CHAPTER XII

ARMISTICE DAY became known in Calcutta as Black Friday. People had on the whole enjoyed the war; the Volunteers' parades, the excitement, and above all, the large fortunes made in jute. These fortunes continued to be made till the early 'twenties but on a decreasing scale. Moreover, the end of the war meant that numbers of young men arrived out as new recruits to the big firms, and their manners and slang and reluctance to wear starched collars in the hot weather deeply disturbed the seniors. "Unstable" was an adjective used several times a day when the elderly gathered together in the clubs for pre-lunch drinks and discussed the juniors in their firms. Just because they had been through the war these young men seemed to consider they had a right to behave differently from their elders and betters and to flout all the traditions of Calcutta society; one always seemed to be having them "on the mat" and telling them that a member of an old-established firm, which prided itself on employing Gentlemen, should learn how to hold his drink (which meant the amiable torpor consequent on a traditionally vast dinner and a succession of dark sherries, madeiras, ports and brandies) and not be heard laughing loudly in the hall of a club or making indecorous remarks in a cinematograph theatre. It was distressing, too, the way the younger men were always in search of novelty and excitement. They did not seem satisfied with the grand old clubs of Calcutta which as everyone knew were the best in India. There was the Saturday Club where one could listen to forty Goanese bandsmen dressed

up like Central European ringmasters at work on "Pagliacci" or "In a Monastery Garden", and every Friday night there was a formal ball where you were certain to meet all the other senior people in Calcutta. And on other days of the week there would be dinner-parties at one or other of the great houses. What more could you want?

But in 1918 Firpo's Restaurant was opened and was at once a success. There was a jazz band; the furniture was in the P. & O. Louis Quinze style; and the place was lit in what was considered a very advanced manner. Even some of the seniors succumbed to the lure of this Continental-looking place and entertained their friends to dinner there instead of in their own huge Georgian houses; and this would have seemed, a few years before, a practice subversive of the whole tradition of Anglo-Indian hospitality. There were sporadic attempts to open a cabaret at Firpo's but for ten years the police imposed a ban, to the relief of most of the influential Anglo-Indians who heard with concern of the state of undress permitted to performers in London cabarets and considered that the effect on the Indian public of the spectacle of European girls as professional dancers in a public restaurant would be unfortunate.

There were other changes to perplex the older residents. The old-fashioned houses were becoming too expensive to run. Servants' wages had gone up (for which the military were blamed, especially the "temporary officers who had only come to India for a short visit and weren't accustomed to having servants and so spoilt them and overpaid them"). People were more concerned to have electric fans and running water than a noble façade or a grand situation. Flats became fashionable; and the juniors clattering up and down the long stone staircases to each other's rooms or calling to each other out of the windows seemed generations

removed from the traditional Anglo-Indian dwelling in dignified seclusion.

Cars came into fashion slowly. Business-men and brokers went sedately to their offices in the traditional *jaun*, a gloomy box-shaped horse-carriage, till the middle 'twenties.

Towards the end of the 'twenties there was a rage for cocktail parties which the juniors found to be so much more economical than formal dinners, and even if the seniors peered suspiciously into their glasses and talked darkly about American habits and poison and probable effects on the liver, it could not be denied that such entertainments were very fashionable at home, as anyone could see from the photos in the *Bystander* and *Sketch*.

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Post-war years were troubled by political disorders. In Calcutta as in Bombay ladies hung about clubs badgering members to contribute to the Dyer Fund, but people in Bombay, who had passed through some very alarming weeks, had perhaps some justification for their subscriptions. This fund has been often and vehemently criticised ; but India is a land of political funds and that was a time when everyone seemed to be raising money for some fund or other. The contemporary Khilafat Fund for which vast sums were collected to restore to his pre-war power a Caliph whose rule was no longer desired even by his own subjects, had an odd and comic history ; and the Caliph must have envied the way General Dyer at least received the money that had been collected for him. In those post-war years most communities in India succumbed to various attacks of hysteria. The boom of the war was followed by a sudden slump. There had been martial law in the Punjab ; a malaria epidemic decimating the rural population over wide areas ;

