sitting enthroned in the temple.

Therefore you needn't be afraid at all of eating to excess at the sacred *Breakfast*. Your business is to eat as long and as much as you can and to leave the rest to the care of the kindly Giver of all the delicious dishes that you enjoy. No stomach was ever too squeamish to digest anything eaten in the divine Presence. But there is one thing which you must not omit to take with you to the famous shrine, and that is Faith, unlimited and unfathomable Faith, in the existence of Mahadev, then, in his omnipotence and last but not least, in his

A FAMOUS TEMPLE.

beneficence. The wrath of the Terrible will surely fall on the unbeliever with disastrous consequences.

If you be sceptical, which is very likely in this ultra-scientific age, you will be well advised to shun the spot where reigns the divine lover of feasts with his countless hosts of happy votaries whose business in life is to eat and enjoy and pray. Sometimes it so happens that a stray atheist develops an irresistible desire to eat at the *Breakfast* and ventures into the temple with sanctimonious hypocrisy. He does eat and enjoy and thinks proudly that he has deceived all the world including the great God under the cover of a false piety and walks out of the consecrated place highly satisfied with this dexterous performance of a cunning feat. But the hapless unbeliever does not know that the vengeance of the All-seeing follows him like a shadow for an opportunity to pounce on him and make the denouement as exemplary as possible. Not all the hosts of heaven can save him!

It was only the other day that a certain Namburi Brahmin after having worshipped the God in chuckling scepticism and filled his maw with all the good things of the *Breakfast* with hypercritical voracity was returning home across the backwater in all the pride of a victory that had just been won. As the Namburi's breast was

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rythmically beating in complacent ease and security, a furious gale suddenly sprang up and a voracious whirlpool sucked up the canoe and the unbelieving Namburi with it. Many heard the repentant cries of the unfortunate man proceeding from the subterranean regions, but who could save him that had incurred the displeasure of this mighty God on Earth! Covet not, then, the sweet things of the temple if you cannot acquire sufficient merit to deserve them, if you cannot walk the way of the Faithful.

And now my Mahadev! If my impertinent pen has dragged Thee into the blasphemous mire of light literature, it is because, Thou, the Omniscient One, hath been pleased in Thy Infinite Mercy to set this irreverent scribe to dance to the tune of a frolicsome strain and not because this lump of worthless clay could set Thee at defiance! Thou Terrible One of the Fiery Eye, my Cyclopean God of unfathomable Mercy, of unfathomable Fury, Thou the adored, the ever adorable Prince of healers, benefactors and miracle-makers, who in Thy Infinite Wisdom wert pleased to infuse a spark of renewed life into this dilapidated me when I sought the rejuvenating, exhilarating atmosphere of Thy Pharmacy, Thou, My Lord Saviour to Whom I owe my life and all that is mine, be not wroth with me for thus painting

THE GARDEN CITY.

Thee in the hues of light-hearted ingratitude, for the fault is Thine although the mischief be mine. Thy will be done !

3. The Garden City.

Trivandrum, the picturesque capital of pretty Travancore, is a nice city straggling on a gnarled stretch of earth on the west-coast not far from the apex of the peninsula. On the sea-shore the wild waves scatter their vain energies in angry impotence. Close by lies the quiet city lolling in dreamy repose.

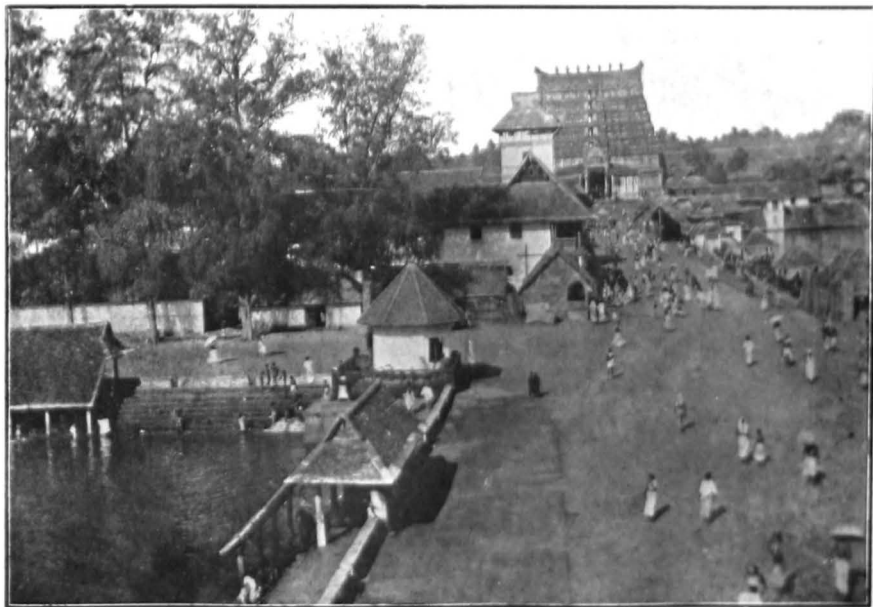
In one respect Trivandrum has an attraction all its own. It is literally buried in a luxuriance of vegetation. Its piazzas and public offices, its palaces and pagodas are swathed in quilts of cushiony green. Ascend one of its little hills that rise everywhere about the town crowned with calm villas and sentinelled by casuarina trees, and the straggling city that rises and falls amidst the undulations is seen embedded amidst a bizarre wealth of plant life fascinatingly foreign to urban districts. Man here lives in friendly neighbourliness with nature and does not seem impelled to rattle his sabre of science to fight and conquer her. This is a happy spot bathed with the sweet suggestion of rest, and nature has laid on it her silken scarf to induce in its inhabitants the unctuous hypnosis of happiness. This is a city of

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gardens quickened by a touch of romance and to view it from the hill-tops and to see the bounding silver of the sea right away across the green affords a pleasure as rare as it is great. But with jealous obscurity the city guards its attractions against the hungry tourist in search of holiday.

Trivandrum is, moreover, a sacred city and its principal pagoda, the holy abode of Sri Padmanabhaswamy (Maha Vishnu) attracts the pious pilgrim from far and near. The temple has an interesting legendary origin. It dates back to that blessed time when man and god lived in close commune.

One fine morning in that far away age, the famous Vilvamangalam Swamiyar, the favoured of Vishnu and the father of several shrines in Kerala unwittingly gave umbrage to his deity in a huff, and the latter leaving his devotee in the lurch betook himself to the forest of *Ananthankadu*, the present site of the city, in high dudgeon. The distressed saint after months of wearisome wanderings came up with the Lord in the heart of the forest and made amends for his misconduct by fervid propitiations. The spot, where the meeting took place, in the course of time, became the Trivandrum shrine within which lies Vishnu with his four arms in all the splendour of high divinity. Gradually a city crept into the forest, and to-day all the appurtenances of



Sri Padminabha Swami Temple.

THE GARDEN CITY.

civilization also have wormed themselves in. That is the story of Trivandrum shorn of details.

Within this beautiful city resides the ruling dynasty of Travancore. No royal house of modern times has pretensions to a heritage as ancient as that of the sovereigns of Travancore. But not only do they come of a line as illustrious as it is old but rule a country the "finest" in India which successfully guarded its independence through the long procession of troublous centuries.

When the rich plains of North India teeming with a prolific people were from time to time submerged under the flood of invasion and conquest by successive swarms of foreign adventurers, the great Parasurama, to whose wondrous powers Kerala owes its origin, commanded the hoary hills of the Western Ghats to mount guard on the eastern frontier of Travancore, a long array of gaunt sentinels—and the sea on the west has always kept howling its unceasing intimidations to intending invaders from that side. Thus protected by Nature's sleepless guardians, the beautiful backwaters of Travancore that weave into the land with exquisite charm lie quietly smiling, rippling, with never a frown on their faces. The cocoanut trees that line the shores of these placid lagoons in multitudinous groves give a contented people the just needs of life with generous amplitude.

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Everywhere in this secluded nook so richly inlaid with the ornaments of nature, there is a deep suggestion of peace and plenty, of calm and contentment, just enough and no more.

To-day the old sentinels, the hills and the sea, stand as of yore, but their glory is gone. To-day they seem to weep bitter tears like superannuated flunkies whose services are not needed in a science-ridden age. Railways pierce the hills and super-planes annihilate the sea, and the old order having outlived its utility stands saying reluctant farewell to the services that it had been rendering since the dawn of creation. Ye, immortal care-takers, your time is up. Science has no use for ye!

Still, Travancore bears the marks of her ancient charms and although rude voices break out occasionally here and there with the epidemic infection of modern restiveness, it even now enjoys the intimations of a happier life than is to be found in many places elsewhere. The charm is fast wearing off but it is still there, thanks to the slow pace of change.

4. The Maker of Modern Travancore.

The maker of modern Travancore, which in area is about a fourth of the size of Mysore or an eighth of that of England and Wales, is Maharaja Martanda Varma

who takes rank with the foremost of South Indian warrior-statesmen. He was a king of whom any people might be proud, and he packed the 29 years of his reign from 1729—1758 with great achievements and far-seeing policy. His admiring descendant, the talented Visakhiam Thirunal who ruled the country from 1880—1885 words his tribute to his illustrious ancestor thus. "Raja Martanda Varma succeeded to a heritage as thorny as it was poor. The feeble rule of a series of his predecessors had fostered the greed of the surrounding chieftains and the turbulence of internal malcontents to such an extent that their kingdom was almost a misnomer and their authority little more than a mockery. But Martanda Varma was one of those whom the world produces but at rare intervals. He was born to command and to conquer. He had the best of schooling—that of hardship. He had the best of teachers—foes. He was served by one of the ablest ministers."

Truer words have seldom been written. Born in 1706, Martanda Varma grew to boyhood amidst the dark insecurity of a vanishing royal power. The Ettuvittil Pillamars, a sort of feudal baronage, were the *de facto* lords of the land and their truculent tyranny had plunged the kingdom into unspeakable anarchy. They were the same cruel "over-kings" who committed the abominable atrocity of drowning five out of the six

children of the unfortunate Umayamma Rani about 30 years earlier. These lawless chieftains were riddling the land with their depredations under the faint authority of a weak sovereign when Martanda Varma their "heaven-born" slayer was fast growing into courageous youth. When a boy of but fourteen, he remonstrated with his uncle against the policy of allowing the proud Pillamars to let loose their lawlessness over the country. "Let me have a finger in the pie" he said "and see if I can't stay their hands." The high spirited boy proceeded with precocious policy to check the defiant misdeeds of the dread tyrants and thus made himself the target for their inveterate enmity. Small wonder that the Prince on several occasions had to effect his escape from them by the skin of his teeth and that having been thus constantly exposed to the highest danger, he in later life proved more than a match to his unscrupulous enemies and extirpated them with the cool courage and confident foresight so necessary for such a momentous task.

The name of Martanda Varma is still green in the memory of a grateful people. They love to recall some of the thrilling anecdotes of his adventurous youth and tell it to each other in admiring enthusiasm. Not infrequently had the little Prince to seek refuge on the tops of trees or under the roofs of humble farmers or in



Marthanda Varma the Great.

THE MAKER OF MODERN TRAVANCORE.

the sombre depths of dark forests infested with wild beasts. Not infrequently did the Prince owe his very existence to the rare devotion and heroic self-sacrifice of his faithful subjects. For, be it remembered that the people at large had not failed to realise that the fierce feudal free-lances were no less a menace to themselves than to the Royal House. The late Mr. C. V. Raman Pillai—often, and not inaptly, called the Scott of Travancore—has woven round the Prince an exquisite novel which in point of popularity yields to none of modern contributions to Malayalam literature.

On the death of his uncle in 1728 Prince Martanda Varma assumed the reins of Government at the early age of 22. As heir-apparent he had acquired abundant experience in the dangerous task of stemming the tide of anarchy. He now came to the throne with a steadfast determination to restore order, to push the borders of his kingdom to the utmost limits of possible expansion and to give it the blessings of a firm but benevolent rule. The story of his struggle with the lawless barons and their wretched machinations against their liege-lord need not detain us long. Suffice it to say that he extinguished the whole tribe and emancipated his country from the rapacious clutches of reckless bandits. This was Martanda Varma's first great achievement. He then turned his attention to the conquest of the

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petty principalities that hedged in and harassed his small kingdom on all sides and especially on the North. Among the backwaters of Travancore any petty princeling with a little temerity can stand at bay against the disciplined forces of even the most mighty. And Martanda Varma had to contend not only against several such princes, jealous guardians of their independence, who disputed with him every inch of ground with strategy, steadfastness and courage but also against the formidable Dutch who invaded his country with a numerous force at a critical juncture in his career. Nonetheless the great warrior got the better of his adversaries and carried his victorious arms to almost the very borders of Cochin, now a sister state lying contiguous to Travancore on the North. The extent of modern Travancore remains much the same as he left it at the end of his conquests.

But great and rare as were the abilities of Martanda Varma, they were considerably reinforced by the trusty assistance of the famous Brahmin warrior and statesman, Rama Iyen Dalawa, unequalled for courage and capacity by any who have left their imprint on the annals of Travancore. Rising from the lowest rung of the ladder to the highest, Rama Iyen served his master with a single-minded devotion and fortitude which are rare in the pages of history. He was literally the right-hand

THE MAKER OF MODERN TRAVANCORE.

man of the King in the battle-field as well as in the council chamber. His capacity as an administrator was equalled only by his courage as a warrior and the revenue system that he adumbrated is the backbone about which the revenue administration of to-day has been reared. Truly might Rama Iyen be called the Todar Mall of Travancore.

True greatness is quick to recognize its kind wherever it may be. The discovery of Rama Ayen by Martanda Varma is a case in point. Further, true greatness while keeping the powder dry always trusts in God. Indeed, the Maharaja's trust in God exceeded all ordinary standards and it was more than justified by his uniform good fortune. Almighty God seemed to help him over the stile in all his adversities. No doubt the Maharaja was himself the architect of his achievements but he always discerned the *hidden hand* offering him help whenever he stood in need of it. It need therefore cause little surprise that he developed an extreme of piety that found ample expression in temple architecture and various institutions of charity, in a life divorced from pomp and a sense of duty rarely approached either before or since by any member of his illustrious house which has given birth to a long and glorious roll of dutiful daughters and sons. Urged by his equally pious minister, who, by the way, remained unmarried lest his

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services to his sovereign and country be diminished, the Maharaja rebuilt the Trivandrum pagoda, one of the oldest and most sacred shrines of India. Within the temple is an imposing stone corridor roofed with large granite slabs (each 25 feet long). It totals a length of about 650 ft.—a truly gigantic work at which were employed 4,000 masons, 6,000 coolies and one hundred elephants for 6 months. To atone for the sins of war the pious king instituted in consultation with the learned Brahmins of the neighbouring kingdoms the famous *Murajapam*, a sexennial purificatory ceremony prescribed by the Vedas. It lasts for 56 days and entails a huge expenditure. On the closing day is an illumination which turns the temple and its precincts into an enormous amphitheatre of lights twinkling with their myriad tongues. This unique and interesting ceremony is not nowadays performed anywhere else in India. The latest *Murajapam* took place about two years ago of which presently.

Nor is this all. Martanda Varma's intense piety and profound sense of indebtedness to God found expression in what has often been called an *act of policy*. This was the famous making over of the kingdom of Travancore to Sri Padmanabaswamy of the Trivandrum Temple in the presence of a solemn assembly one fine morning in January, 1750. Henceforward the rulers of Travancore

have been styled Padmanabha Dasas (servants of Padmanabha) and have been supposed to rule their kingdom in the name of the Lord of the Temple. It seems to be little short of sacrilege to read into this pious dedication the politic purpose of making the kingdom sacrosanct and thus to secure its immunity from internal outrage. Such may, however, have been its result but the Maha Raja who so firmly believed that his successes were entirely due to the unfailing benevolence of his family deity did not seem to have an eye on that result when he made a public and solemn avowal of his great gratitude to his god.

This extremely pious Hindu ruler, however, followed a policy of enlightened tolerance and embraced within his paternal administration all castes and creeds, Christians, Muhammadans and Jews with equal solicitude. He toiled for the good of his people with unremitting energy personally supervising and even taking part in the construction of temples, roads and canals, and, if in modern times any sovereign set an example of plain living and truceless toiling, it is first and foremost this common father of his people whose memory is still treasured alike by the high and low in this "God's Kingdom", the 'celestial' state of Travancore.

5. A Model Hindu Ruler.

The late occupant of the ancient throne of Travancore, Col. Sir Rama Varma Sri Mulam Thirunal, had plainly modelled his rule on the high ideals of his great ancestor. His Highness assumed the reins of Government in 1885 at the comparatively early age of twenty-eight. He had, therefore, to his credit near upon forty years of rule—years of a rich harvest of progress and prosperity, when the sudden and unexpected news of his death about two years ago plunged the whole country into the depths of gloom. Long experience at the helm had yielded him the secret of successful rule and he used that knowledge with wisdom and moderation. His Highness had no attraction for the glamour of spectacular policies or the transient popularity of political booms. With a lively suspicion of leaps in the dark, His Highness anxiously reconnoitred the outposts of advancement before marching forward and then he hastened slowly. If his steady and noiseless rule did not boost his kingdom into the limelight, it rained benefits on it thick and fast, and his grateful and loving subjects nurse no deeper regret to-day than that His Highness was not spared to them longer. He had a keen sense of the value of time and the evil of ease and took an active interest in the administration the details of which he thoroughly knew from A to Z.



Sri Mulam Thirunal.

Constitutional to a fault, he never thrust himself forward into the forefront of politics and he always based his conduct on the high ideal that "the king can do no wrong." No ruler of any Indian State spent less on himself; none took more care of his country. He tended the State revenues with extreme, even ascetic economy and allowed himself very little from them. No Indian ruler handled such plenteous revenue with such singular concern for the public weal. Indeed, His Highness was even more the servant of his people than he was *Padmanabha Dasa*, the servant of Padmanabha.

It is this concern that enabled him to rule the land for forty years so well and to discharge his responsibilities with a moderation and wisdom that have not been equaled in these heady times. He ruled it indeed so well that even those who from some temperamental urge took a hostile attitude towards his policy were constrained to admit that there was in him a rare combination of courage and circumspection, of generous and liberal sentiment mildly dashed with conservative instincts. He was widely read in western lore, and imbued, as he was, with a strong infusion of democratic ideas, he always took care to ballast his administration with enlightened allegiance to oriental wisdom. A more steady-going monarch in India under the British Raj was seldom known.

