

AS OTHERS SEE US

THE relations between a ruling race and its feudatories must be a subject of absorbing interest to any student of the great *Comédie Humaine*, as played by nations as well as by individuals, and an opportunity of seeing something of the play from behind the scenes is never a chance to be lost. So when the offer came to me of the post of lady-in-waiting to the wife of one of the first Hindu princes of India, during a short tour in Europe, I gladly accepted it, and set out at short notice to join "her Highness the Maharani" at a winter resort in Switzerland.

The group of Orientals looked strangely out of place in a Continental hotel, often as such groups are seen nowadays. Shorn of his native dress and the splendour—slovenly though it may be—of his home surroundings the Indian potentate is a more pathetic than imposing figure. The fact that he can spend a year at a time away from his kingdom, is a significant reminder that his Resident, or Political Agent is entirely able to administer his affairs of State; his physique is frequently an object-lesson in the results of generations of child-marriage and self-indulgence; the attempt to imitate Western modes of life and manners involves too often the loss of Oriental dignity. But on points where the men of the party were lacking, the Maharani was wisely tenacious. She wore her native dress, indoors at least, and though she had emancipated herself and her daughter from the shadow of the purdah, she adhered strictly to her own caste rules of food and ablutions. These, combined with English habits of outdoor exercise, had preserved her figure admirably—at thirty-four she was still young. She was tiny, but beautifully made, with the prettiest little hands and feet, her complexion was fairer than that of an average Italian, she had large dark eyes bright with intelligence, and a most charming smile. She sent her maid to me on my arrival with a message that, as I was no doubt tired after my twenty-four hours' journey, she would not require my attendance that day—for which I was sincerely

grateful. The first week passed with some formality, after that the ice was broken, or rather began to thaw. The day's programme did not admit of very great variation on a Swiss mountain top. The gay crowd of visitors skated and tobogganned all day, danced and played bridge every night, and the Maharaja plunged valiantly into each form of amusement, escorted by a French *aide-de-camp* and his young son's English tutor, while the Maharani looked on. She would go across to the hotel rink, and watch her lord and master as he scuffled and scrambled round the ice between the *aide-de-camp* and the skating instructor. He never learned to skate, and I sometimes longed to give him a hand when I encountered him in my "off-duty" moments on the ice. But this etiquette forbade, apart from the risk of giving him a fall.

On most fine days I accompanied the Maharani on her morning walks. In thick boots, and with her *sari* tucked up under a heavy tweed cloak, she would trudge for miles in the snow. Sometimes we had another walk in the afternoon, but more often she would rest after lunch. Unless they had visitors I was seldom in attendance at meals—when I was, the ordinary hotel fare was offered me in case I preferred it to theirs, but I used to give private orders on my own part, that no form of beef or pork should be brought to me at their table, and no wine. On the latter point there was not the same restriction of courtesy, but a stronger one of reason, since the men of the party were only too ready to make English guests an excuse for breaking their own laws in respect of fermented liquors, and I would not have their loss of caste on my conscience. My chief duty was to keep the Maharani amused as far as might be; she liked trying different kinds of needlework—I taught her knitting and the beginnings of pillow lace. For a whole week she made a serious effort to learn French with me, and was a most quick and industrious pupil. But she was tired of everything in turn, and new fancies followed each other with bewildering frequency. Incidentally I drew her out, and listened for hours to her ideas of things and people, her experiences of life, and deductions therefrom, which revealed much of the curious upside-down mode of thought of the Eastern, mixed with the eternal feminine of instinct and impulse.