the recrudescence of the Russian Menace and of the Afghan Question; the launching of the first Civil Disobedience Movement. Stirring times which many English people in India feared were but the prelude to another mutiny. The reforms were held by many to be inappropriate to a period of apparently increasing anarchy. There were some resignations and for a few years it was found difficult to recruit enough Englishmen for the I.C.S. Retired civilians visited the universities to encourage recruiting by painting idyllic pictures of Anglo-Indian Life based on recollections of their own youth in some remote Punjab district in the late 'eighties. One distinguished official, having delivered his recruiting address to an Oxford audience, was asked how a young man with "liberal sympathies" would fare in India. "Well," said the distinguished official with a confiding smile, "I don't mind admitting I was a bit of a liberal myself but once out there you soon forget all about that sort of thing. Too many other interests. Big-game shooting, for instance."

Recruits responded satisfactorily to these siren appeals. Nationalist movements were succeeded by communal riots. And the recommendations of the Lee Commission increased the material comforts of the Indian services. The atmosphere of Anglo-India became much more cheerful.

But it was a strangely changed Anglo-India.

The vast old bungalows were in many districts replaced by neat little villas with electricity, telephones and labour-saving devices. The compound too would be smaller. A garage replaced the row of stables, for people did not ride much nowadays. You could not afford both car and stable, and with tarred roads in the bigger towns riding was much less pleasant than in old days. Besides, one did not remain long in any one district and a car was much less trouble

to move than a horse. It was true that some Indians complained that the new motorist-official hardly saw the life of the villages except along the main roads. But that could not be helped ; with so many committee-meetings and increasing work at headquarters it would have been impossible to do without a car. And Indians complained about many things in the new Anglo-India. Some (but these were the elderly) complained that nowadays Englishmen married much too early in India. The old-fashioned administrator with his Indian mistresses had, it has been argued, a knowledge of the people such as his more virtuous successor could hardly hope to gain. . . .

Anglo-Indian life tended now to converge on the larger stations and cantonments, where there was always some company and where the clubs still flourished. Club libraries were far better stocked than before the war. You would find rows of new books ; Priestley, Walpole, and, most popular of all, Beverley Nichols (homesick subalterns found a nostalgic pleasure in those evocations of English country life, the gardens and village characters, and majors' wives thought him charming and unaffected, not like those Sitwells). There might be in the bigger stations like Poona and Lahore French clubs where one might keep up with one's French and not turn into a figure of fun at Marseilles, abusing the porters in Hindustani like the old-fashioned Anglo-Indians one had heard so many jokes about. And there would be other radio fans with whom one could discuss the problems of aerials and the tiresome atmospherics resulting from stormy weather in the Red Sea, which prevented a clear reception of the news, the descriptions of sporting events and the concerts. And there would be people fresh from home leave, for hill-stations were less frequented—you could get home by air in almost the same

time as it took to get to Kashmir from most parts of India.

In the smaller stations the Anglo-Indian communities dwindled. The services were increasingly " provincialised ". In the bungalows along the straight and dusty roads of the Civil Lines there would still be cane chairs in the verandas and ferns in hanging pots, but the curtains would be of heavier material, the cushions brighter and in the drawing-room instead of a photo-laden piano there would be the little daughter's German harmonium and on the carved tables a bridal couple photo and ash-trays with college arms. The club would have entered on a period of slow, inevitable decline. Club-addiction is a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon trait ; and the English in India who had usually sent their children home to England to be educated and had in consequence none of the intense devoted family life of Indians, found the same pleasure in gymkhanas as so many Americans in country clubs and in reunions of regular fellows and good mixers. Few Indians drink like Anglo-Saxons ; and even those few have no particular zest for a Bar, for the hours spent perched on a high stool with instep resting on a brass rail. Consequently the drink profits, on which club finances generally depended, declined. One could no longer spend so much on English illustrated papers ; and though the conscientious Brahman official might still dutifully plod through *Sketch* and *Tatler*, digest the Society Jottings, the " Priscilla in Paris ", a time would come when the club would have to be content with only two illustrated papers (perhaps the *Sphere* and the *Sporting and Dramatic*) and one fiction magazine. Subscriptions might be put up and even the price of soda and lemonade raised to compensate for the dearth of orders for whisky and gin, but that gaunt building remained too expensive to maintain ; the diamond-leaded

panes of the Tudor windows always seemed to need replacing, the paint was flaking off the two Corinthian pillars of the library and white ants were building in the Gothic fretwork over the pointed archway leading to the ladies' cloakroom.