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In some respects His Highness was a remarkable personality fragrant with the presence of a hidden greatness. He led a life of saintly simplicity and ascetic abstemiousness. The reward had been the inestimable boons of health and experience and the conscious happiness that one's fruitful efforts always bring.

His Highness knew absolutely no extravagances and, strange as it may seem, lived somewhat in a small way. His Court was unilluminated by the splendour of "oriental pomp." He was extremely godfearing and unassuming. Kind and generous by nature, he was not known to have been harsh to any one. He carried the weight of his authority with infinite grace, and his deeds of love took a charm from the bashful serenity with which he did them.

His Highness was something of a perpetual pilgrim with an intensely devotional soul. Piety beyond question was an outstanding feature in the fabric of his mind. He rose early, bathed in cold water and worshipped in the temple at all seasons with a punctuality and persistence that put to shame many a healthier and younger person. He had no stomach for the easy luxuries of royalty and ate but two meals a day. He ordered his life so well that his example always reminded one of the old adage "Punctuality is the courtesy of



Sri Mulam Thirunal's Jubilee Procession.

A MODEL HINDU RULER.

princes." Every hour of the day had its appointment and he seldom abused any. It is, indeed, but rarely that one born in the purple voluntarily adopts such a rigorous regimen.

This simplicity of life and piety of character gained His Highness the reputation of being a conservative. During his visit to the State in 1900, Lord Curzon said in the course of his banquet speech, "I know him to combine the most conservative instincts with the most enlightened views." In 1902 Lord Amptill echoed the same sentiment when he said, "I think no one will disagree with me when I say that His Highness's character presents a rare and valuable combination of conservative instincts with enlightened and progressive views."

In this age of increasing agnosticism people cannot easily understand the beauty of a soul not floundering in spiritual blindness. That was the reason why some considered His Highness a 'conservative' in not a very complimentary sense. But His Highness had conclusively shown that piety and godfearingness were not inconsistent with progressive ideas and that conservatism in politics might on occasion be a wholesome restraint on the impulsiveness of impatient spirits. In proof of this there is the eloquent record of his administration.

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To give an example or two. Under His Highness's wise and paternal regime the foundations of representative government have been well and truly laid. The Sri Mulam Popular Assembly affords the people an opportunity of expressing direct to the Government their wants and their views on all matters regarding the administration of the country. A large proportion of its members are elected representatives of the people. The Sri Mulam Popular Assembly is a sort of levee of public opinion which by its mere pressure can and does influence the policy of the Government to a considerable extent.

There is further the Legislative Council which, as its name implies, does the work of legislation. First brought into existence in 1888, it was thoroughly reconstituted in 1921. The Council enjoys a non-official majority most of whom are elected. It has been invested with powers of voting on the budget, moving resolutions, asking questions including supplementary questions. The low qualification for the franchise assures beyond doubt the representative character of the Council. And what is even more noteworthy is the fact that "*women are placed on a footing of complete equality with men in the matter of both electorship and membership.*" As an example of the large ideals that inspire this Travancore *House of Commons* it may be mentioned that very

A MODEL HINDU RULER.

recently it carried a resolution to introduce spinning in Elementary Schools. That resolution has now been implemented.

The Maharaja was aware of the gravity of the step he was taking, of the dangers that might attend the investiture of the Council with powers to deal with general administrative matters. It must be remembered that in a Native State the Ruler is considered the source of all law and the fountain of justice. But he was one who seldom failed to read the times aright nor to keep himself abreast of them, and he must have discerned that the old order was changing and that if royalty wanted to survive the wild assaults of the many-headed beast rapidly awakening to a sense of its power, it must wear less statelier robes and share its time-honoured prerogatives with the hosts at the palace-gate clamant for a taste of authority. In this, as in several other things, the policy of this accomplished prince upon which he built up the edifice of a monumental administration is a mine of guidance to those entrusted with the difficult and delicate art of rulership.

Moreover, this able Maharaja was most happy in his ministers. One of the greatest of them was Sir P. Rajagopalachari, than whom a more original mind attuned to the great art of administration and endowed with

real abilities South India has not produced in modern times. His giant intelligence working in harmony with the cultivated moderatism of his royal master left the impress of an enduring achievement upon the face of the land. Somewhat dictatorial in manner, bold in conception, swift and thorough in execution, he brought to bear upon every department of the State the pressure of a robust and forward-looking statecraft which has had few parallels in the annals of Travancore since it sought its security under the shadow of the British flag. It was he, of all modern Diwans, who kindled a national life within the state and gave its communities a political education which afforded a handy scaffolding for his immediate successors to erect a cautious, yet liberal, instalment of representative Government. And, as we saw, His Highness was not slow to go boldly forward.

It is clear from the above that in the matter of India's advance towards *Responsible Government*, Col. Sir Rama Varma was in the very vanguard of progressive ideas. So in other matters as well. Progress has left its imprint in every nook and corner of the State. Education has wrought wonderful changes in the age-old outlook of an old-fashioned people. The depressed classes are emerging to the surface helped on by the willing hand of a benign ruler. The so-called *untouchables* are casting off their 'objectionable slough.' Although some of them have

become restive with marking time and want to take the time-worn fence of inequalities by a high jump, there is no doubt that the silent march of events is carrying them, more surely, if less ostentatiously, to the desired goal. His Highness spared no pains to raise the embargo of ages and to restore the depressed and the down-trodden to their birth-rights.

Like his great ancestor Martanda Varma, His Highness was a protagonist of progress no less than a pious and trusty guardian of the priceless heritage of gone ages. Indeed, his personality presented a combination as rare as it was happy.

6. The Murajapam.

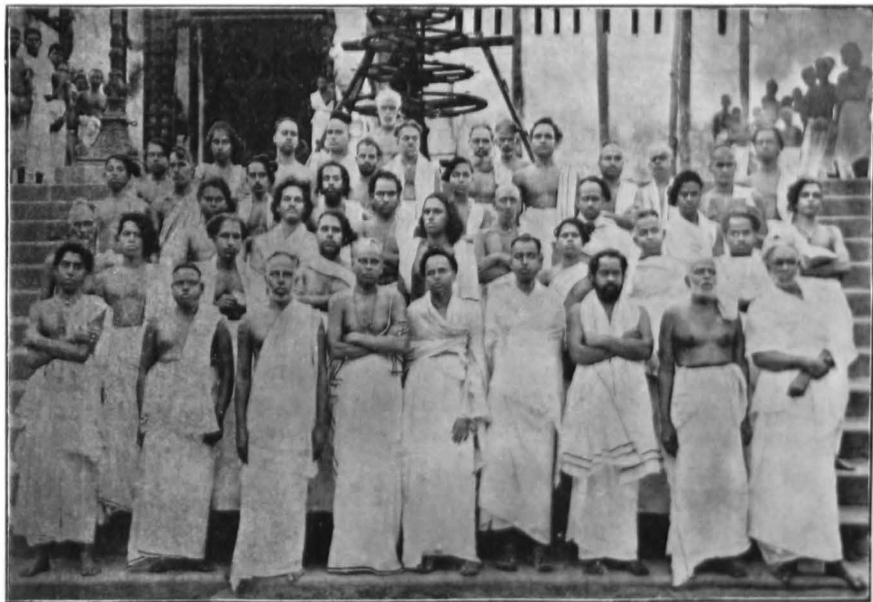
Travancore is still, in some respects, ancient India's epitome. Maybe the tide of metamorphosis swells round her and the time is not far off when she too will have been submerged. But sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

It is hardly little more than two years since the sexennial ceremony of Murajapam went off with great eclat. Then was Vedic Travancore wide awake. The Nambudiris of British Malabar and Cochin were then sojourning in hospitable Trivandrum to perform the expiatory rites.

What is Murajapam? We that grope in the darkness of these misty times cannot easily understand it.

We must take care lest our impious ignorance should tread on it with its harsh heels. The Murajapam is the voice of Vedic India expressing itself in orthodox Travancore—under the wings of the British Raj. We may never understand it, for its true meaning lies hid in the depths of uncounted years. The Murajapam is a mystic gospel of expiation of sins and acquisition of happiness, in whose bowels what merits might not dwell, who can say ?

What is Murjapam? Nothing is easier than to answer the question and nothing more difficult than to understand the thing. Here goes. The Murajapam is simply the recitation of the Vedas. There are seven courses of recitation and each course takes eight days. There are also other *japams* tacked on to the main ceremony, of which presently. Well, the Murajapam, a more or less homogeneous group of several religious rites, was instituted by the great Martanda Varma, the maker of modern Travancore. His share of conquest and annexation was by far more than what fell to the lot of his predecessors and his essentially godfearing mind was uneasy about it all. He therefore called together an assemblage of the learned Brahmins of Malabar, Tinnevely and Madura, and it was decided to inaugurate the Murajapam in the Trivandrum temple so might the sins of war be expiated and the 'compunctious visitations'



A Group of Nambudiris.

THE MURAJAPAM.

of the royal conscience be dissolved. The prayers for the ceremony are a collection of Vedic hymns approved and adopted for a similar purpose by Kartaviryarjuna, the flower of a glorious line of Kshatriya kings.

The first Murajapam was celebrated in the year 1751, and the magnificence of it was so large that it has not been possible to excel or even to approach it since. It cost 2 lakhs of rupees the purchasing power of which was then, to put it moderately, three or four times as much as to-day. The memory of that inaugural Murajapam still lingers not only among the Nambudiris, who were the chief beneficiaries on account of it, but also among the less favoured sections of the Hindu community. Its memory is fresh among the lovers of a society based on the Vedic ideal.

The last Murajapam was the thirtieth. Numerous sheds were built round the temple of Sri Padmanabha within whose sanctified precincts the age-old ceremony was conducted. A considerable part of the people dwelling in the neighbourhood had to make room for their Brahminical betters. The very air assumed a Vedic hue. If, reader, you are a stranger to this country, you must be interested to hear that here in Travancore there is great prosperity, abundance of rains and no end of cocoanut trees—the princely palm of goodwill and utility, if also, some want, abundance

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of sultry days and no end of caste exclusiveness—the fertile source of suspicion and barren hatred; and how much of this happy, nay, inevitable conglomeration is due to the recurring Murajapam and to the cumulative merit thereof who can say? But Sri Padmanabha in whose loving care we live and move, he knows it, he knows it. What know we little men!

The Murajapam consists of four ceremonies, viz., (1) The *Murajapam* proper, i. e., the chanting of Vedic hymns inside the temple; (2) The *Mantrajapam*, a slightly different course of recitation which also takes place in the morning along with the *Murajapam*; (3) The *Sahasranamajapam* or the recitation of the thousand names of Vishnu within the temple at about 2 P.M.; (4) The *Jalajapam* or the recitation of *mantrams* standing knee-deep in water which takes place in the evening in the Padmathirtham tank in front of the temple. Thus, as far as things immaterial are concerned, is spanned the livelong day.

But the inner man will not permit any long obsession with such imponderables without himself being properly propitiated. That is the reason why these spells of spirituality are profusely punctuated with bouts of epicurism. Corresponding to the four *japams* mentioned above, there are four meals of the most sumptuous and plentiful fare. The breakfast commences at

THE MURAJAPAM.

eight and continues till one. One might fall to it at any time between these hours. The variety of comestibles, puddings, pickles and other products of culinary skill defies description. But if the bill of fare swarms with items, the happy people for whom it is meant are capable of doing justice to it. The Nambudiris are as good at eating as at praying. And if they give to the Maharaja and to his subjects immunity from a host of sins and an instalment of prosperity and happiness lasting for a term of six years, they consume a fair fraction of the Maharaja's revenues besides taking with them an equally fair fraction of them in hard cash. But that is no more than good wages for a good day's work.

Be it as it may. The second meal of the day turns up at about 3 o'clock in the evening after the due performance of the *Sahasranamajapam*. This is the lunch, and it is not unworthy of the great occasion. Then there is the dinner after dusk which, in point of style and plentifulness, does not yield even to the breakfast. Finally each Nambudiri, when retiring for the night, is given a small parcel consisting of *aval* or beaten rice well sweetened with molasses. This, as can be readily understood, is to save him if the torment of hunger should catch him napping.

Generally speaking, the performers of the Murajapam ceremony are blessed with an all-consuming

'inward fire', but if there be any not so blessed, he finds it good to exercise a little moderation by entering the 'Dietetic Treatment Lodge' where all excesses and heavy foods are tabôo. Such weaklings are certainly not quite worthy of the Nambudiri strain but happily their number is not large.

Now here is a poser for you. What do you think is the number so fed and taken care of? Anyway, it cannot be very large, you think. But if, when I say, 'over 5000!', you are not taken aback, you evidently have not seen such a large number of people together. Moreover, during the last eight days of the ceremony, this figure nearly doubles itself by the admission to the rich fare of *paradesi* Brahmins 'the back-tufted', 'hubble-bubble' people who not unoften are the pet aversion of the unspotted Nambudiris. Truly is this a wonderful phenomenon unparalleled at any time anywhere in the world. That is why Travancore has often been called the 'Land of Charity.' Yes, charity, which also includes hospitality, is 'our household divinity.' The Murajapam is undoubtedly charity *par excellence*.

To conclude. What better conclusion can we think of than a Murajapam prayer itself? "May Varuna Devata enable us to earn the two kinds of wealth which are together. May enemies flee, as though defeated, through mental fear!"

7. The Kathakali.

The Kathakali is the Malayalam drama. It is, perhaps, the most amusing of theatricals. It is exciting, entertaining. To see it is the only way to know it. The Kathakali defies description. It deludes the memory and eludes the pen. Some brand it as a dumb-show. Such critics have no ears or they are as deaf as those who won't hear. For, if they but listen, they will assuredly admit that the Kathakali is the most eloquent of histrionic amenities.

The music of Kathakali is an abundant symphony. It pours itself out in thrilling spurts of cadence. It bubbles into eddying notes. The music is often lost in the manner. The meaning is lost in the music.

The characters in the Kathakali have their tongues tied with adamantine inhibition. If they open their mouths at all, it is to show their curved fangs in fits of pugnacity. But their fingers and eyes are more eloquent than a hundred tongues. If this mute eloquence of signs is lost on you, you have to thank yourself for it. You must not go to Kathakali glorying in your nescience. The Kathakali is for the knowledgeable few. The multitude may stand aghast at it and return home overwhelmed.

Two kinds of drums cater for your ears. One is the loud variety, which is beaten with a stick in each hand and which threatens to break your tympanum whenever the sticks get particularly aggressive. Yet it affords a rough music whose lure even for the uninitiated is not small. The other belongs to a milder species. It is attached to the loins and is plied with the palms and fingers of both hands.

This horizontal drum, with its vertical, stick-beaten, elder brother, produces a gamut of sounds falling and foaming, rising and eddying, and often bearing upon you in robust melody. And this is without reckoning the gong and the cymbals, the full-throated songs and the stage-shaking tread of the characters. When all these are put together and cast up, you have the prettiest possible entertainment in this imperfect world.

In appearance, the personalities in the Kathakali are, to say the least, a superlative lot. They are a crowned and superhuman sect. Their large, often wondrously large, crowns are set with tinsel gems and other Brummagemms. These crowns shining in the giant light shooting high its lurid tongues from the huge brass lamp fed with an unstinted supply of oil, give their wearers often a commanding and always an unearthly

THE KATHAKALI.

appearance. But the crown is only one of the equipments of a character and that not invariably the most important. The face is thickly painted with paste differing in colour from character to character. Sometimes the paint is of a ferocious colour artistically variegated. Very often protruding contrivances are attached to the extremity of the nasal organ. The central and suburban parts of the forehead also occasionally come in for a share of this literal and tangible attachment of honours. From ear to ear round the chin either an artistic little embankment of rice-flour paste is constructed, or a thumping trimmed beard of red or white colour is firmly affixed. Besides, there are bracelets and breast-piece, jacket and a loose cloth tied round the waist not reaching farther down than the knees. The ankles jingle with strings of tiny bells and the fingers are tipped with silver nails. Now when such preternatural impersonalities shake the earth under their tread in the light of a blazing fire amidst the unceasing din of drums and music swelling up in a spell of wild melody, when gods and ghastly demons dance before you in a big bow-wow style swearing oaths and declaring war and threatening destruction with ferocious fists and faces arching with waves of visible emotion and, think of it! never speaking a word all the while, one, sometimes, is at a loss to know what is actually up

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and one's heart begins to pound in an access of anxious anticipation. You seem to stand on the edge of undreamt of possibilities that might at any moment overwhelm you from above or trip you up from below.

When I was a little boy a travelling theatre halted at our village and put on boards *Bali Vadham*, or the Death of Bali. And we the little ones of the village went and witnessed the performance. The figure of that Bali, the renowned monkey-king still haunts me from the depths of memory. His blood-shot eyes, his furious face frightfully parti-coloured, fuming in a tumult of passions, his circular crown rising from behind his head, his curved fangs showing through a shrill and elongated roar at intervals, his agitating hands rending the air in intermittent fits of defiance, his tireless feet making the fragile earth literally quake under their hammerings—the memory of this mighty figure is still fresh in my mind, still continues to frighten my dreamy hours. I was rattled, nay, everyone of my chummies was. The whole village seemed to have been thrown into a vortex of fear. Next day a fever was upon us and our boyish blood thumped violently at our little temples. That was my first play and time cannot wipe it off from my mind.

Alas! to-day the Kathakali is on the wane. Civilized man has little patience with such rough entertainments.

THE KATHAKALI.

Electric lights have begun to give chase to oil-lamps. Civilized man wants soft music to be crooned in his ears. He will not endure oil-lamps and masculine harmonies. He will not understand the hidden meanings of things. He expects picture language and peptonized education. And that is why the Kathakali is fast receding into oblivion in Travancore. But when it is gone, people will yearn for it and weep bitter tears.

NOTE:—Bali and Sugriva were perhaps the world's first blood-brothers to have been at fierce feud with each other. Bali, the king of the monkeys had the wonderful power of robbing his adversary, whoever that was, of half his strength and adding that to his own whenever he fought. As Bali himself was an extraordinarily strong and valiant hero, to defeat him in fair fight was sheer impossibility. Sugriva prevailed upon the distressed Sri Rama seeking help to rescue his beloved Sita, whom the Lord of Lanka (Ceylon) had abducted to his island home, to kill Bali, his elder and infinitely better, while he (Sugriva) was engaged in fierce battle with him, by an act of treachery which the hero of the Ramayana did and which act, they say, is the only blot in his escutcheon. This is the story of *Bali Vadham*.