If the Maharaja joined us in our walks, I fell to the rear with the *aide-de-camp*. The presence of a second-rate Frenchman in the last capacity puzzled me at first—the explanation of this and other things I did not understand transpired by degrees. These Hindu royalties were playing truant. They

had been given the plainest hints to remain in their own country and do their duty in that state of life to which they still nominally belong ; the Viceroy had intimated his intention of including their capital in the progress of his autumn tour ; it was even whispered that they might be honoured by the presence of a still more august guest, but to all these suggestions the Maharaja turned a deaf ear. His susceptibilities had been hurt at the last State function he had attended, he was not to be cajoled by a minor decoration or coerced by veiled threats of the displeasure of the sovereign power. He would assert his independence, and travel when and where the spirit moved him, and his attitude had the Maharani's warm applause and sympathy. She, in fact, was the livelier rebel of the two, for in addition to her keen resentment of the slight—real or imaginary—offered to her husband, she had a feminine grudge of her own against the Viceregal Court. But that, as Rudyard Kipling says, is another story.

And so they set out for Europe like a pair of disobedient children, exulting in their defiance of authority, and anticipating much amusement from their semi-incognito travels, unhampered by the protective vigilance of an English staff. For since they went without leave, no official notice could be taken of their movements. The disagreeables, to Orientals of their rank, that were bound to ensue in the absence of official recognition, were undreamt of until they occurred. If a crowned head of Europe chooses, for his own amusement to travel in a modest coronet, or even less assuming head-gear, there is nothing but the chance of unwelcome recognition to prevent him from staying at whatever hotel he may prefer, in any country where hotels are to be found. But a dark skin requires an official passport in Paris and Vienna, if not in London, and without it the United States is a land to avoid. A very short experience was enough to prove that some minimum of European escort was indispensable, but nothing would induce the Maharaja to apply to the India Office in his difficulty. So he picked up a stray Frenchman—how or where I never discovered, and the Maharani begged various English acquaintances—including her stepson's young tutor, to recommend her a lady-in-waiting. She was offered a bewildering number immediately, and determined to try as many of them as possible, each for a month in turn. Her experiences, to judge from a few stories told to me, would make an amusing book, if she could be persuaded to write it. All this, I need hardly say, I gathered by degrees, and knowing something of the East—though more of Mahommedans than Hindus—I

could sympathise on some points, discount undue bitterness, and to some extent understand their feelings. The native Princes of India have often been compared to hothouse plants, things artificially preserved from the rude winds of Heaven. Our strong suzerain power shelters them from the struggle for existence, and thereby, while it undoubtedly saves the majority from being swept away, deprives them of the strength that comes by fighting for life. In return for the protection of England, they must needs accept her tutelage, and though they do so for the most part with a good grace, the leading-strings are irksome at times. Criticism of our methods, and discontent with them, are hardly to be wondered at on their part, and that friction, when it arises, is secretly fostered by our enemies in and outside of India, is a matter of common knowledge.

The rest of the suite consisted of the Maharaja's half-brother, who acted as courier and general factotum, a Hindu doctor, two secretaries, one of them a Brahman, and a few servants. The doctor was a typical Babu, possessed of a very fair knowledge of English, an astonishing flow of language, and was always ready to pour out a flood of cheap sedition to an audience of two or three ladies and the sympathetic Frenchman, who would applaud any abuse of "perfidious Albion," but his eloquence was speedily quenched by a little chaff. The revolutionary utterances of the Babu tribe and their newspapers (some of which the doctor would read aloud, translating them for my benefit) are not to be taken very seriously, and in this case were chiefly significant as showing the reflection of sympathy in the mind of the master whom it was the doctor's main business in life to please. On one occasion, after listening to an impassioned article, taken from the vernacular, on the future of "United India" when it had "thrown off the alien yoke," I ventured to ask the Maharaja what he really thought about it, and what he supposed would happen if every Englishman left India to-morrow.

"We should do very well," broke in the Maharani, with a toss of her head. "We should all be at each other's throats," said the Maharaja placidly, "and the strongest would take everything."

"The time is not yet ripe," put in the doctor officiously, "we have not yet learned to stand alone, but when all classes are sufficiently educated——"

"You talk too much, doctor," said his master; "you can be very brave here in Europe, but if war came where would you be?"

The wretched little physician cringed, with a deprecating smile.

