

**DICKINSON
GOLDSWORTHY
LOWES**

APPEARANCES: BEING
NOTES OF TRAVEL

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G. Lowes Dickinson

Appearances: Being

Notes of Travel

PREFACE

The articles included in this book have already appeared, those from the East in the *Manchester Guardian*, those from America in the *English Review*. In reprinting them, I have chosen a title which may serve also as an apology. What I offer is not Reality; but appearances to me. From such appearances perhaps, in time, Reality may be constructed. I claim only to make my contribution. I do so because the new contact between East and West is perhaps the most important fact of our age; and the problems of action and thought which it creates can only be solved as each civilisation tries to understand the others, and, by so doing, better to understand itself. These articles represent at any rate a good will to understand; and they may, I hope, for that reason throw one gleam of light on the darkness.

For the opportunity of travelling in the East I am indebted to the munificence of Mr. Albert Kahn of Paris, who has founded what are known in this country as the Albert Kahn Travelling

Fellowships.¹ The existence of this endowment is perhaps not as widely known as it should be. And if this volume should be the occasion of leading others to take advantage of the founder's generosity it will not have been written in vain.

I have hesitated long before deciding to republish the letters on America. They were written in 1909, before the election of President Wilson, and all that led up to and is implied in that event. It was not, however, the fact that, so far, they are out of date, that caused me to hesitate. For they deal only incidentally with current politics, and whatever value they may have is as a commentary on phases of American civilisation which are of more than transitory significance. Much has happened in the United States during the last few years which is of great interest and importance. The conflict between democracy and plutocracy has become more conscious and more acute; there have been important developments in the labour movement; and capital has been so "harassed" by legislation that it may, for the moment, seem odd to capitalists to find America called "the paradise of Plutocracy." No doubt the American public has awakened to its situation since 1909. But such awakenings take a long time to transform the character of a civilisation and all that has occurred serves only to confirm the contention in the text that in the new world the same situation is arising that confronts the old one.

¹ These Fellowships, each of the value of £660, were established to enable the persons appointed to them to travel round the world. The Trust is administered at the University of London, and full information regarding it can be obtained from the Principal, Sir Henry Miers, F.R.S., who is Honorary Secretary to the Trustees.

What made me hesitate was something more important than the date at which the letters were written. There is in them a note of exasperation which I would have wished to remove if I could. But I could not, without a complete rewriting, by which, even if it were possible to me, more would have been lost than gained. It is this note of exasperation which has induced me hitherto to keep the letters back, in spite of requests to the contrary from American friends and publishers. But the opportunity of adding them as a pendant to letters from the East, where they fall naturally into their place as a complement and a contrast, has finally overcome my scruples; the more so, as much that is said of America is as typical of all the West, as it is foreign to all the East. That this Western civilisation, against which I have so much to say, is nevertheless the civilisation in which I would choose to live, in which I believe, and about which all my hopes centre, I have endeavoured to make clear in the concluding essay. And my readers, I hope, if any of them persevere to the end, will feel that they have been listening, after all, to the voice of a friend, even if the friend be of that disagreeable kind called "candid."

PART I

INDIA

I

IN THE RED SEA

"But why do you do it?" said the Frenchman. From the saloon above came a sound of singing, and I recognised a well-known hymn. The sun was blazing on a foam-flecked sea; a range of islands lifted red rocks into the glare; the wind blew fresh; and, from above,

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

Male voices were singing; voices whose owners, beyond a doubt, had no idea of clinging to anything. Female voices, too, of clingers, perhaps, but hardly to a cross. "Why do you do it?" – I began to explain. "For the same reason that we play deck-quoits and shuffle-board; for the same reason that we dress for dinner. It's the system." "The system?" "Yes. What I call Anglicanism. It's a form of idealism. It consists in doing the proper thing." "But why should the proper thing be done?" "That question ought

not to be asked. Anglicanism is an idealistic creed. It is anti-utilitarian and anti-rational. It does not ask questions; it has faith. The proper thing is the proper thing, and because it is the proper thing it is done." "At least," he said, "you do not pretend that this is religion?" "No. It has nothing to do with religion. But neither is it, as you too simply suppose, hypocrisy. Hypocrisy implies that you know what religion is, and counterfeit it. But these people do not know, and they are not counterfeiting. When they go to church they are not thinking of religion. They are thinking of the social system. The officers and civilians singing up there first learned to sing in the village church. They walked to the church from the great house; the great house stood in its park; the park was enclosed by the estate; and the estate was surrounded by other estates. The service in the village church stood for all that. And the service in the saloon stands for it still. At bottom, what that hymn means is not that these men are Christians, but that they are carrying England to India, to Burma, to China." "It is a funny thing," the Frenchman mused, "to carry to 300 million Hindus and Mahometans, and 400 million Confucians, Buddhists, and devil-worshippers. What do they do with it when they get there?" "They plant it down in little oases all over the country, and live in it. It is the shell that protects them in those oceans of impropriety. And from that shell they govern the world." "But how can they govern what they can't even see?" "They govern all the better. If once they could see, they would be lost. Doubt would enter in. And it is the virtue of the Englishman

that he never doubts. That is what the system does for him."