8. Onam.

This is the greatest national festival of Travancore and of Kerala generally. The Malabar Era which is now running 1102 was probably started in commemoration of the institution of Onam. Whatever its origin, it still continues to cast a spell of plenty upon the land. During the Onam Week humankind in Travancore has no business to repine or to want. As the year approaches Onam the call of comfort reverberates through every home and people get ready to obey the kindly command. The old saw says. "Sell the *Kanam* and feast at Onam." To alienate landed property for the sake of belly-worship may perhaps be bad economics, but the commands of Onam are sacrosanct and must not be disobeyed. So the long and short of it is that everybody eats his fill and buries for a couple of days the rubs and worries of existence in the bowels of enjoyment. The Onam is, indeed, a fascinating arbour of gay amenity in this vast workaday world.

The 'old gluttons,' who, unlike the 'new epicures,' delight in appreciating the pleasures of life quantitatively dive (somewhat literally) on the Onam-day in *Pancharapayasam* (fluid pudding of milk, rice and sugar) and when they rise, a shower of cooked banana-chops is rained on them. This latter delicacy is often humorously nicknamed "drums" from their shape. Mixed well with

Pappadams fried in coconut-oil (*Pappadams*, you know, are a curious kind of preparation made of blackgram-flour, thin and circular in shape, which the English-educated Indian calls by the fond cognomen of "circles"), the "drums" make an excellent dish the thought of which is enough to flood the mouths of ordinary mortals with a stream of longing waters. There is, in addition, the 'storied' *Kalan* which is made of thick fermented buttermilk boiled down to the consistency of a semi-solid with big bits of banana and jam, salted and spiced, an appetizing curry whose smell is certain to tickle your olfactory nerve-ends with not very readily acknowledged yearnings. Indeed, the *Kalan* is the king of curries and the cure of obstinate indigestions. There is the old saying that if *Kalan* is not 'done' with meticulous care, the 'father' would surely begin murmuring and chuntering. Yes, the consistency of the *Kalan* is the true measure of the sincerity of the family to 'fete' the aged senior. All goes if *Kalan* goes. And the lesser things, indeed, they are too many to mention but by no means too many to eat and enjoy. Onam is assuredly the best time to eat and be merry.

"At Onam the houses are made gay with flowers which are collected for the purpose by bands of children singing shrilly the appropriate Onam hymn..... This is the day on which Parasurama or Vishnu is supposed

to descend to Earth to see his people happy." He does, for aught we know, and yea, returns to his celestial home convinced that, if on earth there is peace, plenty and prosperity anywhere, it is in happy Kerala basking in the soothing silver of a smiling moon.

But Onam is not merely a festival of rich and plentiful fare. It is also a season of sports and games. All appear to be on the spree, young and old. Womenfolk sing and dance. Children play filling the air with hilarious hullabaloo. Elderly men compete with one another at some indoor game in sombre gaiety. It is an 'off' time for the whole country when men and things are solemnly required for old sake's sake to be cordial and gay. Life's harsh realities are thus once given the slip and if anybody indulges them on this occasion, he is no lover of the country nor of himself. "Cheerily, cheerily, boys!" That is the message of Onam.

The Onam is essentially a symbolic festival. The people of Kerala believe "that the good old days when perfect justice, perfect truth, and perfect trust prevailed upon the Earth were during the reign of Mahabali" the mythical king but not less real to them than any ruling prince of the present day. Therefore, on the Onam-day they "attempt in a joyous way to reproduce, if only for one night, a vivid remembrance of the millennium, to which they look back with fond longings."

A GREAT MAGICIAN.

Evanescent is Onam. Quickly does it come and go, but the taste of it will linger in the mouth all the twelve months that lie ahead and then the Onam will come again to plunge the people in a deluge of joy. But even Onam is fast fading. The shadow of care lengthens over the land and people become practical running to meet their troubles.

9. A Great Magician.

Kaipuzha Tampan is a household word in Travancore. His wonderful magic still lives in the minds of men. Did he ally himself with the prince of the world? If he did, he afforded his generation the greatest thrills that ever magician conjured up.

Even to-day Travancore has no lack of magicians. Larger numbers, greater masters, flourished in the past. But in the rolls of fame there is none more eminent than Kaipuzha Tampan. He was truly the master of the black art, the prince of spell-binders.

He lived in the time of the famous Rama Varma, the scholar-king of Travancore who ruled the country from 1829 to 1847. It will be little short of impertinent to give further biographical details about Tampan for his immortality transcends such earthy things. In the book of fame where his name occupies an honoured

niche there is no place for the little events that make individual lives. For it is life itself that the book enshrines. That is why Kaipuzha Tampan will ever sail in the eternal ark of memory quietly afloat on the ocean of time. Therefore, kind reader, do not ask me his parentage, his education and things with which we attempt to resuscitate those who cannot live. I will, on the other hand, give some instances in proof of his art which has lifted his name above the reach of oblivion.

The master was on intimate terms with the Maharaja who was so quick to perceive merit and so generous to reward it. He, therefore, occasionally used to come up to Trivandrum to pay his devoirs to his sovereign to regale him with his rare enchantments. Two of these visits are specially worthy of remembrance.

It was a sultry day and the fierce sun blazed in the azure sky like an Attila of the heavens. The air was on fire and under the burning heat lay life like a drooping damsel throbbing with pain.

“O, for a breath of cool air! O, for a cloud to shade the sun, for a shower to quench this intense anguish of the Earth!” cried the Maharaja.

Beside him stood a person with a pair of eyes that flashed intelligence and a demeanour surcharged with a suggestion of vast possibility.

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"The heat is insufferable, my lord," he cut in.

"It is a long time since we last saw your wondrous art. Let us have something to-day. It will help us bear this orgy of heat."

"My lord, your humble servant's bag is empty. Your Highness has seen all his tricks."

"You are an astrologer, Tampan. Tell us when it will rain. We will put your prognostications to the test."

"It will rain to-day! So please your Highness," came the swift reply.

"Not the ghost of a chance!" ejaculated the Maharaja. •

"Nonetheless we are going to have it. Rain, Your Highness, often comes without intimation."

"It will be delicious....."

As the conversation was proceeding in this strain of unbelief on one side and assertion on the other, there appeared a solitary cloud in the western horizon. Anon it grew and began to overspread the sky. A cold wind blew. The sky became dark. Peals of thunder rent the air. Lightning scurried the sky back and forth in sinuous revelry. The affrighted sun quitted the scene like a helpless king flying before a fierce revolution.

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“Tampan! Tampan!” exclaimed the astonished Maharaja, “will your prophecy come true now?”

“Scarcely were these words uttered before the rains burst their murky shells and lashed the thirsting earth in furious momentum. It was not a downpour but a deluge.

The Maharaja looked at the magician, a picture of wonder and dismay.

It seemed that the flood-gates of heaven had given way and that the earth was in danger of being submerged under the liberated waters.

And it almost came to that. For in a trice the large temple-tank close by was full to the brim and then began to overflow. Not only that. Water, water, everywhere. All round the palace as far as the eye could see there was nothing but water rising with tremendous rapidity.

“Is it the final flood?” asked the stout-hearted Maharaja rather anxiously. Nor was Tampan himself less perturbed.

But the swirling waters went madly upwards. The heavens poured down a column of descending seas.

The frightened footsteps of the Maharaja flitted to and fro along the balcony. The poor magician stood there with a stony look in his face.

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But the rain showed no sign of abating and the waters continued to rise. The ground floor of the palace was now completely under water and the first was in imminent danger. It was now attempting the balcony on whose safety depended that of the Maharaja and the magician.

To appear steady in the face of this certain peril were folly. The Maharaja called on the tutelary deity of his family to save him from a watery grave. "Oh! Padmanabha," he cried, "why have you forsaken me!" His countenance grew livid and his tremulous voice seemed to come from the depths of a grave.

Tampan stood by, a speechless figure of pity.

But the Maharaja did not pray in vain. Behold! a brave boat propelled by thirty lusty oars was heading for the palace. The tutelary god would not look on unconcerned at the tragic catastrophe impending on his royal devotee. The magic ark swiftly came alongside of the balcony which the hungry waters were threatening to swallow.

"Come, Tampan, come. Let us save ourselves." And then he proceeded to step into the boat.

Quick as thought Tampan stops the Maharaja. "What, my lord, are you mad?"

“Come, none of your speeches now. Get into the boat.”

“Where is the boat?” asked Tampan firmly.

The fierce sun blazed in the azure sky. The air was on fire and under the burning heat lay life like a drooping damsel throbbing with pain.

That was magic!

Wondrous happenings marked also the second of the two visits. Some years elapsed before it came. “It is a long time since we had the pleasure of seeing you,” said the Maharaja. “You must treat us to a real exhibition of your art this time; give us a taste of the virile variety, Tampan.” The magician bent low and assented saying, “If Your Majesty’s humble servant has luck, he will carry out Your Majesty’s pleasure though he is now grown old and weak.”

In the afternoon, Tampan appeared in the courtyard. The expectant Maharaja was seen occupying a raised seat surrounded by his chief officers. The members of the royal family were also there eager to see the wonder-worker unpack his skill. Tampan spread his magic blanket in the centre of the courtyard and sat upon it. Presently there was seen a thread descending from the skies. It stopped just over the head of the aged juggler

and hey! there was a little epistle tied to its end. Tampan quickly undid the knot and opened the letter. It was written in Devanagari script and it conveyed grave news. A fierce war was raging between the *Devas* and the *Asuras* and Devandra the king of the shining hosts had himself written it asking Tampan to hasten to his assistance. The old man was greatly perturbed at the news. He respectfully handed over the letter to the king and said, "I must now depart from here. Devandra wants me. A fierce Armageddon between the angels and evil spirits rends the heavens. I must at once go from hence. Forgive, O King, thy humble servant; he cannot show his magic at this hour when the gods themselves are in peril! Let me go from hence."

So saying he straightway climbed up the mysterious thread which was still hanging there. Up he went quick as a squirrel and a hundred astonished eyes strained after him. Still up he went lithe as an eel as far as you could see, you and finally vanished into the region of the unknown.

A dismal silence fell heavy upon the scene. For several minutes each as long as an hour nothing at all happened. Then were heard the distant mutterings and thunderings of war. Anon there was a spattering of blood in the courtyard. Soon it gathered force and became a

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frightful drizzle. Then came broken limbs, severed hands and legs in hideous shapes! Came dying horses, dead cavaliers! The party that had crowded into the courtyard eager for enjoyment were now petrified with fear. They must believe for they saw with their own eyes and a terrible war must surely have been waging in the kingdom of the gods. The gruesome scene made even the brave monarch's flesh creep. Was it going to be the end of the world?

Now fell poor Tampan's head itself with a thud upon the ground amidst a ghastly spatter of the precious liquid. At this the queen-consort who was watching from behind the awesome enactment broke down and swooned away. Hurriedly the Maharaja got up from his seat and turned to the spot. The whole thing now became deadly serious. Just at this moment Tampan appeared behind the Maharaja and said quietly, "Your Majesty need fear no more. To-day's performance is over!

The affrighted ruler looked at the courtyard and lo! Tampan was standing there alone, calm as a cucumber. Gone were all the wrecks of that celestial strife!

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Tampan also enjoyed the intimacy of several local chieftains. When in his old age one of them requested him to entertain his court with his magic he pleaded

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that the snows of years had gathered thick on his head and that he had decided to indulge in his magic no more. "Don't you think that a white-haired man like me should have no trade with this black art?" he asked. "Don't try to put me off with these excuses, dear Tampan; you must give us something this time" said the chieftain endearingly. Nothing, however, took place on that day. Nor did Tampan appear inclined to oblige his friend.

The next day the two friends went to the river close by to bathe. It was the dry season and there was not much water in it. Tampan casually asked the chieftain if there were crocodiles in the river and the latter said, "There can be none at this time of the year. They seek deeper waters in the dry months. No crocodile will gobble you up in these shallow pools."

The two of them were squatting at the water's edge. Presently there was seen the snout of a crocodile just in front of them. With a start the chieftain got on his feet and flew up the steps. The magician, however, remained there contemplating that snout. But all on a sudden the crocodile made a dash at the old man and with a fierce blow of its tail flicked him off to the water. Then it swam from the shore with the hapless juggler in its jaws. And the wail of the dying man reached the wretched chieftain. "Did you not tell me there were no

crocodiles in the river, did you not, did you not? And I have now fallen a prey to this monster! Oh my fate! Why, on earth, my friend, did you thus lure me into the jaws of death? Oh my fate!"

That dying sound soon faded and with a tremendous gurgle both man and animal disappeared into the depths away in the middle of the river.

Then there was much shedding of tears and shouting for help. The whole village soon mustered at the bathing-ghat. A thousand nets were cast; a thousand men swept the shallow bed of the river with bamboo poles. They searched every nook and cranny but no trace of either crocodile or man could be found. They searched the whole morning and the chieftain watched their melancholy labours with aching heart. He beat his breast and shed scalding tears. "Oh my fate!" he cried. And as the men dispersed, the weeping chieftain too turned homewards with leaden limbs. The temple wherein his family deity presided was close by. Thitherwards he went thinking to tell his heart's anguish to his god. And whom should he see there but Tampan himself saying his prayers in placid mood!

Poor chieftain! did he ever dream that that crocodile was the conjurer's little joke!

This Tampan died on a date fixed by himself. He predeceased his Maharaja by two years whose death he had likewise predicted.

And to-day he is a fixed star upon the firmament.

10. Among the Waters.

The Clerk of the Weather is often an impossible individual in Travancore. His temperament is erratic beyond measure and his ways are inscrutable. He now lets loose the cyclones to sweep over the land, now releases floods of rain to run amuck upon it. And, too, he is known to strangle it in a spell of drought when he is in the mood for it, but happily such mood comes to him only once in a blue moon. So generally there is plentiful rainfall in the land.

The uncanny clerk is most inscrutable in the manner in which he brings the monsoon and the kind of monsoon he brings. This year, for example, he conveyed the watery vehicle with superlative cunning. For two days he strewed the east with dark patches dashed with a little thunder and lightning. The weather-wise people said, "This is a mirage and the monsoon is still some way off." But on the third day pitch-black clouds were seen to scour the sky rambling angrily now and then and as the dusk gathered into the gloom of night, the cunning little sprite sprang it upon the land with

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fierce momentum. Not one suspected that the monsoon lay concealed in the offing all the day. Then did the weather-prophets hide their diminished heads in their ante-rooms while the wind blew and the welkin poured down deluges of rain outside.

Sometimes he begins timidly only to end in a tremendous crash of the elements.

The rains are the most wonderful things in Travancore. They come with a message of hope holding out, as it were, the elixir of life. Then is the dust dissolved and the heat extinguished, and the cool air begins to swim into the room like a song of revival for the tired thews of the soul.

The monsoon usually bursts all of a sudden. To-day the fierce sun holds sway over the lean and haggard earth. To-morrow the heavenly waters bathe her and the day after sees her young. A few days hence she is tricked out in all the glory of tropical green. That is the way the monsoon brings it off.

As I put these errant thoughts induced by this year's sudden upheaval in the heavens upon this damp paper, a furious onslaught of the waters upon the windows proceeds apace and the pen encumbered with the echoes of it idly loiters upon each word. When the war of the elements rages outside, it is sweet to lo!

securely in the room listening to the noisy collision, and drop asleep.

But the Clerk of the Weather does not always afford you such safe lullaby. Occasionally he flings a tremendous shock at you and sends you out on perilous errantry. When the sun has fled the heavens and the rains hold their high revelry for days on end the seas begin to dance mountains high upon the shore and the rivers to carouse upon the country in grim majesty. Then houses are swept away and people die. The dark sky overspreads the land with the shadow of very calamity. Then you know what the wrathful Clerk has often in store for us. Then you cannot sit within the house toying with joy. The call of the country in distress comes and you buckle to and try to do your bit.

Well do I remember such a time, and here is what I wrote about it in 1924.

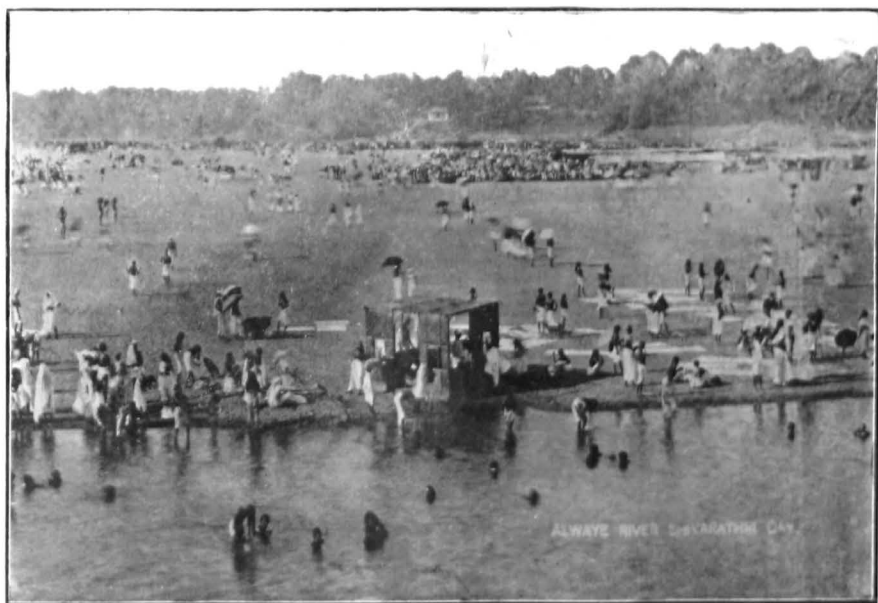
“ Misfortunes never come single. Travancore has been a recent victim to this dread gregariousness. The prosperity of years was swept away by a deluge which has few parallels in recorded history. Then came landslides to carry the work of destruction to the hilly tracts. But the Fates had not yet their fill and they snatched away the benign sovereign who had been guiding the destinies of his people so ably for nigh forty years.

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In this article, however, I propose to deal only with the flood and its consequences as they came under my experience in some of the devastated areas.

The Periyar "big river," is the largest and finest river in Travancore. Although its total length is but 142 miles, it swells into a roaring sea under the lashes of the monsoon and stretches its arms far inland on either side submerging miles and miles of land under its swirling currents. At the headwaters of the river the Madras Government have thrown a dam and turned back a part of its flow through a tunnel across the hills into the Madura country to irrigate its arid fields. The Periyar rises in the Shivagiri Forests among the Western Ghats and empties into the backwaters of North Travancore through several distributaries.

