

CHAPTER X

THE Great War at first hardly affected the world of Anglo-India, and business as usual remained the prevailing principle throughout its course. For one thing Anglo-Indians had always lived in an atmosphere of greater familiarity with things military than people in England; and to the majority of Anglo-Indians who never went on leave during the war its gravity and the privations of the civilian populations of Europe were hardly imaginable. The papers continued to print optimistic reports of the military operations and sanguine forecasts. So that at first the only sentiments were of pleasurable excitement. The Germans were not unpopular with Anglo-Indians. Indeed, some were never tired of extolling their achievements in their African colonies. But there had been stories of German ambitions in the East and the activities of German agents in the Persian Gulf were not reassuring. Business circles were jealous of German commercial penetration. And the official world had been revolted by the behaviour of the German Heir-Apparent during his regrettable visit to India, during which he was always unpunctual, although punctuality is said to be the politeness of princes. (On the other hand most Indians remained admirers of the Germans throughout the war, Hindus imagining that all Germans were profound Sanskrit scholars like Professor Muller, and Muhammadans remembering with gratitude Germany's help on previous occasions to the Commander of the Faithful and believing in the frequent German expressions of sympathy with the Islamic world.)

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It was an exciting moment when the Indian troops sailed for France and dear Sir Pertab Singh (about whose quaint misuse of English so many stories had gone round the clubs) insisted on going with them. The response of Indian Princes was more than gratifying. Almost every day one read of a loyal speech by some ruler, offering his State Army for active service or funds for an aeroplane. From the English Press one learned that the Gurkhas had absolutely terrified the Germans, who were quite unmanned by the way the little Nepalese would crawl over to their trenches at night and attack them with kukris.

Gradually, however, it became apparent that the war would last some little time ; and the unfortunate campaign of General Townshend gave rise for the first time to alarm and despondency. It was no longer an affair of a few battles in Europe. Ladies formed knitting groups and gentlemen enlisted in the Volunteers and spent their Sundays marching about in military formation. The parades of the Volunteers were, it was felt, certain to impress Indians with a revelation of the firm resolution of the European community. Actually they had the contrary effect and Indians felt convinced that the war must now be lost, otherwise why should highly paid merchants and officials voluntarily undergo such discomfort, just as if they were ordinary privates who had no other alternative ?

1917 brought the collapse of Russia and new menaces on north and west, the pronouncement of August 20 in the House of Commons, and in November Mr. Montagu's six-months-long perambulation of India.

Leave was now almost impossible to obtain ; and the reports brought by those who returned from leave did not make one repine for a visit to war-time England. The joy of new arrivals from England to find that there were no

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food-restrictions in Bombay and the eager appetite with which they settled down to "a pre-war breakfast" at the Yacht Club were as pathetic as they were strange. Nor was it only the discomfort of life in England which made leave a doubtful pleasure; the voyage was dangerous. Until the boat reached Port Said passengers from England had to wear life-belts all day and sleep in their clothes at night. Religious services were frequent and well attended. My father relates that a Frenchman, travelling to India on a P. & O., was deeply impressed by the "*sens religieux des Anglais*". After Port Said, however, life-belts were laid aside and, now that there was no fear of submarines, the services were hardly attended by anyone. On the other hand my father's French acquaintance was more than ever impressed, but this time by the "*sens pratique des Anglais*".

A faint sense of excitement came to the parties gathered on the Yacht Club lawn each evening, on the terrace overlooking the harbour, to notice that even the P. & O. ships ("such a conservative line, too") had gone in for this camouflage. But, as the gentlemen remarked, tilting the straw hats over their eyes to protect them from the glare of the setting sun, the camouflage didn't make the ships any harder to see. On the contrary, all those stripes and spots drew one's attention to the ship. Of course, one couldn't tell how it looked through a periscope. But the P. & O. were apt to be very dull and stupid, so perhaps they had used the wrong camouflage. In any case, it brought the reality of danger on the high seas very vividly home to one, and increased a natural disinclination for needless risk.

In consequence, when people wanted a holiday they would go to one or other of the Indian hill-stations or to

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the increasingly popular Kashmir. Formerly a visit to Kashmir was almost an adventurous undertaking and Lord Baden-Powell relates that he would grant two or three months' leave to young subalterns who wanted to go to Kashmir, and only one month to those who were so unenterprising as to spend their leave in Simla, where they would only waste their time and energy at parties and dances instead of pursuing more healthy activities. Climbing and fishing have continued to be the main resources of Kashmir. On the banks of upland streams pipe-smoking fishermen with slow anticipatory relish select a fly for their next cast. Weather-beaten matrons in green-leather hats and brown-leather jerkins stride briskly down the winding hill-paths. On the door-post of a chaletesque chapel are notices of a Men's Friendly next Sunday afternoon. The chaplain in old school blazer chats genially with a group of Punjabi scouts in khaki shorts and gay turbans, while in the Scouts' camp a young Sikh bugler practises (with a continual menace of quarter-tones) "Come to the cook-house door, boys". Intellectual majors (fond of referring to "ordinary Army people who aren't interested in Things of the Mind") lean on alpenstock or rest on shooting-stick and explain "Jove, it's just like Sicily"; the other majors are reminded of Scotland or Switzerland. And bespectacled missionaries hop off their bicycles and remark with pleasure that in this delightful land even the old Hindu temples have the air of an English parish church of the 'forties; for so prescient of English taste were those architects of the eighth and ninth centuries that they constructed their shrines with pointed or romanesque arches and trefoil windows and tall sloping roofs, all of the most sedate grey stone, so that coming upon such a shrine in the shadow of pines and fir-trees it is almost shocking to perceive, blatant

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among so much spinsterish restraint, a marble phallus of Shiva, in the central nave.

But these wilder pleasure-grounds were not the only attractions that a rapidly progressing Kashmir had to offer Anglo-Indians on holiday. An admirable hotel in Srinagar with comfortable bedrooms, and in the lounge probably more paintings of ducks than any other room in the world. House-boats with cushioned chairs, geraniums in pots and chintz curtains which had to remain drawn most of the day to shut out the importunate hawkers who drifted round the canals in their narrow boats offering for sale at each house-boat papier-maché hair-tidies and cigarette cases inlaid with regimental crests. Shops embowered in roses like a painting on a Christmas gift blotter. A jewellery shop whose half-caste owner was a noted palmist and astrologer who held séances in an inner room (it was indeed surprising the number of people who consulted him, their voices drifting through into the outer shop, "You say my Leo influence means too many rich meals, well I've always been fond of good nourishing food . . . but my bad feet you put down to Piscis? You suggest I should wear more red stones to strengthen my Sagittarius influence, well that does look a very pretty brooch I must say . . ."). An Amateur Dramatic Company whose productions were so good that even temporary visitors were anxious for a part in the next rehearsals ("I've always been fond of acting, though I haven't had much experience except in a performance of 'Aladdin' we got up in Malta for charity. I was a slave, you know, not a big part, but the make-up was difficult. I had to oil myself all over. Oh, I was much complimented."). Both at Srinagar and Gulmarg admirable golf-courses. And everywhere landscapes of a singular beauty; the clear blue lakes fed by mountain streams;

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the enormous poplars, the irises in spring and maples in autumn ; sunset on the mountain bastions, the foothills a smoky brown like uncut topaz and the carved white peaks against the paling sky. . . .