Sometimes an old Anglo-Indian, who had found his periods of leave and visits to England increasingly unsatisfying ("England seems quite a strange country nowadays. No one seems to have any manners and everyone is in such a hurry") would have settled down in the station where he had been happy with the golf-course and the friendly gossip in the bar afterwards, and by virtue of his long connection with the club would have been elected secretary year after year without question, and he would now find the changes almost bewildering. Such a one said to me, "Before the old club finally has to put up the shutters I hope I'm dead. I've made it a point in my will that I want to be buried on that little hill overlooking the eighteenth hole, and instead of the burial service I want to have a panatrope play over my grave the Londonderry Air."

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The bigger the station the less noticeable the changes. Christmas Week at Lahore was as gay as ever for the soldiers down from the Frontier for a dance and a decent meal at Stiffles' and a cocktail in the mornings (the brisk and misty mornings of Punjab winter) at Lorang's where the band played fairly recent foxtrots and the waiters, wearing sashes and turban-bands of the Belgian colours to emphasise the proprietor's nationality, hurried between the bamboo chairs and the glass-topped tables balancing trays of oysters (brought in cold storage from Karachi) and champagne cocktails and the subalterns fresh from remote outposts

remarked on the number of Sikh girls (" surprising percentage of good-lookers ") with smart shingled hair and elaborate cigarette-holders who enjoyed their cocktails and beat time to the strains of " Ten cents a dance ".

In New Delhi more visitors than ever gathered for Horse-show Week. New and shining cars sped down the long, the bewilderingly long avenues lined by beautiful new bungalows in the Lutyens Colonial style ; the avenues whose surface was so wonderfully smooth on account of the ban on all lorry traffic and, in the grander roads where the big officials had their bungalows, even on bullock carts ; avenues with well-clipped grass on either side and carefully tended trees ; avenues leading nowhere in particular or just out into the rock-strewn wastes around the new city, or to the central avenue from which one gazed admiringly up to the pink cliffs of the new Secretariat and the copper dome of the Viceroy's House and the white circular many-columned Council Chamber, or to the circular road (reminiscent of Bath or Cheltenham) where the shops clustered together, or to the new stadium facing (and concealing) the Old Fort where Their Excellencies would drive in state with lancers and umbrellas to inaugurate the Week, and would mount slowly to the Viceregal Box where in accordance with established ritual the gentlemen of the party would immediately change their white topis for felt hats brought to them on trays by red-robed orderlies. And in the beautiful little houses, furnished in distinctively London style, there would be sherry-parties with well-informed conversation about the ballet, the more modern poetry and painting. These conversations were notable for the absence of Anglo-Indian slang—indeed many boasted of their ignorance of it, like one well-groomed official of many years' service who indicated a veranda and asked,

"Now what's the word they use out here for those little terraces? *Loggie* our Italian friends would call them. . . ."

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Post-war changes in Bombay were inevitable and natural. Indians there had always been more Westernised than anywhere in India, and even at the beginning of the nineteenth century Mrs. Graham had noted that relations between English and Indians in Bombay were unusually friendly. Industrialisation had brought together business-men of both communities in alliance against the workers, mostly Marathas from the Deccan plateau who, driven to the cities by poverty, had developed a taste for expensive luxuries like drink and American films and for the incitements of the ubiquitous Bolshevik. The Club-Entry problem had been as long-standing an irritant between the two races as the Temple-Entry problem between the Twice-Born and the Untouchables; but on the initiative of Lord Willingdon a new club was started, open to all communities. Much of the money was put up by Indian princes and there was a lavish expenditure on the golf-course, the tennis-courts and squash-courts. This club naturally attracted those young princelings who generally open their conversation with, "What games do you play, besides golf and tennis I mean?" But the club building was an ignoble structure and the subscription so high that only the rich could hope to be members.