This year, this fine river became a veritable monster under the dark inspiration of a mad monsoon. At Peer-made 8 miles down from the dam there was twelve inches of rainfall on the 15th July and ten inches on the 17th. The river went into tantrums. Its wrath fell with heavy stroke on the Taluq of Kunnathunad some miles below the hills. This Taluq contains the well-known sanatorium town of Alwaye, where people gather in the hot weather to bathe in the medicinal waters for which the Periyar is famous at this place. The flooded river took by surprise the unsuspecting people of Alwaye and the



The Periyar at Alwaye.

surrounding country over a dark and stormy night. The angry waters touched with their furious mane the iron-girder of the railway bridge which here spans the river at a high level. The situation became quite alarming and there was a rush for dear life to the neighbouring knoll where the weekly fair is held. The poor hotel-keeper of Alwaye under whose roof I recently spent a night told me the story of his escape from the dread waters with affrighted unction. He recalled for me the awful incident with his hair standing on end.

At Alwaye the river bifurcates. A couple of miles lower down the broad northern branch reposes the Union Christian College amidst a scene unmatched for its exceeding charm in all South India. The river broke into this scene with its terrific gift of red ruin. The college itself is on high ground. But the river could sweep over its neighbourhood with slaughterous inhumanity. On the night of the 16th July through the wind-swept darkness were heard by the college students the helpless wailings of men, women and children caught amidst the merciless waters swishing through with giddy velocity. A great opportunity came unsought to the students of the college and they did not let it slip by. One of them told me with a fine glimmer of mingled pride and joy that when the local boatmen of whom there were not many demanded exorbitant, nay, impossible fares for the loan

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of their boats, they took them by force and started to rescue the people at dead of night taking their lives in the hollow of their hands. No questions of nice morality were mooted at that terrible hour. Great praise is due to the students of the Union Christian College for snatching 2500 odd souls from the fate of a watery grave.

Nor was it all. They sheltered these diverse people and shared pot-luck with them. Under the shadow of this great calamity people forgot their immemorial caste distinctions and lived together like the brothers and sisters that they really were. Disaster seems to be the only effective cement to unify divergent peoples. Well, the Union Christian College has woven a purple patch across its infant existence.

To continue. A little lower still are the vast paddy and sugar-cane fields of rich Alengad. When, a couple of days ago, I was travelling in this district I found the whole country more or less under water and that at a time when the flood had sunk 10 to 12 feet from its original height. A rich gentleman of this place told me that all his cows, about twenty or so, died and his people saved themselves by the skin of their teeth although they lived in a *pukka* two-storied house. The whole of this rich district was turned into a watery desert by the riotous elements.

AMONG THE WATERS.

Last but not least on the banks of the Periyar is the low-lying delta of Parur with its cocoanut-bearing neighbourhood so thickly indented by arms of the sea and the river. No place in Travancore has been so heavily hit by the flood as this unfortunate locality. Its people are extremely industrious, but the fates are proverbially blind and often lay about them with indiscriminate fury. The treacherous river stole a march over these people and it is a miracle that it was able to take only a slight toll in human life. The police inspector of the place did brave deeds to save his kind from the cold clutches of the insane element. This gentleman jokingly told me that one of his men deserved a V. C. for plunging into the stream sweeping along in sublime majesty to save a helpless cow crying in the agonies of an imminent death. He had done like that several times before to save human beings, but nobody suspected that his regard for life was so Jain-like and that his quick emotions were such an engine of heroism.

On a dark night, when the waters were holding their high revel of destruction, news reached the inspector that a solitary individual was in an isolated house amidst the infuriated arms of the river. Not for a thousand pounds would any ordinary mortal dare row across to rescue him. He did. Huge uprooted trees, elephants, houses,

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and dead bodies whirled in the crashing river. I saw this unknown hero earning his half a loaf, one among a much maligned and often unscrupulous fraternity. He is a constable. But the inspector never told me that the constable was but his henchman in this risky enterprise.

During my recent tour in these parts I came to a stricken village now unspeakably destitute. Most of its hamlets were under water and the few that were not were literally crammed with hungry, shivering crowds. I felt a catch at my heart-strings at the sight of these people. One of these houses contained a well-to-do Christian family of ten members in the "antediluvian" days. Only two have outlived the deluge. One of the two "survivals" is a bright young boy of just nine summers and the other a brawny young man in the early thirties. On the ominous night of the 16th July when the swollen river began to swoop upon the houses, this ill-fated family got into a canoe in search of high ground. The river whirled down with giant force. The canoe with its "doomed" load was caught in the current and all but the two were drowned. The helpless boy floated down for about two miles and bumped against the crown of a cocoanut-tree where he passed the dreary night. Next morning a chance boat came along and picked him up. And so he lives to-day. The child's



The S. M. V. School.

version is slightly different. He came to me with his crystal face and told me that he was borne above the waters by a pair of invisible hands and that he slept soundly on the top of the tree under the impression that it was his own house. Those who believe in God may fortify their faith by "divine interventions" such as these. Now the only happy individual in that weird village is this innocent boy, the favoured of God.

It is time that I added a word why I went to these places. I belonged to a relief party organised by the headmaster of the S. M. V. School, Trivandrum, the premier house of secondary education in the state. The boys of this school, besides pooling their mite, which was not small, into a fund started by this talented and public-spirited schoolmaster, organised themselves into parties and went into the suburbs of Trivandrum begging from door to door to swell their School Flood Relief Collections. Some of them walked a hundred miles in two days going from house to house accepting whatever was given and however small in quantity with smiling gratitude. The writer was one of these mendicants and his experience in this line showed him the other side of the shield regarding the beggar problem. *It is hard to beg even for such a noble cause.* Purse-strings seldom relax at the touch of importunity. The poor, however, are easily

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moved. In one place the schoolboys' graphic description of the flood moved a number of fishwives to tears so much so they filled in a little while a little basket with little coppers. *A day labourer gave a rupee and that was all his wealth in cash.* Another argued and heckled and talked airily for quite a long while at the end of which he shelled out a magnanimous number of coins amounting to two annas! In this manner a large collection was made in kind and in cash.

Having thus scraped together the 'sinews of war,' this great headmaster organised four relief parties consisting of pupils and teachers to do work in four different parts of the country. He selected exactly those places which on account of their inaccessibility or inhospitableness were likely to be left out in ordinary relief work. One party, for example, went up the Pampa in central Travancore to relieve the acute distress in its upper reaches. To get there was really a bit of an up-hill work. Finding it absolutely impossible to row up the river, they had nothing for it but to walk the whole distance of about 40 miles along a most difficult route zigzagging through a rugged and hilly country. The party that proceeded to Kuttanad on the coast had practically to spend days and nights on end in little canoes in a vast stretch of watery desert. We ourselves had a few providential escapes in the Periyar. But the

spirit of service was in us and difficulty or danger but added zest to it. Some of us had an exciting time of it indeed.

'The little beasts' of Travancore 'Harrows' are a spirited folk. They often give no end of trouble to their teachers, and are equal to all occasions. Most of them grow into excellent men. But good material often suffers at the hands of bad workmen and there is the danger that those lovable, little beasts, may make beasts of themselves both now and in after life. But social service like the one herein described will work on them like alchemy and transmute them into gold. Is there better education than what is to be had from saving life and making less the misery of our kind, from being united and unselfish in the endeavour to alleviate suffering?

We got a taste of such education among the rough waters that we roamed in search of service. From such schooling spring true citizens, and such opportunity comes not infrequently to the hopeful children of Travancore, for this is a country of fine days for young ducks and the wind bloweth where it listeth. Then the rivers swell and the waters rise and suffering and famine stalk through the land.

II. The Maharaja's Zoo.

"It was a very great pleasure to visit this charming spot and to see the gardens admirably kept and the animals evidently well cared for."

"The public of Travancore are indeed fortunate in having this wonderful spot for instruction and recreation."

LORD WELLINGTON.

Indeed the spot is wonderful no less than charming. An enthralling Eden in this picturesque capital of pretty Travancore. The Zoo is the beauty-spot of the garden city—the fairy city basking in dreamy repose.

The Trivandrum Public Gardens within which is also the Museum is one of the best in all India. Lying away, as they do, from the bustle of life, on a rising, undulating stretch of land, hushed beneath the peace and luxuriance of tropical vegetation, the gardens afford a restful retreat at once exhilarating and educative to those who stand in need of an escape, if only for an hour, from the grinding toil and worry of this work-a-day world. This is the abode of peace and possibly of pain—think of our dumb brethren here contentedly bearing the heavy yoke of imprisoned liberty! Sweet, soothing is the thrill that one feels in the becalmed atmosphere of the Public Gardens so magically charged with the hypnotic electricity of nature. You must go there to



The Museum Entrance.

THE MAHARAJA'S ZOO.

get the thrill. You approach the gardens by a broad metalled road thronged with happy people. Go forward. The gardens invite you. **DRIVE SLOWLY.** The architectural arch with this bland commandment lets you in. This is the spot!

Strangely enough, the first thing that interests you within the Zoo is its superintendent. For, besides being an ubiquitous personality among its inspiring alcoves and romantic valleys, he carries about him the attraction of a strange, almost weird and lovely friendship of which he is the principal partner. The other members of this interesting intimacy are an amiable lady (his wife), an amiable lion (his favourite 'cub') and an amiable bitch which suckled the cub with true maternal love. Quite a happy family playing pranks with one another,—and 'Mennie' knows that the love and care of a university man are a sufficient compensation for the loss of a precarious monarchy in the forests. If these wayside allurements do not, however, engage you, do not pretend they do, but walk on and see.

There, that quaint architecture standing on an eminence, surrounded by beds of cannas, dahlias and rosaries of choice colours with a fountain in front of it sparkling showers in a ceaseless trill of delight, there, that building, a concrete mass of romance in art, is the

Museum. Go straight in. The exhibits set your imagination on edge and captivate your eyes. What an enchanting assortment! Here, forming, as it were, the archway to the southern entrance, are the jaw-bones of a fin-whale, each measuring 20 feet in length. Do not contemplate the size of this monstrous creature lest you should become nervous about the sea. The reptile gallery will arrest your attention and teach you in a pleasant half-hour a host of things and that without your knowing it. You have here every variety of marine fauna arranged artistically and most life-like. The terror-striking model of a crocodile harpooned in the Cochin backwaters will convince you that even a backwater journey may not be all smooth-sailing. Further there are some very curious things in this delightful gallery—flying fish and walking fish that occasionally permit themselves the pleasure of a change when swimming weighs down on them with the burden of monotony. The gallery of extinct mammals and birds will make you think twice before you dismiss the Arabian Nights, the stories from the Ramayana and other treasures of ancient literature as fictitious and incredible. Was Jadayu, the flower of avain chivalry, who fought the redoubtable Ravana hieing away with Sita, the ideal wife—was Jadayu only a find in an odd recess of a wonderful imagination? Contemplate this extinct race of giants before you rush to

THE MAHARAJA'S ZOO.

announce your answer. But the Museum will not give much rein to your mind. It won't, in fact, allow you to indulge your metaphysical moods. For, if you are a botanist which is as likely as not, the herbarium of over 600 specimens mocks at your vaunted knowledge and challenges you for a trial of strength. Perhaps you are an ethnologist. Then too there is no escape for you. Those life-size models of primitive humanity suggest posers which will tax your scholarship for a pretty little while. Probably you are an archæologist and as such claim immunity from poethers. But no, you have enough to engage your adept eyes. Temples, houses, Buddha images, the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, curious coffins and other relics of a pre-historic age which the light of research has not yet penetrated,—with all these and more you cannot say you haven't enough to exercise your interest. But time is fleeting and there is much more to see and learn. Do go along, therefore. Look at this avian and mammal gallery. Do not start. The panther won't spring on you and eat you up. All these birds and animals appear so realistic! The attempt to exhibit them amidst their natural surroundings as life-like as possible has proved a splendid success and you stand before this absorbing theatre half in awe, half in admiration.

But the best is yet to be. To get it you must ascend one of the four museum towers. The way up is narrow but not straight. The steps are somewhat slippery. The passage is dark. But the curator ensures your safe-conduct and his word is absolute law in these towers. After a number of windings and turns you come to the top. Open your eyes and see. This is the enchanted kingdom of beauty! Enclosed within an amphitheatre of greenish hills rising one behind the other is a bewitching expanse of wavy, variegated carpet of indescribable freshness and charm. When the prying eyes of inquisitive mankind are closed in sleep, then perchance that elusive queen whom we call Nature comes here to swing on this rocking seat attended by her numerous elfins who watch over the mysteries of her court with unremitting vigil. Would some power evaporate the body away so might we mingle in the jubilee and charm rising, falling and merging in the distant horizon before us! The gardens beneath you are but a woof in this rolling captivation of a rippling web.

Leaving the the Musuem by the northern gate you stand speechless, with admiration at the panoramic beauty dancing just in front of you. Here is another fountain, the fountain of fragrance whose cool, exhilarating waters wafted on the wings of a welcome wind come to touch you with their message of peace and joy. A whole Eden



The Museum Buildings.

THE MAHARAJA'S ZOO.

of multi-coloured flowers eagerly bathes you in its innocent, sweet-smelling smiles. Thus purified and rejuvenated, you enter the 'forest' within which dwell a goodly number of our kin doing penance like the venerable sages of old and patiently dree their weird. This is the 'jungleman' of the Malays, one of those present-day giants, accounts of thrilling encounters with whom you often read in the newspapers. He is quite sane, be assured, and is busy acquiring merit in sack-cloth and ashes.

From another part of the gardens are heard the thunderous roars of the king of the forest. His cracked voice, somewhat care-laden, is the pensive cry of fallen majesty. Yet he looks the kaiser that he had been and his flowing mane and agile iron-build are indisputable emblems of royalty by divine right. In the case of the lion kingship in shackles is still kingship in some sort. If you are a naturalist, you can spend days on end going about from house to house with your interest wide agape, observing and accumulating priceless facts of animal life for future study. Look at the twin leopard cubs of unlike colours. The superintendent tells you that the black one takes after its grandfather who was an out and out black panther. Shade of Mendel, the thing occurs even here! Then there are these other smaller mammals. Do not try to pass them

by. They are past masters in the art of levying a heavy toll on your time without rousing your resentment.

The birds and the trees, the aquarium and the lake are a spring of perfect joy. You fancy that you are actually amidst the romantic scenes of which you read in the "Sakuntala." This is an enchanted spot and you stand amidst a spray of charm. I would fain leave you where you are. The very birds stand like strange statues as though charmed by the surrounding spell. The waters of the lake are likewise still. Even the vagabond winds dare not enter this abode of peace. Stand here and melt away into the glorious bliss of peace, beauty and joy.

12. Village Life in Travancore.

Rural Travancore is the real Travancore. Wealth and want compete with each other for sovereignty in the town. In the village peace and happiness consort with each other for the contentment of man.

Noisy traffic rends the town. In the village tranquillity reigns. In the town people buy and sell. In the village the peasants plough and harrow. The village is the bee-hive where the honey is made. Those busy bees drink little of it themselves. Lost in their labours



Tillers of the Soil.

VILLAGE LIFE IN TRAVANCORE.

those bees allow the produce to meander unwarily at large. Then the hungry town prowling for prey springs upon the timid stream and sucks it dry. Thus the fittest do the work and the hungry unfittest eat the fruit.

In the village is the simple, in the town the gilded, life. The village is the voice of real simplicity. Among the polite society of the town the howling of an unquenchable thirst assails your ears.

The town is a constant growl, a chronic complaint. The village is a cadence humming in cool shades, in quiet arbour. The one is a haunting dream, the other a harsh reality.

The town vainly seeks the primrose path. It vainly tricks itself out in glittering apparel and rides rolls-royce. These outward shows of happiness only increase its discontent. The more it has, the more it wants. The village knows no hankerings; neither does it know any lack of happiness.

So the village is the glory of Travancore. The town is the creature of modern times. The village is her true heritage.

The bird poising itself in mid-air sees the village, a cluster of homes that stud a beautiful stretch of land. Round the cornfields smile. The cattle graze upon the

GLIMPSES OF TRAVANCORE.

green sward. Old men and women go round the temple with fervent prayers on their lips while the children romp outside. An idyllic charm envelops the spot. The little bird sails over it drinking in the scene. Then it perches on a branch of the mango tree and pours down a cascade of carol. The tree is loaded with fruit and as the wind swings its branches the ripe mangoes rain down in showers upon the ground. The children come running in glee and gather the mangoes. Then it is that the little bird flutes its sweetest songs and the cascade swells. It is the image of paradise and in that temple dwells God.

People live cheek by jowl in the village. The scattered homesteads are tied together with amity and concord. Quarrels are rare and when they happen they deepen the love that binds the village-folk together. In the pure air and pellucid sunshine of the village quarrels yield cordiality and good cometh out of evil. In the village the Hindu and the Christian vie with each other in loving tolerance. The Muhammadan tends the cow and trills Hindu airs. In the village the true God dwells in temple and church and mosque. The villager knows it and will not take God's name in vain. If there is not much acquired knowledge in the village, there is that amplitude of commonsense which alone can invest human relations with abiding harmony. The village

VILLAGE LIFE IN TRAVANCORE.

atmosphere warbles lessons that the schools do not know.

The village priest does not prate about philosophy, but he is fervent in prayer and firm of faith. He believes, he sees, and he spreads the faith in which he lives. Thus he fulfils his allotted task and when the time comes, leaves the village better than he finds it.

The village schoolmaster does equal service. If he does not spare the cane he does not also spoil the children. He gives them current coin and they put it to use in their daily life. He teaches them to read the stars and tell the fortunes of men. He teaches them to measure the coming monsoon and estimate the next harvest. He teaches them, too, reading and ciphering. He teaches them all that they need ever know.

But this excellent type of schoolmaster is now almost gone out. Those ubiquitous vernacular schools have penetrated even the most remote village. Everywhere the cackling of a new education is heard. The old-world schoolmaster who not long since used to rule the roast in the village is hushed. An army of teachers is carrying on a valiant fight against the hydra-headed monster of ignorance. Soon that ignorance will be extinguished, but it is more than doubtful if wisdom would come in its wake. For wisdom, one must go to that vanished figure the village schoolmaster.

GLIMPSES OF TRAVANCORE.

My village schoolmaster was both old and blind ; but he was wise. He always saw us with the eye of wisdom. These physical eyes rarely see the good in men. Our schoolmaster saw only the gold in us and he nurtured these qualities that go to make such gold with parental love. So his memory is green even to-day in the village. In the village school that clash of wills which often strews the modern class-room with the wrecks of endeavour never arose. The primitive pedagogy bore abiding result.