"No," the Maharaja continued sadly, "we have forgotten how to rule, we are only puppets now, and can do nothing without permission. All is by order of the Viceroy and his Council; how should we know how to rule ourselves, we are a conquered people?"

"But if it is Kismet that a white race should rule in India, would you not rather it was the English than another European Power?" I asked, endeavouring to soften the bitterness of his conclusion. I saw glances exchanged between the four, the Maharaja, his brother, the Maharani, and the doctor.

"You English think yourselves superior to all the world," said the Maharani half-maliciously; "but in what are you better?"

"We have a better reputation for the art of government than most," I returned, with perhaps pardonable Jingoism. "What other nation could replace our Indian Civil Service?"

"India demands a Native Administration," said the irrepressible Babu; "why should she not have it?"

I did not want to be ungenerous, but he really seemed the native Press incarnate, and as such deserved a snub. "If you had a case to be tried," I retorted, answering him in Eastern fashion with another question, "would you sooner bring it before an Englishman or a native magistrate?" He hesitated. "You might have to give your countryman a present before he attended to you, whereas you would not dare to offer the poorest Englishman a bribe. Is it not true?" I demanded, appealing to the other men. The Maharaja nodded, his brother made an affirmative click.

"It is true," said the latter, "the English are just, and in that lies their strength." It was a curious admission on the part of a man who himself took his "squeeze" from every hotel bill.

"Your ways may be very good for an Englishman," said the Maharani, "but we like our own better. And the poor people also like them better." And this is indeed the difficulty, that most of them at heart prefer to be ground down by rulers of their own blood, than to live under the sway of the most beneficent alien.

"What is the use of discussion?" said the Maharaja, "the English are rulers of India, and will remain so in our day, and our sons' day. For the most part they are wise, but sometimes they do not understand, and do harm when they think to do good, and so our people suffer hardships. Consider, for instance,

these *tamashas*, of which there have been too many of late years. India is a poor country, yet look what we are forced to spend, we native Princes, whether we like it or not, on these displays. The Delhi Durbar cost us many lakhs of rupees, more than I can count ; and now this Royal visit, what will it not cost in festivals ? And all the while the poor people are starving by the hundred. You ask why we do these things on such a lavish scale ; it is expected of us that we follow tradition and entertain magnificently. We cannot afford it, and our people are taxed to supply the money until often they sell all that they have to the moneylender, even their seed-grain. Yes, we are fools to do it, but it is our pride ; we will not say that we cannot afford it. Just as the poor *ryot*, who has no food to give his wife and children, will wax his moustache before he goes out, and put a grain of rice on it, that his neighbours may say he has been eating pillau, so we pretend we are rich, and it does not matter how much we spend. It is said that these durbars and these Royal tours are for the pleasure of the people of India ; all that they mean to the masses of India is that they have to pay heavier taxes. Do they care that one of the English gentlemen who drive past them is the future King and Emperor ? Let them feel some good from his coming, then they will care. It was the old custom in India that whenever the ruler went about his kingdom, he gave some good thing to the place he visited, or he lightened the taxes. Now, if some portion of the salt-tax could be remitted in honour of the Prince's visit, then the poor people would feel and understand that it was the son of the great King. As it is, they only know that their burdens are heavier in order that the great people may feast."

"Surely these things could be represented to the Viceroy, or even to the King himself ? Why does your Highness not do so ?" I asked.

The Maharaja shrugged his shoulders. "I am in what you call 'hot water,'" said he ; "how should any one listen to me ?"