The younger generation of Englishmen brought up on jokes against pukka sahibs developed few racial prejudices. And anyhow it was easy enough to get on with young Indians who were as interested in cars and sport as any English subalterns, who played bridge enthusiastically and read "Sapper" and Edgar Wallace.

Of course there were some intellectuals of both races,

too, and they found many interests in common. They joined the Three Arts Society founded by that cultured Muhammadan lady, Atiya Begum. The reunions would be held at her house on Malabar Hill which had been built to resemble exactly an old Mogul palace. Sometimes a distinguished visitor to Bombay would be present as guest of honour. On one occasion Mr. Bernard Shaw, who had arrived at Bombay on a winter cruise, accepted an invitation and this was justifiably held to be a triumph, though at the meeting a little confusion was caused by the persistence of some of the Indian members in addressing the guest of honour as " Sir Bernard ". There would be on other occasions recitations of poetry, preferably the poetry of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, The Indian Nightingale.

O brilliant blossoms that strew my way

(The reciter would make a gesture as of one strewing)

You are only woodland flowers, *they say*

(But the reciter shook his head. He knew better.)

I sometimes think that perhaps you are
Fragments of some new-fallen star !

There would be Indian songs accompanied by Indian musicians and then perhaps a young Parsi would be persuaded to do a tap-dance to the music of a gramophone.

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The cordiality between English and Indian in Bombay survived the recurring political tumults when tempers were frayed and old animosities half-revived. The Simon Commission landed to the accompaniment of sharp controversies ; but both English and Indians enjoyed the legend that went round the clubs, that on his return to England after the first six-months' tour the leader of the

Commission had been seen brooding tenderly over a bed of daffodils in Hyde Park and had been heard to murmur with a gentle sigh, "Daffodils. Well, well . . . English daffodils." The returned exile. . . .

Even in the fury of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 Bombay maintained its reputation for friendliness between the two races. While in Calcutta it is said that many of the younger Englishmen joined an association known as the Royalists with gentlemanly-fascist leanings, enterprising Englishmen in Bombay formed a group called the Young Europeans. These were mostly junior members of Bombay firms who prided themselves on a progressive outlook. They gave lunches to prominent Indian leaders and listened with enthusiasm to eloquent speeches by their guests who pointed out that the brotherhood of man was a noble aim and that liberty was preferable to tyranny. They despatched representatives to congratulate Lord Irwin on his policy and were gratified by a viceregal interview. Many, perhaps most of them, were sincere in their desire for a new relationship with political India. Others felt the natural satisfaction of the self-consciously advanced; the excitement of defying the conservatism of unsympathetic seniors in their own firms and the prejudices of the less sensitive juniors. They had little support among the smarter athletic groups like that exclusive swimming set the Bombay Ducks (with their slogans like "Never let down Ducks" and their annual dinner to the Governor). The more defiant among them flew Congress flags on their cars, which was regarded with wide disapproval. But after the movement was over they could congratulate themselves on their endurance in face of hostile comment ("Yes, we went through a bad time in '30 but we stuck it out.").

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British and Indian business-men found a bond of sympathy in approval of "The Cut": the ten per cent. reduction in the pay of all Government servants. Ever since the beginning of the economic crisis there had been rumours of such a measure. Local Service associations were naturally alarmed; for a ten per cent. reduction under to-day's undemocratic Government was a sad precedent to set for to-morrow's democracy. In every up-country club there were anxious discussions as the rumours increased, and the juniors hoped that the "cut" would be carefully graded according to the scale of salaries, while the seniors stressed the importance of the principle of equality of sacrifice. When the final decision was reached to levy an all-round ten per cent. cut there was great disappointment and anxiety among junior officials and soldiers with comparatively small salaries. The reactions of the military included a circular enjoining club members to pay for their own drinks in the club bar and to refrain from "treating". Traditionally each man present in the bar or sitting in one of those wide circles on the club lawn would in turn call for a round of drinks and then sign a chit for that round. According to the new plan each member was only to order drinks for himself and never offer them to his neighbour. This important change, however, was never fully realised; it seemed unnatural never to turn to the others at the bar and ask "What's yours?"; and after a few months the old system had returned despite the frowns of authority. There were other circulars suggesting a parallel cut in servants' wages and committees of military women drew scales of maximum pay; twenty rupees for a subaltern's bearer, thirty for a captain's bearer and so on. But, as the subalterns and captains in line regiments complained, rich cavalry regiments paid little attention to these proposals and