The village physician is no less important than the village schoolmaster. Happily he is still a living functionary. His knowledge of herbs is immense. His belief in himself is equally immense and with these two acquisitions he works wonders. The villager trusts to him the care of his body, and his health seldom suffers or if it suffers, it does not suffer long. The physician quickly cures him with his simple herbs. It is true that western pharmacopœia is now-a-days nothing new in the village but the age-old leech is still the king. That heavy lore-loaded with drugs and the obiter dicta of a thousand scientific doctors bends its knees before the wise village physician. The villager still trusts to him the care of his body. If he pays court to the new arrival and suffers thereby, he will have himself to thank. But his

VILLAGE LIFE IN TRAVANCORE.

innate commonsense may be trusted to save him from that fate for many years to come.

There is, however, a real threat of danger to the village physician. It proceeds from one who claims to be his kith and kin. That is the up-to-date Ayurvedic physician. He often makes a boast of the doubtful fact that he is a revised edition of his brother in the village. And 'suing the action to the word' he bottles his tinctures and writes his prescriptions upon paper of the correct size. Worst of all he often has a smattering of European medicine. Unless the village physician is vigilant his so-called 'younger brother' will 'pill' him and usurp his place.

The village is a priceless heritage. It is the pride of Travancore. It is the acme of human harmony. The village is the scene of human happiness. In the pride of the morning the village appears like a vision, a dream half revealed. You yearn after it. The cooing echoes that shake the village air with soft melody come to you like a voice from the land of bliss. This is the earthly paradise and from the inmost recesses of your heart longings bend thitherwards. The village is not merely an invitingly irregular assemblage of happy homes. It is also a message to those who are up to the eyes in the hurly-burly of towns. It is the message of peace.

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A thousand smiling villages line the Periyar. The majestic river sweeps onward to the sea. It is the silent pilgrimage of Father Time to the fluid waste of eternity. The villagers adorn the path of the ancient pilgrim with willing toil and loving deeds. Children clamber up the knees of the old man, and women burn incense to him in the sanctum of the family.

Here is a village basking in the brackish breeze of the backwater. Above, a sea of cocoanut leaves rustles. Beneath the emerald shade so suggestive of the sombre hues of life men work and women cook and children play. The sun pierces the shadows and the variegated pot assumes the aspect of a living romance. It is still the early hours of the morn and everything is fresh and young. A long day yet stretches its mingled prospects before them. This microcosmic village is the true meaning of the world.

A scattered village sprawls among these hills. The town lies twenty miles away and the path to it is devious. But the few valiant villagers scatter like ants the fruits of industry upon the hill-sides and a summer gleam spreads its fitful light over them. That devious road therefore becomes the hungry hand of the town plunging its rapacious fingers into the scene. Yet those ants will continue to ply their work and sow fruitful fertility among the inhospitable hills.

VILLAGE LIFE IN TRAVANCORE.

Here is a village on the roadside. Omnibuses and eight-seaters rush madly back and forth. Those impossible horns smother its harmony. Clouds of dust spring upon its face. But the hand-loom and the spinning wheel continue to warble the meaning of work, to weave the fabric of human happiness.

On the edge of the sea this village squats. It looks like a dot upon the sands of time. The howling surf beats upon the shore. Away the white horses dance their weird and phantom delights. But that tiny dot is charged with heroic elements. These come out and plunge into the terrible sea to gather the pearls. Looking at the scene the diffident, doubting ones take heart and re-edify hopes. It is the spirit of man rising superior to its surroundings.

Thus a procession of varied villages fills the restful country of Travancore. The scent of tranquil effort marks the path of this great procession and as the sun sinks down underneath the horizon a kaleidoscopic tumult of colours wafts its dream-like fancies upon the land. Presently the mantle of darkness falls upon it. Then work ceases and men sleep the sleep of the happy and the innocent. At this hour the pen too drops from the hand and the slumber-laden mind shuts its tired eyes.

13. The Backwaters.

Travancore is famed for its backwaters. They are peculiarly characteristic of this pristine land. Their utility is exceedingly great; their beauty is simply unsurpassable.

The backwaters provide safe and easy waterways in the major part of the state. It is possible to travel from Trivandrum to the northernmost limit of the state by them, a distance of about 150 miles. A large volume of traffic is borne upon their breasts. The 'iron horse' was much too slow to come to Travancore and even to-day it is not greatly in evidence. In Travancore the waterways still reign supreme.

It is true that from Shencottah on the other side of the Ghats a railway enters the country, and after labouring among the hills for a considerable time reaches Quilon completely exhausted whence it starts afresh to Trivandrum. Thus the South-Indian network reaches out a lone branch to this city among the gardens. But this is a strange and hard strand in a fabric of silken yarns. These latter are the waterways, so mild in appearance and so amenable to the wishes of man. The iron road, that strange and hard strand, too stiff and mechanical to kowtow to human whims, seems to grip the state like a chain and to drag it to the vortex of modern



A Lake View.

THE BACKWATERS.

times. Therefore the traditional tranquillity of Travancore is considerably perturbed; still the backwaters remain to this day unchanged and unchanging. They remain to this day the shiny scarfs of beauty that they have been through the centuries.

These sheets of quiet waters give Travancore the piquant beauty of a variant landscape. The hills rear their wooded heads in calm majesty. The waters seem to lave their very footholds in a ceaseless ripple of soft melody.

Geographically Travancore can be divided into two sections—the highlands over which spread the greenish offshoots of the Ghats and the lowlands across which intersect the bluish offshoots of the sea. While the former are wrapped in luxuriant vegetation, the latter are hedged in with promiscuous clusters of coconut trees as far as the eye can see. These innumerable groves that incline with the burden of their excessive productivity seem to literally scramble for the mild backwaters. So thickly they huddle on their shores!

The following is roughly the sequence of things in Travancore.

The backwaters bear the coconut trees. The coconut trees bear the coconuts. The coconuts cross the the seas and send back the 'sinews' of prosperity of which Travancore is proud.

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Somebody, as I pointed out in the introduction, has said that Travancore is the finest country in India. Even supposing that the verdict was made under the compulsion of a sudden sentimentalism it does not seem to lack that tincture of truth which gives swift currency to falsehoods. For in Travancore are the backwaters which so happily combine idyllic picturesqueness with brisk utility. They ripple by day and twinkle by night. Country crafts without number softly unroll on their quiet careers. Occasionally a steam or a motor boat whisks across with its precious load of passengers. The bracing breeze shakes the air. The disturbed waters settle down to quiet again. Shoals of fish emerge to the surface with their little mouths wide open, wondering wondering. The coconut trees that lean over the lake peer at the flashing boat in mute surprise. Perhaps a squall may spring up and make the waters dance. But brief will be that hour and repose will come again. And when the moon shines like a frozen flame in a speckled sky, the backwaters seem to be decked in robes of star-streaked with the rays of the sun.

Is Travancore after all the finest country in India? Moreover these backwaters are a source of nameless delight to the slow traveller. You can stretch yourself at full length in the classical canoe and dream away the long hours. The little vessel glides leisurely. The pole

THE BACKWATERS.

with which the canoe is propelled rise and fall making an occasional gurgle and splash. If you are awake you cock your ears to catch these welcome sounds in this slumbering sea on which you are afloat. The boat glides; the sounds return; the poles rise and fall. Perhaps, if you have luck, one of the two men who ply these poles may break into a song which seems like a string of sound upon a guitar of silence. This is a dream-world from which haste and hurry have been banished, where things swing upon perfect equipoise, where the earth has achieved equanimity. Here the pendulum of the universe oscillates with an impassive, inscrutable purpose. You cannot penetrate the veil. You can look upon the scene and dream away the long and lonely hours.

The slanting rays of the morning sun sprinkle their shimmering pearls upon the rippling lake. The air is fresh and still. But a bewitching breeze approaches you with stealthy footsteps and sprays upon you its delicious perfume. At such a time even the heaviest melancholy is shamed and hies away and the rescued heart rejoices. You melt and merge into the surrounding charm.

The globe-girdlers who attempt to bind mother earth with a track of steaming hurry, who rush through space with almighty velocity may, if compelled to travel in the

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canoe, feel like the Saturn plucked from its orbit and put into a palanquin to traverse the immense distances of the universe. The canoe will not yield its fascination to these restless spirits raving like mad and revelling in a new knowledge. If you have no placid frame of mind, the patience to see slowly and enjoy quietly, you had better leave the backwaters to those who have and seek your asylum in the tumults and tempests of the age. The ethereal air of these inland, little 'seas' is for the serene soul. Here is no fear, hunger or anxiety.

Time upon the backwaters glides like the canoe glides. It steals slowly away and seems to stand still. The beautiful morning comes and never goes. It waits on you murmuring its charms. You can listen to the soft strains and become one with the singer. The noon is a silver-sheet. It glistens. The air is still again. Away the coconut trees slumber and you too may drop asleep and merge into the scene. In the evening the setting sun rains golden rays upon the spot and you fancy that you are in the heart of wonderland. You plunge into the throng of colours and forget your self for a while.

Thus the canoe makes its progress slow and soft through a eycle of changing joys. Happily the journey will be long and the pace is slow. You forget that you have a destination to reach. You have not perhaps started and you will not easily reach; you simply

VARKALAY BY THE SEA.

meander among the scenes. If you travel in a canoe you cease to travel but see all the time. The canoe is the most wonderful thing to travel in. It is an old-world ark upon a sea of Odysseys of which the invisible king is the mind.

14. Varkalay by the Sea.

By the side of one of the backwaters lies Varkalay, the seaside resort of Travancore. It is the high edge of an undulating headland some twenty miles north of Travandrum. It has a wonderfully bracing air. But the sea is its glory.

Some days ago I visited Varkalay. It was sundown. The sea shone a sheet of silvery sheen. Beyond it was the horizon loaded with a tawny mass of stolid clouds heaped one upon another like giant peaks of snow.

I saw the wonderful procession of the clouds at the foot of the sky on the serene sea. Nervous man whirling like a giddy top heeds not the lesson of the clouds marching with invisible steps—the very idealization of quiet work.

Indeed the book of philosophy lay open before me, and if I was tempted to read the headline of a chapter or two, pardon me, kind reader.

But more glorious than Nature's bookshelf was the magic scene that was lying unfurled before me. The

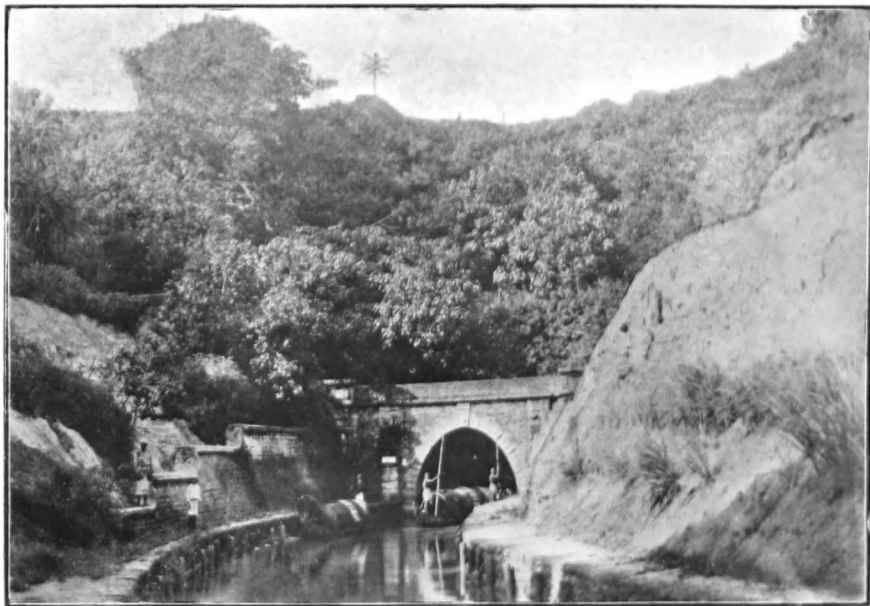
GLIMPSES OF TRAVANCORE.

heady Arabian Sea looked here like a sane sheet of water. It gently lapped upon the foot of the huge cliffs overhanging the sea with a gaunt suggestion of hostility.

With extreme trepidation the sea gently approaches the land lured by its beauty while the cliffs overhead with their hoary hoods appear to hiss at it in high dudgeon.

The throbbing waters flap their folds far below—more than a hundred and fifty feet. The precipitous cliffs stand sentinel to mother earth against the amorous sea-god. I sit on this barrow. A false thought or an unwary step, and I would plunge headlong on the rocks. The deepening gloom is gathering round me. What thoughts may lurk under the darkness, who knows? I must seek shelter in a safer place.

The next morning I went to the foot of the cliffs and walked away the whole bright morning alongside of it by the edge of the sea with the crumbling laterite and ochre of varied hues above my head. When my 'understandings' were quite exhausted, I plunged into the brine to search the sands for the hidden stores of the strength of the sea. Vain search, you think. But the sea put a little of its strength into my limbs although I could not see where the hidden stores were. It was enough for me. At last I emerged from the sea and edging:



A View of Varkala.

VARKALAY BY THE SEA.

to the overhanging wall sat under the mineral waters perpetually spurting out from it for the delectation and purification of whomsoever listeth to go thither. These salubrious springs are locally known as *Papanasam* or the *destruction of sin* and many a pilgrim goes satisfied after a prolonged bath under them. Sceptical people like me cannot shake off the burden of their sins so easily.

The next place of my visit was the temple, a couple of furlongs from the springs. A quiet neat place where everything looks holy. Many consider the shrine almost as sacred as Gaya and pilgrims from all parts of India resort to it. If it is believed, as they say, that, in days of yore, Brahma performed a great *Yagam* (sacrifice) here and that the strata of lignite and the mineral waters are the results thereof, there is ample warrant for the belief in the quiet repose and hallowed appearance of even present-day Varkalay where rattan-works, railway and coffee-clubs are leading a determined assault on the *sanctity* of the place. The workaday world will get the better of it no doubt.

I also visited the canals that cut through the Varkalay cliffs and connect Trivandrum with the backwaters of Central Travancore. The canoes propelled by the primitive poles quietly wend their way through the underground waterways. The sea rises and falls just a

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few yards to the west. Far above along the surface of the headland the grimy drivers make the engines puff furiously and whirl along with their long lines of bogie-cars and waggons. The passengers stick their heads out to catch a glimpse of the magic scenery. Here and there is an overbridge along which a solitary carter drives his heavily loaded vehicle. This is a place where many arms of civilization meet.

When Varkalay gets sufficiently well-known, its holy repose will certainly be broken by the influx of tourists and holiday-makers.

But the time for it is not yet. You can still have Varkalay all to yourself if you like. And to see the beauty of this place in blossom, you must stand on any little prominence on the headland and look. You will find spread out before you a most enticing expanse of coconut trees whose bound the eye cannot reach. These clustered columns of the palm outstrip your ken and lose themselves in the far haze.

Indeed the most remarkable topographical feature of Travancore is the coconut tree. The coconut tree is the king of the palm trees because it is the greatest, being the servant of all. This regal palm with its circular crown of rustling fronds and clustering fruits has a use for everybody, and everything in it is useful. Verily

is it an incarnation of usefulness in the shape of an unpretending palm. It grew in an age of pure philanthropy and continues to adorn and enrich the East with especial solicitude. The industrialized West enslaved to competition and to the money-god is perhaps too unromantic and ugly a place for the beautiful, benevolent coconut tree. It shrivels in an atmosphere of jealousy and withers amidst armaments, hypocrisies and the inhumanities of war. It thrives best in the midst of peace and goodwill with the breeze of love gently shaking its long, slender leaves. That is why it is so plentiful in pretty Travancore.

The following, I ween, is the origin of the coconut-tree. Would you believe it ?

When Parasurama of old reclaimed Kerala (Malabar) from the fluid waste of the Arabian Sea, Varuna the sea-god in great distress fell at his feet begging him to let him have at least a place here and there in the reclaimed area. Taking pity on the poor king, the puissant priest granted him his wish, and the ocean cuts the land by many a long, winding, shallow inlet to this day. When the sea became salt (through the inadvertence, it is said, of a certain sailor who to save his good ship threw overboard a magic mill which started making huge quantities of salt at his bidding but deigned

not to stop making it at his bidding) these intersections commonly called backwaters became brackish. So the canoe-wallahs who plied their little boats over these sparkling patches of water set up a cry for drinking water. Mother earth heard the cry and said, "Ye my children, ye shall have water to drink. And in a little while, hey presto! on the banks of these undrinkable backwaters grew the coconut trees with their bunches of tender nuts filled with the most delicious beverage. And the mother said to the thirsting ones, "Behold the tender nuts whereof ye may drink deep and slake your thirst." The brackish backwaters hung their heads in shame and for very shame, to this day, they remain silent and still, never flying into foaming tempers or swelling into heaving waves. Little fish, like arrows of remorse, cleave the repentant lakes and rivers roaming about in search of chivalry hurry down to their aid and purge them of the offending salt from time to time.

This is the coconut tree, the tree of true philanthropy!

15. The Nambudiris.

In the foregoing description of the Murajapam we made mention of two peoples, the Nambudiris and the *Paradesi* Brahmins. Both are interesting and deserve separate treatment.

THE NAMBUDIRI.

First the Nambudiris. They are special to Kerala of which Travancore forms a large part. They are somewhat exclusive in their habits and unwilling, justly unwilling, to give up their prized patrimony of high sacerdotal position. You must excuse their exclusiveness, seeing that it is only an endeavour, laudable endeavour, to conserve their heritage. They still lead the simple life of their forefathers and are, indeed, the repository of a 'good old time' in this part of India. According to tradition they are the "descendants of a colony of 64 villages brought down by the renowned sage and warrior Sri Parasurama from the plain of Kurukshetra." The Nambudiris, no doubt, are not undeserving of even a celestial original home and a very god for leader in their colonizing peregrinations.

The Nambudiris, moreover, are genuine Vedic Brahmins. Did they ever attempt to make it appear that all the excellences were their birthright, it was because such was the fact, the indubitable fact. Roam the whole of India over, you cannot find the like of them in point of gentleness and simplicity, unbounded benevolence, sincere piety and innocence enthralling. The Nambudiris are pure gold in a world where there is hardly any elbow-room for anything but compounds, elemental beings in an age of over-abundant alloys.