There were days when the ludicrous side of the situation outweighed all else, and I felt as though I had been suddenly thrust into an opera-bouffe, in which I was a trifle uncertain of my part. The Maharaja would be seized with a new inspiration for renovating his State on Western models, such, for instance, as an idea of establishing country-houses as seen in England, and their customs into his Indian domain. He ordered a copy of the *Country Life* illustrated series, depicting a number of well-known houses, and chose out those that pleased him,

getting me to draw rough ground-plans of a few that I happened to be acquainted with. These sketches and pictures were sent off to his Court architect with directions to prepare designs and estimates for their erection, and he then proceeded to question me minutely—a secretary laboriously recording my replies—on the routine of English country life, the household details, and the etiquette of visits. This last particularly interested him, because he said, "For political purposes such visits might be very useful." "Let us begin at the beginning," he said, like a child that wants a story told to him; "when the guests have been chosen for a party, who writes the invitations?" I told him the lady of the house, and we went through every detail from that point. When it came to the accommodation to be offered to each guest, he seemed surprised that they should not be given private sitting-rooms. "How can they see each other alone, if they wish to talk?" I told him that opportunities for private conversation were seldom lacking when wanted, and we passed on to the programme of an ordinary "shoot," or Saturday to Monday party. The difficulty of reconciling Eastern laws of courtesy with modern ways cropped up here and there. What was to be done if one of the guests did not want to shoot or hunt, or go to church, as the case might be. Was the host obliged to remain with him? No, he was left at home with the ladies, such as might be indoors. But if he had not wanted to hunt or shoot, he would not have come. As for going to church, I explained that a week-end visit did not necessarily entail any obligation in that respect.

"You are not obliged to do anything, it seems—you just please yourselves; it must be very pleasant."

"It can be pleasant," I agreed.

"But I fear it might not improve the morality of my upper classes," he concluded, and there the subject dropped. I never heard whether designs for those Elizabethan mansions saw the light of day, or whether the Maharaja's court ever wrestled with the rules laid down for informal entertainments in the country. But, like the Maharaja, I tremble for the results, if they did.

On another occasion it was resolved to institute an Order of Merit in the State of —, of which the Maharaja should be the Grand Master, his sons knights of the first rank, other relatives, and Ministers of the State should be in the second, and Associates third. The nature of the services to be thus rewarded were not specified, the decoration was to be bestowed at the Prince's pleasure. One of the best jewellers in Switzerland

was sent for, and in due course submitted his designs, of which the one selected was comparatively simple; the Maharaja's monogram on an oval of coloured enamel, set round with rays of stones to match those in which the letters were set. The Grand Master's badge was to be entirely of diamonds, those for the first rank set with emeralds and small brilliants, for the second, rubies and rose diamonds, for the third the monogram in pearls, but no rays to the medal.

I could not help thinking of the Maharaja's "starving people" when I was shown these pretty toys. "What will your Chancellor of the Exchequer say to these, your Highness?" I ventured to ask. The Maharaja laughed, his ubiquitous brother wagged his head. "Those who receive them will doubtless pay fees," he suggested. Perhaps they will, but how expensive it will be to "acquire merit" in the State of —.

Another incident brought out the better side, the innate courtesy of the Oriental. The English church was in need of funds, and some of the visitors got up an entertainment to collect the money. A subscription was also opened, to which the Maharaja contributed handsomely. When the rather ill-mannered young parson who acted as treasurer approached him with, "I suppose we mustn't ask *you* for anything," he replied, in his soft, purring voice: "Though we are only poor heathen, we are very glad to give to those who do good." It was said with a laugh that dissolved any awkwardness, and the Maharaja, in addition to his present, took tickets for the theatricals for himself and all his suite. It was a singularly poor performance, and I blushed for my fellow country people who could make such an exhibition of themselves. But the Hindu party, led by the Maharaja and Maharani, applauded every scene warmly. It was not till nearly the end that the poor little Prince, bored to distraction, said in a whisper: "Will they think it rude if I go out? If so, I will stay." I assured him no offence could possibly be taken, and he slipped away. But his wife murmured to me in an undertone: "We will wait for the end, for they have taken so much trouble." And she even congratulated the performers in her most charming manner afterwards, little as they deserved it.