so prevented unanimity among employers. The cut was presently " restored " but its memory continued to provoke a certain sense of insecurity.

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An Anglo-Indian of the 'seventies or 'eighties of the last century who returned to Bombay to-day would miss, at least in the " Fort " area, the traditionally vast dark drawing-rooms, the verandas wide as a liner's deck, the great gardens. The spaciousness of Anglo-Indian life had always been a much-vaunted compensation for the discomforts of the climate ; and though our visitor from the 'seventies might be impressed by the amenities of frigidaires, English baths, built-in radios and electric cooking ranges, he might wonder whether Anglo-Indian life had not lost much of its distinctive character, and whether these bright little flats with tiled floors and imitation-Heal furniture were not more appropriate to New York or Berlin than to Bombay.

He would probably, however, find even more to cavil at in the style of Bombay's post-war architecture. The Georgian palaces of the eighteenth century were as appropriate to the age of the Nabobs as the red Gothic of the nineteenth century to the age of the evangelical administrators. But to what kind of age, our visitor would wonder, could these new buildings be said to be appropriate? Styled by local admirers " modernistic ", these blocks of flats are shaped like biscuit-tins, their walls adorned with a few insignificant geometric designs which begin to change colour after the second monsoon ; there are bits of arty trellis-work and balcony railings designed with the purposeful rusticity of garden-seats ; flat roofs with an imitation pergola and a coloured plaster gnome or two ; doors in unexpected places with quaint door-handles and knockers ;

entrance-halls like grottoes in Selfridge's annual display of Santa Claus Land. Even the sedate hotels which in their gloomy solidity had seemed pleasantly typical of nineteenth-century Bombay had, our visitor would find, yielded to these new architectural fashions ; had opened cocktail bars in " Riviera Style " and many a little alcove or " Kozy Neuk " leading from the main hall whose pointed arches offered a remarkable contrast to the new eruptions of chromium and moulded glass. And our visitor would hardly enjoy his luncheon (no longer tiffin) or dinner in the sea-green glitter of the dining-room, silver stars and a laughing moon on one enamel-green wall, green glass pillars all round, no fans or punkahs (no longer necessary with the air-conditioning apparatus) and on the dais a deafening noise from a jazz band. For luncheon they would play old favourites, perhaps Gilbert and Sullivan or selections from the works of Mr. Hermann Finck, but for dinner jazz would be inevitable. Many of our visitor's fellow-diners would dance as soon as, or even before, they had finished dinner. Others would be off to the cinema. Bombay now boasted seven or eight cinemas devoted exclusively to American and English films. Most of them, it is true, were converted theatres, with the annoying result for those who had paid the top prices for the best view, that they also got the most uncomfortable seats, but films were often shown at the same time as the London première, or even earlier, so that one had the comforting feeling that one was not an exile.

For an exile in post-war Bombay one was, more than before, likely to feel. Too many things seemed to be inferior, yet nostalgia-inducing, imitations of London . . . The negro band that played in " The Taj " in the cold weather and made a speciality of " swing " music, to which luckily

it was, however, quite easy to dance the same old fox-trot one always had danced; the football matches on the Cooperage ground—though England could boast nothing so picturesque as the forest of fezzes and turbans that rose skywards whenever Muhammadan Sporting scored a goal; the Bombay Symphony Orchestra's concerts, with the Police Band in charge of the "brass" and Parsi ladies fiddling away for dear life; the B.B.C.I. (Bombay, Baroda and Central India) electric railway; the new double-decker, red-painted buses: all tended to have the same effect, an effect reinforced by the weekly arrivals and departures of the P. & O. mail-boats.