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Indeed the average Nambudiri is a hale, hearty, honest fellow in a world where such qualities are now perhaps at a discount. His simplicity is enough to put to shame any panjandrum who glories in his pomposness. Intelligent and unspotted, contented and canny, amiable and open-faced, the Nambudiri is perhaps the only sinless soul among a sightless mankind groping in moral lightlessness. In the background of a cloudy earth he stands a column of light over which the shadows are fast falling.

The fountain of faith still sprinkles over him its holy waters. The Nambudiri is an early riser, a bather before sunrise, a temple-goer, and a strict two-mealer except on such rare occasions like the Murajapam. Therefore he is no seeker after health or a yearner for peace. These come to him unsought and keep him perpetual company. He is the longest-lived and healthiest Indian in this age of scientific health culture.

The longevity of the Nambudiri springs from his habit of taking his meals slowly and with gusto. He never bolts his food, come what may. If he does not live to eat, neither does he eat to live. With him eating is its own reward. To eat with an end will be to degrade a decree of Providence.

In the philosophic atmosphere of India, mirth, they say, has not a congenial home to thrive. But the Nambudiri is

THE NAMBU DIRI.

a prince among the children of mirth. His jovial countenance is catching. Seldom is laughter so hearty as when the Nambudiris foregather to pray and eat. Their temples are consecrated by the purifying spatter of their mirth and their food is served, as it were, on plates of pleasant feelings. That is the reason why the Nambudiri's food is rarely devitaminized although it usually consists of a variety of highly seasoned dishes. The ability to laugh covers most of his lapses.

Rarely, if at all, is the Nambudiri a politician. As a fact he does not care a farthing who rules the country or how it is ruled. He is too pure to have a finger in the pie. He prefers to live away from alarms and excursions. But latterly he has, it is bruited, developed certain political proclivities. This is perhaps a fib, for the Nambudiri is too precious for the paltry impermanences of the political world.

Writes Mr. Fawcett in the Madras Museum Bulletins:—"A peace-loving people, and devoted to their religion, the Nambudiris are beyond doubt. Long may they remain as they are, untouched by what we hear called 'progress', but which is really *change*—for better or worse, who knows? Long may they be what they are, the only undisturbed vestiges of Vedic Brahminism."

But as man proposes and God disposes, the Nambudiris are *progressing, changing*.

**16. The *Pattar* or the *Paradesi* Brahmin
in Travancore.**

'*Pattar*' is a term of reproach and often of insult. Occasionally it takes on a virtue and becomes an epithet of hated endearment. But although it is subject to changes in its implications it always denotes the same people. The *Pattar* is the Tamil Brahmin of Kerala.

There is a large number of *Pattars*, the so-called *Paradesi* or foreign Brahmins in Travancore. Most of them are as good sons of the soil as any in the state. Some are recent settlers. A few are merely birds of passage. But everyone of them is a *Pattar*. It is simply impossible to escape the name.

The *Pattar* is a 'foreigner' in spite of his often being a native of the first water. He cannot shake off the stigma, let him move heaven and earth. He is a foreigner in his own house, poor thing. But he may thank himself for that. At any rate he has his share of the blame which is not small. He lives in Rome unlike a Roman. He speaks Tamil—a foreign tongue. He wears a back-tuft. His wife is expensively dressed in coloured fabrics. He is addicted to speaking Malayalam with a strong admixture of Tamil accent. Often he wears a *dhoti* instead of the Malabar *mundu* (cloth $4\frac{1}{2}$ by 3 cubits or so) which has always been the vogue in Kerala. He i

a good eater and often eats his head off. These things are quite outlandish and the *Pattar* is punished for his distinction by the curse of perpetual foreignism. His native land is nowhere and his patriotism is doomed to eternal inertia.

Of late the term *Pattar* has considerably extended its denotation. In Travancore it now includes all sorts and conditions of Brahmins except the Nambudiris most of whom, as we have seen, still dwell in an extended age of the Upanishads. It is the sacred thread plus the partaking of the loaves and fishes that give the *Pattar* its implied meanings.

Now let us look at the person up and down some what minutely. This individual whom one frequently sees in the forefront of most things is an interesting handiwork of centuries. He has latterly been raised to bad pre-eminence of a sort, but whether he deserves the elevation is more than one can say. Many credit him with no end of cleverness, cunning and selfishness which for the unaided eye is difficult to see among his possessions. Some consider him the pet of Genius which however, seems rarely to do him any favour. In short, he is a man, take him for all in all, subject to the fluctuations of the blood and the fancies of the flesh. He too has a framework of obstinate bones.

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The *Pattar* is usually orthodox. Progressive in politics and retrogressive in religion, he often yet appears to be unreligious and illiberal. He will not dig up his roots from the old world nor cut off his shoots from the new. He is, therefore, a contradiction and an enigma to the casual observer. While he keeps open house for the ideas of these times, he is unreasonably reluctant to abandon the crude notions of a bygone age which mar the graces of his present hospitality.

For example he is unwilling to give up child marriage which with its expensive adjuncts saps the vitals of his society, and will militantly take his stand in the sanctity of hoary custom. He will not believe its inapplicability to modern times although he knows it better than most others. He will not give up *untouchability* without a struggle although he is often the very first to declaim its unmorality in stentorian accents. In a word he is progressive and at the same time a stern enemy of progress. People therefore often call him names.

The *Pattar* is usually a highly educated man. Therefore he has the lion's share of the evils of modern education. He is accommodating and not always unwilling to smother his instinct of independence at the bidding of worldly wisdom. All is grist that comes to his mill but he is, generally speaking, not jealous of other men working.

in a similar way. If he seldom stirs without an axe to grind, seldom does he play the dog in the manger.

He is an adept in passing examinations. He always comes out top at them. Few can equal him in this matter. There is no limit to the industry of which he is capable. His is a prodigious memory. His is a sharp intelligence. No questions, however searching or out of the way, can thwart him. The Brahmins generally are a race of excellent examinees. They are born with an instinct for book-learning, and a great insight into the art of passing examinations.

The *Pattar's* besetting sin is his craze for government employment. Furthermore he is cradled in the ambition to rise high in the ladder of public service. And in promptitude and ability, in initiative and foresight, in strict adherence to duty and in untiring habit of work he is unrivalled and unassailable.

His success in service is the gift of two qualities which he owns in large measure. He is born to a large heritage of tact, and he soon adds to it the priceless acquisition of knack. In the matter of pleasing his superiors or tiding over a crisis he may well depend upon these qualities to help him. Failures and indiscretions are the exception in his service. He is an excellent subordinate. But he is inclined to do the grand when he becomes 'boss'.

Success, and particularly conspicuous success, always raises gusts of jealousy. The thing is perfectly natural, if not reasonable. For, success of whatever kind should not be made the sole right of any special class. Its tendency to run straight from father to son ought to be checked and it must be made, if possible, to scatter its fruit and stimulate all sections of the people. The one and only way to do it is to protect those born with no heritage of success against the habitually successful. Therefore keeping out the *Pattar* from the public service for a time just to give a chance for others to come up is not without justification.

Such exclusion of *Pattars* from public service for a time is good not only for those for whose sake it is primarily done but also for the *Pattars* themselves. Their talents ought not to be allowed to become the monopoly of any branch of life. These must be diffused through all of life's concerns. The Brahmin's presence is a long-felt want in business organizations and manufactories, in social reform, educational reconstruction, agriculture, mining and what-not. They must cease to be captains of government service and try to become captains of industry. They are more urgently required where the peasant drives his team than where the tax-gatherer wrings revenue out of him.

THE NAIRS.

A glorious future awaits the Brahmin if only he would jettison his century-old conservatism that clogs his steps in the path of progress. Will he come down from his immemorial habitat of ascendancy and live amidst the masses to help them and to lift them? Will he sink all considerations of personal advancement and be prepared to make suffering his badge for the sake of the depressed and down-trodden? If he does, Travancore, nay, India generally, will get to like him. Hostility towards the *Pattar* has now reached the high-water-mark in the state. It rests with him to assuage suspicions and kindle harmony. He must forget the accident of high birth if he cares either for his future or for the future of his country. He must dedicate his exceptional abilities to the service of his brethren.

17. The Nairs.

Travancore, as we have seen, lies away from the hustle of life. The hoary hills guard its tranquillity. The angry sea keeps watch on its beauty. Travancore is the restful land. It is also the loyalty-land. Here you have loyalty warranted pure, the real article. Here it springs direct from the fountain fervent and warm. Here the elemental virtue plays a whole bag of pranks. In this delightful land so effusively bathed by the balmy

breeze of the backwaters, the quality of loyalty embodied, as it were, in trees and plants seems gently to shake the air making it fragrant, and shade the earth making it romantic.

The various peoples of this land vie with one another in showing loyalty to the ruling house. The thing is a race pure and simple. The Nairs are among those in the van. One of the great fighting races of India, they have been the Kshatriyas of Malabar, martial and adventurous. These Rajputs of Kerala once romped the country in the pride of prowess, in the glory of chivalry. These soldiers of the past have in the present day become the pillars of peace, pioneers of culture and refinement, scholars, thinkers and statesmen of no small eminence. The warriors that once delighted to carry fire and sword through the smiling corn-lands of Malabar are to-day one of the most beloved and lovable sections of the people of Travancore.

If, however, the Nairs have in recent times swapped their swords for the avocations of settled life, it is not because the ebb of time has made them timid but because the powers-that-be afford them few opportunities for the exercise of their martial instincts. The people of Kerala are dowered with a high martial spirit and the Nairs enjoy a goodly share of it.



A Group of Nair Ladies.

THE NAIRS.

In the late world-conflagration many a youth from Travancore shed his blood for the cause of Empire, and the young men of the Nair caste did not flinch from the sacrifice. They cherish the memory of ancient achievements in the battle-field and they may be depended on to gird their loins when occasion requires.

These past followers of the path of war and present admirers of the arts of peace are, as has been said, one of the foremost amongst the subjects of Her Highness the Maharani Regent in the matter of robust loyalty. The Travancore Nair seldom entertains an irreverent thought about the ruler. His native intelligence and education only help to strengthen his implicit confidence in monarchy. He may wish and even agitate for representative institutions but his fervid, even exuberant, attachment to the royal house remains as firm as a rock. He may bristle up now and then against this and that but his loyalty is too deep-rooted to shake under these passing disquiets. He soon steadies down and assumes one of the incomparable moods of human nature in which loyalty plays no small part.

Indeed here in Travancore all and sundry are too loyal to moot the question so often asked elsewhere, "What use are kings?". Yes, the subjects of the state almost believe in *the divine right of kings* and make royalty, if anything, a little uncomfortable by an excessive exhibition of loyalty. The Nairs give a large share of this tribute to the ancient ruling house of Travancore.

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It must be an interesting digression to sketch a few glimpses of the average Nair psychology. He is an easy-going, amiable and endearing individual. He is proud of his country and, more markedly, proud of himself. He is of the chosen people and the salt of the earth. His country is God's very own. He will stick at nothing to maintain his high estate. Sometimes he may appear to be somewhat *dévil-may-care*. That is because he is charged with the spirit of independence to the full. He rarely truckles to anybody under the sun. He seldom eats the humble pie. To conquer him or to crop his feathers is difficult. But one might earn his alliance which, beyond doubt, is inestimable.

The Nair is an amiable soul, we have said. But we have not taken the measure of his amiability yet. It is nothing short of an entertainment. It is the acme of beautiful behaviour, the apogee of personal charm. The Nair carries invincible fascination about him. Further he is hospitable to an extreme and frank to a fault. His mind has no hinterland of hidden thought. He warms to you like a brother. His candour is unclouded. His sincerity is fed by feelings that ring true, feelings that well forth fresh and glowing from the heart. He is a bit of an ethereal being, but the earthy forces gather fast and swell heavily round him. Will he stand the siege for long?

THE NAIRS.

The Nair looks like a chip of history with a tincture of true romance. He is averse to take life seriously. It is all beer and skittles to him. The rubs and worries of life seldom pother him. Its thistles do not prick him. He rides its ups and downs airily and easily. The fragrance of a happy world hangs about him. He is one of those rare birds that flit about and sing in perfect freedom.

The Nair lady is physically the cleanest and intellectually the sharpest among Indian women. Her store of mother wit is plentiful. Her physique is a pattern of perfection. Her movements are a happy blend of art and grace. Nature has lavished upon her the best of skill in creation. She is not of the pigeon-breasted, chicken-hearted sort. She is astonishingly educable. She is strong but not masculine, bold but not saucy. She can stand on her own bottom. She can even beat her male compeers. Her industry is unremitting. Her calligraphy is beyond praise. Her composition is rich with the scent of an original and virgin mind. No examiner can easily plough her. She is the type of student that any schoolmaster might sigh for. Exempt from the *purdah* and enjoying a measure of freedom rarely met with in the East, she is an unanswerable argument in favour of the complete emancipation of women all over India. She is an example of what a

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glory the fair sex can be, if only men will not kill them with their kindness or hamper them with the shackles of suspicion.

Nor is this all. For she occupies, if not the first, certainly a front seat in the world's gallery of beautiful women. Dressed in her spotlessly white garments she looks a nymph fresh from the lap of nature bedecked in her choicest hues plying her elfin tricks of conquest and of love with bewitching charm. She seems to be the very fountain of grace, a dance of very beauty. She seems to move upon the hidden springs of an inimitable art. She flits about like a fairy. Her spoken word comes embalmed in the harmony of sweet sound. She lives amidst the halo of a buoyant mind and twinkles with the shining rays of her smiling optimism. She is too good and pure for the foul fumes of industrialized life. She is too precious to be cast into the vortex of civilization.

The Nairs born of such women are the natural quarry of the four cardinal virtues and the altars of inextinguishable courage. And that is one of the many reasons why in Travancore, within the alcoves of which dwells a goodly section of the Nair caste, the brimming streams of loyalty never cease to flow fertilizing the land for a bumper harvest of prosperity and coconut tree.

18. The Pulayas.

The Pulayas are mostly a class of semi-serfs and day-labourers. They number about two lakhs in Travancore. They are people beyond the pale.

These sons of toil scatter broad-cast the fruits of their industry. And even the highest Hindu does not hesitate to gather them. But the person of the Pulaya is an unmixed aversion and is suppressed with all the holy fervour that the orthodox can muster. He must bow his knees and bend his head. He must coax the rough soil into good-humour and collect plenteous yield from it. He is the worker, the producer, the sufferer. He must toil tirelessly while others eat the bread of idleness. He must suffer and die and may not question why.

For centuries they have been living a life of enforced segregation. Therefore they remain unaffected by most movements of modern times. They possess the dubious virtue of contentment to an astonishing degree. They will have little truck with those aspirations that fill everybody's breast in these days. They are content to lead a famished life and to take their social ostracism as a part of the scheme of things. Most of them are even blind to their degradation. The few rebellious spirits among them who feel the sting of the inhumanity

of their betters often try to escape their lot by embracing Islam or Christianity but, alas, they often find that the blemish of birth is not thus to be wiped away. Not rarely does the Pulaya convert remain a Pulaya still. Unrelenting inferiority shadows his steps crossing the boundaries of religions.

Pathetic is the condition of the Pulayas. They befriend destitution. They hug over-work and ill-treatment. Yet are they human beings, mother India's own children, the brothers of those who throttle them with the iron hand of prejudice. But happily even the Pulayas are waking up. A Pulaya sits, as the representative of his class, in the Popular Assembly. The Angel of Change has waved a torch across the land and the sparks that have fallen from it will soon collect into a conflagration and many a worn thing of old must perish in the flames. So the Pulayas too will be purified and will take their place by the side of their so-called superiors. They have already begun to hold conferences and ask for their rights. This is a happy augury and from it will arise a new amelioration for the tribe.

That day is however not yet within hail. Even the sparks collect but slowly. Meanwhile the rank and file of the Pulayas continue to cling to their old habits. Their besetting sin is drink. Even the women

THE PULAYAS

are often boozy. The country toddy allures them. In it is the sum of all their enjoyment. They work the livelong day. Then they gather at the wayside tavern and the guerdon of the day's labour is dissolved in the frothy liquid. Thus they make themselves merry. The western horizon glows red. The gay evening scintillates with hilarity. Ribald jokes and wild guffaws rise and fall. But those who play at bowls must look for rubs. So the horizon grows dark. The hilarity is extinguished. The small wages have disappeared and the men and women walk with unsteady steps toward home. These huts are cold and they starve the long night.

The vile habit is terrible. The country drink plays the jackal to the fiends of hell, and those who know do little to frustrate the cunning animal. So the offerings at the altar fall thick and fast. There is no lack of tears in the land, of crocodile tears. But we cannot wean the poor Pulayas from these habits unless they are lifted from ignorance, unless the servility that binds them to-day is broken, unless the injustice that assigns them to the stables to-day is wiped out.

I have attended several of their drinking bouts and partaken of the resultant merriment. They squat on the floor in front of the "drinking-bar." Each has an earthen or coconut-shell bowl. Each has a big tapioca root or two boiled in their jackets. And the simple fare

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is seasoned with a profusion of fun and frolic so appetizing. How often are the bowls filled and emptied. The flood-tide of boisterous revelry swells and engulfs them all.

Vain would you tell them how injurious the toddy is, how it ruins the body and damns the soul. They will laugh at your ignorance and offer you a bowl to make you wise. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, they will say. They will listen to your lying theories on no account. Drink is their very life, their very vitality, and they prefer death to abstinence, suicide to the stopping of the habit, which oleaginous fact they will tell you with engaging candour. The grip of the toddy on them is firm and unrelaxing. To make them go 'dry' in the present stage of their development is next-door to impossible. A living sympathy for them is required, a compelling desire on the part of the less unfortunate among their countrymen to raise them to the surface. Now they remain submerged, and not many are the fingers that are stirred in their behalf.

The Pulaya is a contented man, one that is a mass of subservience. But he will give his ears to be allowed to drink and he is too pleased with his present lot to permit you to lift him without a struggle. People often treat him like a pestilence in the flesh and he likes them to do so. He loves to announce himself at the top

of his voice to his unwary social superiors. The mode of announcement varies from place to place. In some places it is a hoot, in others, it is a howl or simply a shout. Often it assumes the shape of a yell. But whatever be the manner of announcement the meaning is always the same. "Beware, beware, a Pulaya is in the neighbourhood; a Pulaya moves about." The Pulaya will never take you by surprise. If he is an evil creature in himself, he more than atones for it by his exemplary behaviour. He is so humble that he will not easily believe that he has the stature of man.