There is an obvious inconsistency between the antagonism the Maharaja and his wife displayed towards English rule and institutions, and their anxiety to have their children educated in England. They had English tutors and governesses for them in India until they were of an age to be brought to Europe, and at the time I speak of, the heir-presumptive, the Maharaja's son by a former marriage, was at Cambridge, the Maharani's

eldest child, a boy of sixteen, was at Harrow, the second at school at Geneva in charge of his English tutor, and the two youngest, a boy and girl, were established at Eastbourne, with a nurse and governess, and attended classes at private schools. I asked why this was done, and the Maharaja's answer was characteristic.

"I have seen in my time many Rajas deprived of their power because of their incompetence," said he, "and I have determined that this shall not be the case with my sons. They shall learn all the things that Englishmen learn; they shall go to your public schools and colleges, and have the same chance as Englishmen."

It was quite impossible to point out that they could never have the same chance as the sons of the average English gentleman, since they started handicapped by hereditary unfitness for the liberty of English boys, and with the eternal bar of race between them and their schoolfellows. I only asked what they thought of the Imperial Cadet Corps, and other such recent institutions for the education of Indian youths of the upper classes in their own country. "They learn nothing there except drill," was the answer, "they become a very ornamental feature of the Viceroy's suite, but I do not choose it for my sons."

This may or may not have been a small ebullition of private rancour—personally I think it was.

Incidentally it may be noted that the succession in the Native States is seldom fixed. The heir is nominated by the ruler, or, in some Hindu States, by the Brahmans—always of course with the consent of the Viceroy in Council. This arrangement leaves the door open, as may be imagined, to an endless amount of jealousy, heart-burning, and intrigue, but the law of primogeniture does not answer with Asiatics as with us.

One day the Maharani had her hand read by an amateur palmist in the hotel, and was told she was the mother of a son who would be famous. This pleased her immensely, especially as it coincided with the predictions of her horoscope, which she told me had been cast when she was about ten years old some time before her betrothal. One can imagine the precious Indian child, listening eagerly to the prophecy concerning the destinies of the son who should be born to her in years to come. She would talk to me by the hour sometimes of her early days, when she and her five sisters played together within the walls of her old home, then of the separations, as each married, and how when her own turn came, at the age of fourteen, she wept so bitterly that her mother entreated leave

to go with her to the Maharaja's palace, but was not allowed to remain very long.

Then I heard of her journey to Europe in the year following that of her marriage, 1887, of her terror and shyness in the strange land, that made the Jubilee festivities more alarming than enjoyable. She dwelt on the kindness of the "Great Queen" as she called her, and spoke of her with touching affection and respect.

"She was so kind that I was not frightened any more," said she, in describing her first visit to Buckingham Palace. "Mrs. E. (the Political Agent's wife) went with me to translate, for then I only spoke Marathi, and the Queen said, 'You must try to learn English, so that the next time you come, you can speak to me yourself.' And her voice was very sweet, and so I made up my mind to learn at once, and I worked very hard. And ten years after, when I saw the Queen again, she said, 'I am glad you have learnt to speak English so well.' And she knew how many children I had, and that I had been very ill, she forgot nothing," said the Maharani, content overspreading her face at the remembrance. "I saw her once again," she continued, "only a few weeks before she died, and she still remembered me. She sent for me to see her, and I went alone, without the Maharaja. The Queen talked to me for a few minutes, and then Princess Beatrice, who was there, said to me that we must come away, for the Queen was very soon tired. Then I knew that she could not live long, and in six weeks she died, and I grieved very much. Never again shall we see such a Great Queen."

After her glimpse of the big world and its gaieties, the secluded existence of a *pardah nashin* seemed very intolerable to the Maharani. She persuaded her husband, although she could not have much social amusement in her own country, to allow her some outdoor pursuits. He let her ride, and being eager to learn, and, astonishing to relate, not in the least nervous, she soon became an excellent horsewoman. She always rode astride, and attired in a divided skirt, and veiled to the eyes, she accompanied the Maharaja in his morning gallops. It amused him to have her company, and she next learnt to shoot, and would go out with him after duck and pigeon. By the time I knew her, her ambition was to shoot a tiger, and while we were in London she had a rifle built for herself for the purpose. These amusements relieved the monotony of her days, a monotony she described to me with lively eloquence as she saw it in the lot of many of her friends and relations.