Leave was a staple topic of conversation at all gatherings and particularly—for many ladies went home every year—at those "bridge and gimlet" parties at which the married women whiled away the later hours of the morning. Another favourite subject now was patent medicines, a topic not confined to the women. Gone were the vast meals to which our nineteenth-century visitor had been accustomed and on which he had thrived. Even the more frugal, cold-storage fare now provided proved too much, in Bombay's climate, for twentieth-century digestions. Our visitor would be startled by such outlandish words as "Bemax", "Energen", "Vitalin", repeatedly recurring in the conversation, alarmed at "Are you still on strychnine? I've gone on to arsenic", disgusted by the food served to him at a meal where all his fellow-guests were taking a course of Dr. Hay's famous slimming diet.

As of old the Anglo-Indian Press chronicled the various festivities in which the city indulged. Bombay's "gay social whirl" (as one girl described it to me) reached its apex for many at Christmas and the New Year. The welcome accorded to 1937 was thus described by *The*

Evening News of India in its society gossip column called "The Bombay Man's Diary":

> The host of New Year's Eve revellers last night must have totalled thousands and the voice of jubilation swept through all the city and its suburbs. It roared its loudest and merriest at the Taj where there must have been not much short of two thousand souls bent on making the welkin ring with echoes of a very good time. An elaborate programme had been arranged by that enterprising duo Faletti and Framrose, who devised between them a host of ingenious ideas to keep everyone interested and entertained . . . a choice menu of mirth, beautiful decorations, quantities of gewgaws, baubles and noisy instruments, first-rate cabaret music and what not. The result was a proper Bacchanalian rout in which the most sedate and sober pranced and capered with the zest of two-year-olds at a birthday party.

Yet was this Bacchanal essentially more vulgar than the routs and orgies in eighteenth-century Calcutta so much more literately described by Mr. Hickey?

One more difference perhaps our visitor might mark, and it would comfort him—the contrast between life in the "Fort" area and life on Malabar or Cumbala Hill. On the two latter lived the Civil Service and the Judiciary, the world of officialdom, the "Number Ones" of business firms and the rich Anglicé Parsis. Here were still spacious bungalows, many of them with views over the lovely Bombay coast-line. In them formality and precedence still to some extent held sway, their inhabitants seldom figured in "The Bombay Man's Diary". "The sun"—to vary Mr. Noel Coward's lyric—"had *not* set on Government House."

The advent to power of Congress brought to this world new social as well as political problems. Should one attempt to "mix", risking the snub of refusal which Congress Headquarters wished the Provincial ministers to

administer? Should the Sheriff of Bombay go to the station to meet the new Premier on his arrival from Poona? Should the European members of the Bombay bar attend a dinner in that Holy of Holies, the Byculla Club, to the new minister for law and order, risking the possibility that a hot-tempered Irishman might strike the cigarette from the mouth of a congressman who was smoking during a loyal toast? And there was the alarming scare that the seat of government was going to be moved altogether to Poona. It was all rather difficult, but meanwhile life for the majority went on much as before. Probably a social *modus vivendi* could be achieved; after all congress-men were human beings, and it was satisfactory that the ministers had not, after all, insisted on the police wearing Gandhi caps and *dhotis*. Anyway, one must wait and see. . . .

And in that position we must leave the British in India. Times have changed rapidly for them since 1918—even their designation of "Anglo-Indian" has been taken from them and by Act of Parliament bestowed upon those who had previously been called Eurasians. Indianisation proceeds apace and Indian independence has become a practical possibility rather than the extremists' dream. The spacious days when the Englishman, be he Governor-General or District Officer, was supreme in his own sphere have vanished. To-day may be looked on as a transitional stage. One may hazard that in the future the British in India may be less noticeable for their eccentricities, their conscious superiority, but that it is extremely unlikely that anyone will ever mistake them for citizens of any nation but their own.

THE END