One evening when I was taking a turn in a lovely field I saw some way off a tiny figure leisurely moving towards me. It soon became clear that the swarthy, squat figure was a Pulaya going to his hut semi-inebriated after the day's work. Directly he suspected that I was a higher Hindu, the respectful Pulaya swerved off from the straight path to provide an 'unpolluted' passage for me. But I was in no mood to thank him for his kindness. I went to the length of attempting to balk this apostle of goodness of his excellent intention. As I approached him, however, the poor astonished Pulaya broke into words. "I am a Pulaya; do not come nearer; do not pollute yourself," he implored. And no amount of arguing or coaxing could persuade him to stop and allow my superior self to get into close quarters with him. It

seemed to me that this was his way, the Pulaya's way of taking the change out of me, out of us the superior men for our past inhumanity to them. I bent my head in shame and pondered the strange revenges that the whirligig of time brought.

The constricted castle of contentment in which the Pulaya lives seems impregnable. A fiery soul inspired with sympathy must invest it, otherwise success will be most difficult and the redoubtable inmate will hold out for long.

The Pulaya woman belongs, however, to an altogether different type. She can see the vision of a fuller life, a life emancipated from the impoverishments that cramp both body and soul. She is also quick to feel and bold to act. She does not bear the load of injustice and insult heaped upon her without murmur. She kicks against the pricks, and smiles at *unapproachability* and its absurd implications. She is not markedly avid for saving the demigods from 'pollution'. She would much rather do the contrary and demonstrate the fictitious character of such pollution. It is a sight for sore eyes when a forward-looking, courageous Pulaya woman comes face to face with a hide-bound caste-Hindu stickler for prerogatives. Then issues a fierce combat. The woman argues, the man curses. The woman marshals cold logic, the man spews forth emotional imprecations. In the combat the caste-Hindu appears as a

slave to superstition and the other the mistress of commonsense. If the Pulaya only joins hands with his better half the elevation of a deplorably depressed class would soon be an accomplished fact. The more one thinks of the course of human affairs the more the conviction is borne in upon one that the future is the age of woman and that under her this restless world ailing from hourly paroxysms will achieve the equanimity which it now covets in vain.

The Pulaya woman is perhaps the harbinger of this new age.

19. Travancore's Young Maharaja.

Long live our beloved prince! Long live our Maharaja! Such is the fervid prayer of the people of Travancore to-day.

The little state is in many respects the most advanced part of the Indian Empire. Its people are not 'the dumb, driven cattle' on whom pitiful writers on Indian subjects are wont to lavish their tender sympathy. They are well-informed and can and do think for themselves. They can weigh monarchy with democracy and get to the bottom of things. When with such a people monarchical ideas are strong, we cannot say that they are led by sentiment. They must be deemed to know the merits of monarchy too well to be lukewarm towards it. The rulers of Travancore have always been on the side of

the people. The pages of its history are eloquent of how seldom they used their authority otherwise than for the good of their people. When kingship is looked upon as a trust and fulfilled accordingly it becomes perhaps the highest form of government known to man. The Maharajas of Travancore have always done so and that is why the Travancore royal family has the ardent allegiance and support of an intelligent and progressive people.

His Highness the young Maharaja *Prince Chitra Thirunal* who was installed on the ancient *musnad* of his illustrious ancestors in the year 1924 is a prince of great promise and bids fair to carry out the great traditions of his house. Upon his active, intelligent 'wide-awake' boyhood rises a destiny to which people fervently look forward. His European tutor ably watches these years which must profoundly influence His Highness's future career. But more than a thousand tutors is the queen-mother Her Highness the Maharani *Sechu Parvathi Bai*. Her Highness is imbued with the highest ideals of motherhood. Her Highness is a highly cultured, broad-minded, forward-looking woman of real ability. But she has a weakness, the weakness of all true mothers. Her Highness takes the extremity of pride in her children, particularly in her first born whom heavy responsibilities await ahead. She has also great ambition, the ambition of all true mothers. Her Highness would give the



Sri Chithira Thirunal.

world to make her son an ideal ruler for this beautiful land. Her Highness will go through fire and water to see her son worthily wield the authority that he will shortly grasp.

Pride and ambition that one's children beget in one's bosom are the common property of all womankind. But Sethu Parvathi Bai has qualities that few among her kind have. You cannot think of a more excellent mother to bring up a prince. Her Highness is one of the most intelligent women in Travancore. Her experience, though short, has been wide and varied. She has travelled extensively and seen the world. Her insight into child nature is profound. She is abreast with the times in all spheres of life. She is at home in politics as in literature, in science as well as in philosophy. The professional man is quite often surprised at the facility with which she talks about topics that the layman seldom takes pains to know anything at all about. She keeps herself in the swim and can hold her own with distinction and dignity whatever be the subject of conversation. To the doctor she talks about medicine, to the lawyer about law, to the teacher on education and she is never dry as dust. Her personality no less than her attainments holds your admiring attention.

Her Highness has, moreover, a keen appreciation of, and a great partiality for, whatever is beautiful—

ideas, actions and things. She wants everything about her to be basking in beauty, to be subdued in tone. She has no liking for the hurrahs and haw-haws of the modern women of the West. Her ideal appears to be a mild blending of ordered activity and chastened rest, of quiet work and high thinking. She is not fit to abide the hurly-burly of this busy world. So she lives outside the town on one of those beautiful hillocks that so thickly huddle about Trivandrum. She drinks in the scene and like Sakuntala has woven her life into a fabric of beauty and charm, a real princess among the daughters of Eve.

If she has a keen eye for beauty, her ears are not less attuned to the appreciation of music. Indeed, she is herself the favoured child of the sweet-voiced muse. When I drew a picture of her 'weaknesses' and accused her of pride and ambition, I ought also to have added another thing to the list of her 'sins'. That is a noble passion. She is proud of her son, ambitious on his account and she has a passion for music. She can easily beat hollow many a skilled professional in the art. She plays on the *vina* with exquisite felicity. She weaves a magic wreath of dulcet sounds about her and the artist goes under the spell of the harmony which she herself calls into being. Underneath the evanescent, endless, quickly-changing shapes that flit back and forth on the surface



The Queen Mother.

of things is the music of life, a perennial stream of pure melody. She has heard that heavenly strain and entered into the spirit that moves its currents.

To these qualities rare as they are resplendent, she adds the equally great quality of sociability. She never puts on side. She is never affected in manners. She seldom shuts herself behind the barricades of royalty making herself inaccessible to those who solicit interviews with her. She has a broad outlook on life and is well acquainted with the various grades and shades that go to compose it. The prince who is growing into man's estate and who will soon assume the reins of governance can have no trustier mother to lead him safely through the uncertain years of adolescence and to launch him on life. There can be no greater artist to mould his life's ideals for him. And when he has become sovereign there will be no abler minister to render him advice than his gifted and accomplished mother. Great must be deemed the luck of the prince who has such a noble woman as his mother to love him and to lead him on.

The reader might wonder why so much should have been said about the queen-mother in a sketch about the prince. The reason is plain. Is not the mother the greatest teacher we know? Do we not with our mother's milk imbibe our ideals, the destiny that will hold us in leash in after lives? They make us what we are. They are the architects of destiny.

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Under such a mother the prince is growing up a picture of radiant boyhood. His Highness has already become the cynosure of all eyes. He has already endeared himself to his people by his suavity and simple manners. His intelligence assures his future beyond doubt. His urbanity exceeds expectation. His personality is suffused with a tender charm. His diligence promises a large harvest of achievement. People have already learnt to turn their eyes to him with high hopes.

His education leaves little to be desired. It includes the whole gamut from fine arts to manly exercises. It is the all-round culture that the wise mother has planned for her son. But the course is carefully prevented from constricting that well-regulated freedom which is the very life-breath of boys. There is no doubt that under the increasing influence of this ideal education His Highness will measure up to his true stature when the time comes.

His Highness is still in his teens. He is an extremely handsome boy. He looks the picture of simplicity but has no lack of splendour. He is perhaps conscious of the high estate to which he has been called. His kingly bearing is proof of it. He does not, however, forget that he is a boy. This is even better than his kingly bearing.

The prince wears a majestic look on public occasions and it serves to impress his people.

Mere gentility doesn't take with the average man. When, for example, the average man is on the move to have *darsan* of the Maharaja, he means business. A mere boy may not quench his curiosity. The air of majesty is, therefore, necessary to satisfy the average man. Behind it is the real prince. The eyes are alert. The face is crystal clear. Hungry observation makes it beam with quick activity. Men and things flit by. The prince allows none to escape. He snaps them all on the camera of his mind. The world cannot keep its old ways from him. His shrewd eyes study them assiduously, avidly. His Highness therefore strikes every one as a promising prince with a glorious future.

It is a pretty hard job that the prince has got on hand. His age is in stout contradiction with his office. Nature has invested him with healthy, intelligent, observant boyhood. The Fates have installed him as the Maharaja of Travancore. The two are apt to cannon harshly of course. But he cleverly avoids the collisions. There is the Maharaja for those who want to see the Maharaja. There is the boy for those who want to see the boy. Hundreds bend low and bow to him. Others stand all eyes. The former are satisfied with their loyal obeisance. The latter are assured that the little prince who sits so royally in the coach and four and observes with steady gaze all sorts and conditions of people and

never fights shy of the stare of endless crowds will, when age gathers unto maturity, become a ruler worthy of the illustrious line to which he belongs.

The Maharaja of Travancore is, as we have seen *Padmanabhadasa*, the servant of Padmanabha, the Lord of the temple. The Kingdom belongs to the Lord. The Maharaja administers it for the Lord as His servant. Therefore His Highness is an attache of the temple. He has sundry functions to perform there. On ceremonial occasions when the Lord goes a-hunting or on a short excursion to the seaside, the Maharaja has to attend on him in the obedient and humble attitude of a true servant. On such occasions large crowds gather to see the Lord and His royal esquire. The little prince goes through them all with dignified piety and makes a charming picture into the bargain.

The other day what is called the Sastamangalam Procession came off. Every year the Poti Brahmin of Sastamangalam who lives close to the capital is honoured with a visit from the Maharaja. This is done to commemorate a great service rendered by one of the ancestors of the Poti to a former ruler. The procession is made an imposing ceremonial and the burden of it on the principal personage is heavy. The prince bore it with becoming elegance. His demeanour on the occasion was infused with the simple dignity and mild lustre

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that are so peculiarly his own. The milk-white steeds seemed proud of the precious little soul sitting so majestically in the magnificent carriage. The prince who so worthily bears the burden of a heavy round of ceremonies will, no doubt, when he comes of age, worthily bear the high responsibilities of ruling one of the foremost states in the Indian Empire.

The prince's educational attainments are already high for his age. He talks English fluently. He has a keen love of books and is said to absorb their contents omnivorously. He has a broad forehead and seems to possess sharp intelligence. Physically he is agile and looks his age. Years and education with a wide margin in it for play will make him a man and a Maharaja to whom Travancore will have good reason to be proudly loyal.

20. The Maharani Regent.

MAHARANI SETHU LAKSHMI BAI is indubitably one of the shining lights in the galaxy of India's ruling chiefs. Her Highness belongs to that select group of men and women who not only see visions and dream dreams but also strive valiantly to realize them. Still in the early thirties and idealistic by temperament, she is neither impetuous in action nor unpractical in policy. It is as if the counsels of a mellow experience are brought to bear upon the high impulses of young^{er} years

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Her Highness plans wisely, does bravely, loves greatly, and she is dearly loved. Travancore is said to be the home of the *Goddess of Prosperity*. Her Highness Sethu Lakshmi Bai reigns over this 'fairylane' like that very goddess who brings to it her plentiful gifts of milk and honey. To-day the state rides a flowing tide. To-day it has a ruler who is every inch a queen and who, imbued with noble endeavour, accelerates its onward course.

It is only about two years since Rani Sethu Lakshmi Bai was installed in the high office of regency, but within this short period she has been able to stamp her unique personality upon the face of the land. Vastly venturing, she has kindled a new era in the state which sooner or later must yield its fruitage of greater justice, larger tolerance and more mutual sympathy than heretofore obtained among the four millions odd people over whose destinies she has been called, at a critical hour, to preside. A rich originality of purpose distinguishes her reign, and her policy, broad-based as it is, on kindly courage, patient purpose and even-handed justice is already putting forth its blossom of early achievement. She has turned the flank of some of the most thorny problems that confront the state to-day and she is eager with the passion of a high-souled patriot to come to grips with new ones. The young regent is therefore



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rightly acclaimed as one of the great woman-rulers of modern India.

When in the year 1900 a lovable little girl belonging to a collateral branch of the royal family in Mavelikkara, a thriving inland town in Central Travancore, was adopted into the reigning house at Trivandrum, little perhaps did people think that her propitious fate had decided to assign her the regency of one of the most prosperous and progressive of Indian states five and twenty years hence. It is true that she was adopted from a family several of whose members had achieved fame in different fields and that talent of one sort or other has always been running in it. Her father, Raja Kerala Varma of Kilimanur, himself a litterateur of no mean distinction, is, for example, the nephew of the great artist whose name even to-day, when the anarchists are pouring their daring dreams into the picture-galleries of the world and when indeed the ideals of art to which he gave such vivid expression can no longer claim general allegiance, is a household word throughout India, and whose pictures still continue to adorn the Indian home and to lend it the grace of association with the past not a few of whose personalities live imperishably in the rainbow-world of his brush and paint. It is also true that her adoption together with that of her younger cousin, now the queen-mother, was made

to keep alive the line of succession and the late Maharaja who was then going on for the shady side of forty was one of the few surviving male members of the royal house in the direct line. But despite these circumstances which could easily have warranted a prediction of great destiny for her, few could really have conceived, amidst the gorgeous splendour and ceremony that accompanied the adoption, of her prospective accession to the supreme seat of authority in the state.

However that may be, the little princess quickly grew up under the shadow of *Sree Padmanabha* the guardian deity of the royal house. No pains or expense were spared to give her an education worthy of the great position to which she had been called. She was taught Malayalam, Sanskrit and English, not to mention literature, music and mathematics. It was a liberal education in the true sense of the word and its effects are visible to-day in her life and character. It afforded freedom and emphasised play. It endowed her with real culture and attuned her to the harmonies of things. It gave her that vision of sisterly sympathy for the people which forms the key-note of her administration, and which has made her an object of such spontaneous love and fervent loyalty throughout the state to-day.

Thus the happy years of girlhood rolled melodiously on and as the fair princess approached the thresh-

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old of womanhood came her marriage which was celebrated with pomp and joy. She was wedded to a nephew of the late Valia Koil Tampuran C. S. I., who was by far the greatest author and poet of modern times in Kerala. It was a felicitous choice and the prince-consort whose position is admittedly one most difficult and delicate, a position which affords ample opportunity for idle tongues and from which might conceivably spring a crop of questions and misunderstandings, is to-day able to skate on the thin ice with the cautious wisdom and careful skill the occasion demands. Moreover, his robust character and forward opinions shed a quickening influence around him. That marriage brought about a happy conjunction of two great heritages.

The Junior Maharani, her cousin, gave birth to a son on November 7, 1912, who has now become the Maharaja and who, when he attains age, will become the ruler of the land as well. This great event put a period to the long waiting of the state for the coming into the world of the successor to the throne. If at the time of her adoption into the royal family few among the citizens of Trivandrum could have envisaged the possibility of the five-year-old princess ever assuming the high office of queen-regent, fewer still perhaps thought of such a thing after the Junior Maharani had given birth to the present Maharaja. At the time of the birth of this prince the

late lamented ruler was only fifty-three years old and he had not lost a jot of his mental or bodily vigour. Those who saw him believed that he would attain to a green old age. He had already, at that time, sat on the throne for twenty-seven years. People therefore had well nigh become accustomed to associate a permanence of a sort with his reign. At any rate they had not the shadow of a doubt that the ruling Maharaja would live long to see the little prince come of age and fit to grasp the reins of government when in the fulness of time he would have been gathered to his fathers.

Is it to be wondered at then that the public did not fully know at this time what sort of a lady Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai was? And for her part she had a wholesome aversion to publicity and a deep-rooted desire to avoid the lime-light. Even to-day when she has taken the helm and the prosperous voyage of the ship amidst the heavy seas about her depends upon her skilful steering, she tries to stand aloof with informed sedulity preferring to do things in a quiet way, preferring to work out her great mission in tranquillity. In those days of which we here speak she wove golden ideals into her character. In those days she lived in seclusion away from the public gaze and the rare virtues that had gone into the making of a lofty personality were hidden, as it were, under a bushel. Well-known visitors to the capital from abroad heard little about her. She travelled but

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rarely and for that matter was seen outside but seldom. The extremely taciturn princess seemed to have made it a point to keep within the four walls of her palace unless some imperative duty demanded her presence elsewhere. The young Rani was a picture in herself of this tranquil and beautiful land, a princess of the purest blood, of the highest virtues.

It was during this period that the fabric of her personality was inwrought with the richest strands. She lived her life after the manner of the heroines of ancient India. If she shunned the glitterings of modern times, she yearned after the glories of the highest type of Indian womanhood. It was the ideal of Sita that she kept before her and she became an exemplar of virtue, a pattern wife who in her enlightened devotion to her husband was almost without a peer. Those who knew her and her great qualities of head and heart were certain that a great destiny awaited her.

About three years ago Her Highness gave birth to a princess thus adding her share of life to the exiguous royal house of Travancore. The old Maharaja who greatly loved her and held her in high esteem was overjoyed to hear the glad news, and he went down to give her his blessing. At this time this great ruler who had been shaping the destinies of the land for nearly forty years was still hale and hearty, and it never occurred to the

people that even such a long and glorious reign must one day come to its end. The abstemious Maharaja had a great virtue or a great weakness, as some might say, and that was his intense piety. The rigid regimen that he had prescribed for himself was undermining the 'vital fort' but not even the warnings and entreaties of his trusted physician could persuade him to permit himself any relaxation from the self-inflicted code. The result was he was taken ill suddenly, and died leaving a young boy of twelve as the heir to the throne. This sudden calamity came upon the country like a bolt from the blue, and it was riven with grief. Seldom does the death of a prince plunge the people into such profound sorrow. But the good Sri Mulam Thirunal had ruled the country with true paternal tenderness.

Now the Fates could no longer allow Rani Sethu Lakshmi Bai to enjoy her dear quietude. They had now need of her. So they raised her to the very seat of royal authority and invested her with absolute control over forty-five lakhs of people. The public at large, as we have seen, were hitherto concerned little about her to know her fully. Therefore the most sanguine expectations about the new ruler fell short of her virtues. The astonishment of the people when they came to know the matchless princess was only equalled by their joy, for she seemed to have walked out of a

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bewitching dream, for she stood before her subjects like a revelation, too queenly for them and too great for their country.