"They have nothing to do, very little to think of, and perhaps no one to speak to but servants all the day long, they cannot go out, and it seldom happens that any one comes to see them. Think of it."

She went on to describe how some took refuge in religion, became *dévotés*, endangered their lives by the severity of their self-imposed fasts, and spent whole days in prayer. She spoke of matters of religion with a mixture of awe and incredulity. The Maharaja and his brother were professedly and practically materialists, and so she kept her own beliefs, whatever they may have been, to herself, and showed a wide toleration that verged on indifference towards those of her neighbours, but at the same time, scrupulously avoided offending any prejudices they chanced to exhibit.

Her comments, however, on discrepancies between profession and practice were caustic. In speaking of Western marriage laws one day, she said that they undoubtedly put women in a more advantageous position than did Hindu or Mahomedan customs. "But then," she added cynically, "marriage does not count for very much with you." I ventured politely to demur. "Oh, no," she retorted, "look around you. If you see a man talking to a lady, skating with her, dancing with her, you may be sure they are not husband and wife. Perhaps he is going to marry her, but afterwards—he is always with other ladies, she is always with other men." I tried to explain that our customs and social duties do not allow of husband and wife being always together; but she could not reconcile this with her conception of domestic bliss. Her view of social relations was thoroughly Oriental; in spite of having some acquaintance with the Western world, she judged all things by the low standard of Eastern morality, and her inferences startled me. If such are the conclusions of the Indian upper classes, what is the opinion of the ignorant masses likely to be of their white rulers?

And yet, while she condemned our freedom of intercourse, she hankered after it herself, and nothing delighted her more than a chat with an Englishman—a pleasure that, on his part, the Maharaja seldom permitted her. And, with all her philosophy as to the latitude to be granted to masculine frailty, she was tearfully jealous on occasion. She said one day, rather sadly, "A wife must always very much forgive." And that, no doubt, constituted in her education the whole duty of woman.

My term of attendance was lengthened to three months, and might have lasted longer if urgent private affairs had not obliged me to go home.

It was an interesting episode, and one that gave much material for reflection. Is our rule in India really secured, as we are so often told, by the grateful loyalty of the subject races, or are we hated, as the Babu tribe whispers behind our backs? Recent agitation in Bengal and elsewhere throw some light on both sides of the question. The effete races are our enemies, the strong ones our friends—so long as we show ourselves strong. And that is where the moral lies. We should do better often, for our own prosperity, if we let the laws of nature take their course, and sweep away the unfit, but for our honour we cannot. We have inherited our responsibility and must keep it. We cannot, if we would, reinstate those rulers who, through their own or their parents' sins, are incapable of holding the reins of power; we cannot create in the weak Bengali the spirit of uprightness by which alone a republic stands. Those whom we protect we must rule, and it is not to be believed that the disinterested toil, the brave self-sacrifice, the lives that have been given by many of the flower of our race to establish justice and peace in India, should have been spent in vain. And yet so much is lost by the vulgar arrogance of the few. Such incidents as occur too often when a crowd of pleasure-seeking tourists rushes out to India for some pageant, and treats the native Princes at best as "part of the show," do untold harm. We live in a vulgar age, but let us not be more vulgar than we can help. "India," to quote the Maharaja once more, "remains unchanged at heart for centuries. Our ancestors reigned over civilised kingdoms when England was covered with jungle and peopled with savages. And it will be the same when England has passed away and is forgotten."

Perhaps so, but the traces of our rule will survive, and in the traditions of that far hereafter will be an indelible record of the aspect in which others see us to-day.

MILDRED ISEMONGER.