At the installation ceremony the Maharani made her maiden speech. It put to shame many a seasoned hand at eloquence in that select and solemn gathering. Her behaviour on the occasion was becomingly beautiful; her simplicity was like charm and her wealth of commonsense so gracefully borne spoke like the voice of true wisdom. Small wonder that the citizens of Trivandrum seemed to have had no other occupation but to laud her to the skies for a fortnight or so after the ceremony. If the death of the late Maharaja was a heavy blow to Travancore the installation of Lakshmi Bai as Regent has been an unmixed blessing to it. To-day her likeness sells by the hundred and wherever she goes, people pour out to do her obeisance and to feast their eyes upon her.

The incredulous reader may shake his head and take my story with a grain of salt. If he does, that would be proof positive that he knows little of Travancore. He needs to be told that in this state there is nothing more deep-rooted than loyalty and that princes and princesses take up a large space in the people's mind. A bad ruler in this country may not escape censure. That is because the people are knowing. But a good ruler cannot escape worship, do what he or she would. Here love,

admiration and gratitude are often tricked out in an ostentation that easily lends colour to the belief that they literally lay it on with a trowel.

The supreme merit of the Maharani is that she is essentially a large-hearted woman. She is, therefore, anxious and able to understand her subjects. Royalty has not raised her above the knowledge of ordinary mortals or responsibility hardened her great human qualities. The regent's manners are the simplest, her disposition is the sweetest. Her modesty is a model to womankind. She is the fairest in a land of fair women. Her queenly bearing conquers. Her gentleness captivates. Her life is the realization of a dream. Her rule is the embodiment of an ideal.

It is the spirit of progress that sits enthroned in her heart. It is her inborn courage that gives her strength to hearken to the voice of that spirit. Perhaps upon the gateway of her judgment may be seen engraved the motto 'hasten slowly', but she hastens nevertheless on the road onward. In her are combined the caution and moderation of a true woman with the courage and capacity of the practical idealist, of the progressive ruler.

Let us now consider some of the more prominent features of her administration. Her brave and sympathetic handling of the crusted problem of caste has won



An Ezhava Family

her an all-India fame. To understand the magnitude of Her Highness's achievement in this field we must examine the problem in some of its bearings.

Hindu society is to-day in a state of flux throughout India. In Travancore particularly it is undergoing a rapid and profound change. The ravelled skein of its structure is fast yielding to the universal demand for the simplification of society, for the amplification of justice. Gone are the days when the invidious distinctions enjoined by caste were acquiesced in without demur. Gone are the days when the outcastes ate the humble pie with unquestioning, nay, ardent obedience, and treated intolerance with deference. The democratic spirit of equality is now awakened in their breasts and their placid, almost pathetic, contentment has burst its shell releasing the dumb disquiets of centuries. No more will they take any social injustice or suffer any deprivation of their birthright. The *untouchables* are out to establish their claim to the common heritage of human beings. This is particularly the case with the Ezhavas who in Travancore number about 7 lakhs. The Ezhavas are a sturdy, thriving people. Industrious, enterprising and progressive, they are one of the most 'go-ahead' castes in Travancore. Under the inspiration of their revered leader, Sri Narayana Guru, who, as all accounts show, is among the greatest of modern Indian worthies, the

Ezhavas have sensed the dawn of a new age divested of the inequalities of the old. They are, therefore, not a little anxious to break the spell of ancient traditions and to acquire a place in society by the side of their whilom superiors.

The orthodox, on the other hand, especially the 'last ditchers' such as the conservative section of the Nambudiris and Tamil Brahmins, are eager to throw themselves upon the 'old order' and to resist the onslaught of newer ideas. Fortified, as they are, with the strength of customs, whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, they are reluctant to throw overboard their pet privileges and to concede their essential kinship with the *untouchables*. They are, therefore, not a little anxious to play the game of marking time.

These social frictions led to the Vaikom Satyagraha movement the story of which is too well-known to require rehearsal. It was at a critical stage in the struggle that Her Highness was called upon to assume the high and heavy office of regency. At this time the opposition of the orthodox party was coming to a head. It had already become spectacular in appearance and clamorous in expression. Feeling was running high. The government themselves were nearly at their wit's end. Her Highness carefully studied the situation and made up her mind. Her innate sympathy ranged itself on the

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side of reason and humanity. But there must be a large body of opinion in the state in favour of the changes contemplated by the movement before she could award the victory to the lamp-bearers. As if to give an illustration of her mind, Her Highness accorded Mahatma Gandhi the honours of a state guest during his tour in Travancore for enlisting sympathy in the Vaikom movement. It was a signal act which not only showed of what mettle she was made but also accelerated that very accumulation of sympathy for the *untouchables* which she demanded before she herself clinched the question by a fiat of her government.

This courageous, enlightened and ennobling attitude on the part of the greatest in the land opened the eyes of the orthodox to the logical realities of the situation. When the apparatus of thought is roused to activity, passions and prejudices find small chance to hold sway over human conduct. Thus the orthodox party was gradually enabled to shake off those ignorances and hysterias that had inspired their early conduct towards the *untouchables*. When, accordingly, the iron became hot the Maharani struck with firm decision and the Vaikom roads were thrown open to all people irrespective of caste distinctions. But this visible and outward success of her policy is in fact the least of her achievement. Her real victory consists in having afforded

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an excellent education to her people, in having kindled a new outlook in the minds of the orthodox Hindus in Travancore. This is a big achievement and under its impact *untouchability* and other allied evils that have made Hinduism stand abashed at the forum of world-opinion are bound to disappear soon or late. They may linger on the stage staggering awhile but their doom has been declared by forces that shape the future. In bringing out this most devoutly wished for consummation, the Maharani Regent has borne a worthy hand, worthy of a great woman and a good ruler and worthy of the great traditions of the ancient house of which Her Highness is such an illustrious member.

Another equally noteworthy illustration of her courage and high statesmanship is afforded by her appointment of a Christian as her Diwan. As it is impossible to appreciate the import of this step without understanding the position of the Christians in the state, I offer no apology for making the necessary digression.

Travancore is a Hindu state ruled by an orthodox Hindu Royal House. Alone among Indian states to escape conquest and domination by any ambitious outsider, Travancore has been able to maintain its individuality as a Hindu state uncorrupted by foreign influences almost down to the present day. The state has,

therefore, often been called an epitome of Hindu India and be it said to the credit of its Hindu inhabitants, that the simple life for which Hinduism has always stood, the pure faith it has always engendered and the high thinking it has always inculcated are practised to-day in Travancore with greater devotion than in any country of which Hinduism is the prevailing religion. It can, therefore, be asserted without more ado that Travancore has always been and perhaps continues to be a Hindu state. And because it has been so, the government of the state has been predominantly Hindu in complexion and the traditions of the Hindu raj are so strong here that it is more than doubtful if in this regard the state has a double in all the Empire.

Hinduism is not merely a religion. It is the organization of life's manifold activities on a pedestal of pure religiousness. Hinduism is the dominance of the religious ideal in life. The Travancore Durbar is associated with religion in the measure in which the Travancore Hindus are Hindu-like. No government of any Indian state is so closely associated with religion as that of Travancore. The number of temples under direct state management is legion. The greatest temple in the state, the one at Trivandrum, claims the whole state as its property, and rightly may it do so. For Marthanda Varma who, by the valour of his arms, brought under his umbrella the territories now known as Travancore dedi-

cated, as we have seen, his dominion to *Sri Padmanabha* the presiding deity of this temple and ruled it as *His* servant and in *His* name. "The character thus stamped on the state has never been lost sight of by his successors on the throne of Travancore," and the solemn dedication so piously made by that eighteenth century Maharaja of 'immortal fame' has never been repudiated. To this day the royal house of Travancore is attached to the temple in what is at least a theoretical devoteeship. The Maharaja is called *Padmanabha Dasa*, devotee or servant of *Padmanabha*. The Maharani Regent is called *Padmanabha Savini*, female devotee or servant of *Padmanabha*. The assumption of the *Gadi* by a new Maharaja consists mainly of what is called the *Padiyatam*—a sacred temple ceremony in which the prince is formally admitted into his role as *Padmanabha Dasa*. He is expected to reside and usually resides in the palace adjacent to the temple under the shadow of *Padmanabha*. He is expected to and, more often than not, does wait on his Lord at stated hours of the day. His presence in the temple is imperative. In fact the ruler of Travancore has no existence apart from the temple and is but an aid-de-camp of the deity. It is difficult to think of a more beautiful interpretation of monarchy; and the humility and earnestness that this interpretation evokes in the ruler have largely

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contributed to the general prosperity and contentment that obtain in the state to-day.

It goes without saying that under such circumstances the government of the state must bear the pious hues of religion, and that the Maharaja's officers who form, as it were, his retinue must reflect his relation to, and attitude towards, the temple deity. Small wonder that such has been the case and if to-day the old order changeth giving place to the new, it is because the march of time has made life more complex and new problems have sprung up in its wake crying for solution. And it is one such problem that led to the appointment of a Christian as the Diwan of the state.

Although the people of Travancore are mostly Hindus, there is an important and rapidly-increasing minority of Christians who are as much the natives of Travancore as the Hindus themselves. When Europe was one mass of heathendom upon the face of the globe, when the early Christians were suffering persecution at the hands of imperial Rome, there flourished in Travancore a small but happy Christian colony under the large tolerance of its Hindu peoples. It is said, and the statement is seldom contradicted, that Christianity was brought into Malabar by one of the Apostles themselves. Starting from Syria, St. Thomas is said to have reached the Malayalam country in 52 A.D. He esta-

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blished seven churches in this remote corner of India five of which it is the proud privilege of Travancore to claim. From this remote date till the present time the followers of Jesus have lived, increased and thriven in these parts and particularly in Travancore without let or hindrance. As early as 745 A. D. their rights were recognised and privileges conferred upon them by royal charter graven upon copper plates and made over to the Christian community amidst much pomp and circumstance with the solemn assurance likewise inscribed that 'the gift shall be valid from generation to generation and as long as the sun and moon exist.' Christianity has never had such a smooth and prosperous course anywhere else in the world.

And the Christian subjects of the state played a part worthy of their great religion in the history of the state. They spread Christian teaching in the land and in their turn imbibed Hindu ideals. The two religions mingled together to mutual advantage. Their industry increased the prosperity of the state. They fought for their country and their kings and their loyalty was never doubted. In every way they made Travancore as much their country as that of any other community.

To day the Christians of Travancore are a large and prosperous people. They number about 30 per cent of the population. In the matter of education they stand

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foremost among the millions of India and in their inherited abilities they yield to none. For all these reasons although Travancore is indubitably a Hindu state, it is also the one and only Christian state in the whole of India. Even a very casual visitor to Travancore can hardly resist coming to this seemingly contradictory conclusion.

However, what with the increase in their numbers and what with the spread of education among them, the Christians of Travancore began to feel, more acutely than ever before, their disabilities concerning their representation in the public service. They were excluded from various important posts on account of the close association of these with the Hindu religion. They, therefore, started a peaceful movement for the termination of this association and, as they conducted it with remarkable restraint and wisdom, they rapidly, if only progressively, attained to the realization of their aspirations, with the result that to-day the highest office in the state namely the Diwanship is held by a Christian.

It was left to Her Highness the young Sethu Lakshmi Bai to take this momentous step of throwing open the highest office in the state to Christians who alike by their education and exemplary loyalty to the ruling house had made themselves eminently fit for any position however high and however responsible.

When Her Highness's intention to do so was made known to the public, it was greeted with disfavour and even resentment by some of her Hindu subjects who saw in it with melancholy eyes the end of Hindu raj in Travancore. For a time it blew great guns and the political weather-cock was wildly agitated. But nothing daunted the Maharani Regent proceeded to look about for a suitable Christian candidate for the post. Meanwhile second thoughts had convinced the Hindus of the impolicy of opposition to a just measure and the hasty agitation which had assumed bombastic behaviour all too suddenly, shrank and fizzled out much earlier than many expected.

To quench the apprehensions of her orthodox Hindu subjects regarding the appointment of a Christian as the Diwan, the Maharani issued a proclamation announcing the separation of *Devaswom* or Hindu ecclesiastical matters from the general administration of the state presided over by the Diwan and her intention to place it under a Hindu minister directly responsible to her. Perhaps after a time, when the demand is certain to be made, the *Devaswom* will be handed over to the Hindus for good, and the kingdom of Padmanabha will be looked after alike by Hindus and non-Hindus chosen exclusively on the basis of their capacity.

This vastly important measure has justly met with widespread and enthusiastic appreciation. It marks a

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turning-point in the history of modern Travancore. No civilized state can afford to remain ecclesiastical in these days when individual liberty in matters of religion is fast becoming the ruling passion of one and all. Eclecticism in religion does happily find more and more favour in the eyes of thinking people. Perhaps the day is not far off when the rigid distinctions that to-day so sharply divide one religion from another will be obliterated, and then will Christians be Hindus as much as Hindus themselves and Hindus be Christians as much as Christians themselves. It will, therefore, be undoubtedly the part of wisdom to secure the severance of states from the chariot-wheels of formal religions so that their growth might not be hindered by the obvious limitations that the latter must impose upon them. The logic of the times urges this divorce of ecclesiastical from political matters everywhere, and the Maharani Regent cannot be praised too highly for correctly reading the times and for courageously carrying out a policy thus indicated by them. The appointment of a Christian as her Diwan has modernized Travancore in one particular and paramount aspect.

“In my father's house are many mansions,” said Jesus. The elevation of a Christian to the highest office in the state breathes the spirit of that Christian tolerance which is the essence of these transcendent and

truest words. The zealous young queen seems to say "In my kingdom are many mansions."

The proverb says "Kings should rule by love." It does not mention queens. They do not perhaps stand in need of the command. Nature is lavish in giving this gift of love to women. She dare not trust the ordinary man with more than a limited amount of it. For, he has always been an adept in putting good things to bad purpose. The 'weaker vessel' on the other hand cherishes the boons that are given to her and draws golden uses from them. Love has a woman's face, kindness a woman's heart. It is this ineffable quality of the true woman that elevates the Maharani Regent far above the ordinary run of mortals. Every action of Her Highness seems to arise from a loving wisdom laved in the milk of human kindness. Take, for example, the great service that, as a result of one of her very first enactments, she has been able to render the animal kingdom. The sacrifice of animals in Hindu temples was an immemorial practice in Travancore. Men insulted their creator by creating gods and goddesses thirsting for blood and by slaughtering fair creation to quench the thirst of these deities with the blood of the smoking victims. The gruesome practice sanctified by the holy insensibility of centuries lay like a crying scandal upon the face of Hindu society in Travancore.

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It was left to Her Highness to regard the thing in its true light and to wipe it out with a firm and womanly hand. This act of the regent, small as it may seem, will rank among her greatest achievements. It is a victory for humanity, a victory for true human love, and it speaks her great. The Maharani has earned the thanks of the dumb animal world, and these are worth a thousand priceless monuments of marble or gold.

In one of his stirring addresses in Trivandrum, Mahatma Gandhi said, "I have fallen in love with the women of Travancore. Their spotlessly beautiful and white borderless dress has captivated me. Its whiteness to me is an emblem of inward purity."

The picture that rises to one's mind when one reads these beautiful words is that of the Maharani, the emblem of purity, the image of love. That picture must have no doubt captivated the Mahatma as it has done the bulk of her people.

One of the recent actions of this cautious ruler has not only been not rightly appreciated but also seems to have struck a slightly discordant note in the choir of the thousand voices swelling in praise of her. This is the press law that Her Highness has had to promulgate recently in the larger interests of the people whose destinies she holds in trust.

GLIMPSES OF TRAVANCORE.

There has been in late years a spectacular multiplication of newspapers in Travancore. This has been made possible by the rapid spread of literacy within the state during the last twenty years or so. Proficiency in the mother-tongue is general in Travancore to a remarkable degree and the people are able to make use of the pen as a ready and pliant instrument in their daily life. An atmosphere more favourable for the formation of a virile, enlightened and helpful school of journalism is difficult to think of and such a school is bound to rise in the near future.

But the pen is a dangerous weapon. Not all who know to write can do so, or do so with benefit to themselves and to others. It would surely go ill with the 'fourth estate' if it falls into the hands of men who know to write and are prepared to put it to dubious use. The capacity to write aside of the restraining influence of culture, aside of the warning counsels of judgment is a weapon of evil. The press is a vast educative organization more powerful in some respects than even the strictly educational institutions. Should it be run by capacity alone without the due assistance of the moral sense, it may scour the country scattering harm. The pen that would serve the public must be wielded by the worthy. The author and the journalist are the custodians of a great trust.

THE MAHARANI REGENT.

The liberty of the press is sacred. So too is the duty of the pressmen. Heavy is their burden, and unless their shoulders are broad they will not be able to bear it worthily and their duty will not be rightly done. Then their liberty loses its sanctity and the law will perhaps have to be laid down to it.

This is just what has happened in Travancore today. The great profession of journalism descended, in several instances, to somewhat low levels. Their writings were characterized by an indifferent morality of expression and their columns often became a ready vehicle of unnecessary personalities. It plainly threatened to corrupt the public mind and to hold up the progress of years.

Diseases call for remedies and the Maharani whose sisterly solicitude for her subjects is so real and so universally known had to apply her royal prerogative, "the medicine of the constitution," to this curiously pathological condition of the press. Health will, no doubt, be soon restored, and there is no fear that the treatment will have to be long. The Maharani deserves great praise for her timely interference in this important matter.

It can, therefore, be safely asserted that the regent's policy is one of enlightened and cautious advance. Her great ideals are imbued with uncommon

GLIMPSES OF TRAVANCORE.

courage. The nobility and highness of her character shine like a beacon upon the land. She desires to, and does, rule as well as reign. To-day, as we have seen, the administration of Travancore bears the impress of a fresh, forceful and impartial mind. Already the fruits of her policy have gathered to a plenteous and abiding store. These two short years have shown what a large-hearted, loving and aspiring ruler can do. But what has been achieved is only a foretaste of the greater possibilities that await. A golden prospect stretches in front and it will surely be soon traversed.

For these reasons Her Highness Rani Sethu Lakshmi Bai has become the idol of a highly discerning and educated people. Her firmness, sympathy, courage, tact and moderation have come home to them. There is no doubt that when the time comes for Her Highness to relinquish the heavy responsibilities of regency she will not only have chalked out a noble path for His Highness the Maharaja, her young and promising nephew, to tread but also have added some lustrous pages to the history of this ancient land.