At this moment a voice was borne down the breeze. It was that of my travelling companion, and it appeared, as he approached, that he was discoursing to the captain on the merits of Dostoievsky's novels. He is no respecter of persons, he imposes his own conversation; and the captain, though obviously puzzled, was polite. "Russians may be like that," he was remarking as he passed, "but Englishmen aren't." "No," said my friend, "but don't you wish they were?" "I do *not*," said the captain with conviction. I looked at the Frenchman. "There," I said, "behold the system." "But your friend?" "Ah, but he, like myself, is a pariah. Have you not observed? They are quite polite. They have even a kind of respect – such as our public school boys have – for anyone who is queer, if only he is queer enough. But we don't "belong," and they know it. We are outside the system. At bottom we are dangerous, like foreigners. And they don't quite approve of our being let loose in India." "Besides, you talk to the Indians." "Yes, we talk to the Indians." "And that is contrary to the system?" "Yes, on board the boat; it's all very well while you're still in England." "A strange system – to perpetuate between rulers and ruled an impassable gulf!" "Yes. But, as Mr. Podsnap remarked, 'so it is.'"

We had penetrated to the bows of the ship and hung looking over. Suddenly, just under the surf, there was an emerald gleam; another; then a leap and a dive; a leap and a dive again. A pair of porpoises were playing round the bows with the ease, the

spontaneity, the beauty of perfect and happy life. As we watched them the same mood grew in us till it forced expression. And "Oh," I said, "the ship's a prison!" "No," said the Frenchman, "it's the system."

II

AJANTA

A dusty road running through an avenue across the great plateau of the Deccan; scanty crops of maize and cotton; here and there low hills, their reddish soil sparsely clothed with trees; to the north, a receding line of mountains; elsewhere infinite space and blazing light. Our "tonga," its pair of wheels and its white awning rolling and jolting behind two good horses, passes long lines of bullock-carts. Indians, walking beside them with their inimitable gait, make exquisite gestures of abjection to the clumsy white Sahibs huddled uncomfortably on the back seat. Their robes of vivid colour, always harmoniously blent, leave bare the slender brown legs and often the breast and back. Children stark naked ride on their mothers' hips or their fathers' shoulder. Now and again the oxen are unyoked at a dribble of water, and a party rests and eats in the shade. Otherwise it is one long march with bare feet over the burning soil.

We are approaching a market. The mud walls of a village appear. And outside, by a stream shrunk now into muddy pools, shimmers and wimmers a many-coloured crowd, buzzing among their waggons and awnings and improvised stalls. We ford the shallow stream, where women are washing clothes, cleaning their teeth, and drinking from the same water, and pass among the bags of corn, the sugar-cane, and sweetmeats, saluted gravely but

unsolicited.

Then on again for hours, the road now solitary, till as day closes we reach Fardapur. A cluster of mud-walled compounds and beehive huts lies about a fortified enclosure, where the children sprawl and scream, and a Brahmin intones to silent auditors. Outside they are drawing water from the puddles of the stream. And gradually over the low hills and the stretches of yellow grass the after-glow spreads a transfiguring light. Out of a rosy flush the evening star begins to shine; the crickets cry; a fresh breeze blows; and another pitiless day drops into oblivion.

Next day, at dawn, we walk the four miles to the famous caves, guided by a boy who wears the Nizam's livery, and explains to us, in a language we do not know, but with perfect lucidity, that it is to him, and no one else, that backsheesh is due. He sings snatches of music as old and strange as the hills; picks us balls of cotton, and prickly pear; and once stops to point to the fresh tracks of a panther. We are in the winding gorge of a watercourse; and presently, at a turn, in a semicircle facing south, we see in the cliff the long line of caves. As we enter the first an intolerable odour meets us, and a flight of bats explains the cause. Gradually our eyes accustom themselves to the light, and we become conscious of a square hall, the flat roof resting on squat pillars elaborately carved, fragments of painting on the walls and ceiling, narrow slits opening into dark cells, and opposite the entrance, set back in a shrine, a colossal Buddha, the light falling full on the solemn face, the upturned feet, the expository hands. This is a monastery,

and most of the caves are on the same plan; but one or two are long halls, presumably for worship, with barrel-vaulted roofs, and at the end a great solid globe on a pedestal.

Of the art of these caves I will not speak. What little can be seen of the painting – and only ill-lighted fragments remain – is full of tenderness, refinement, and grace; no touch of drama; no hint of passion. The sculpture, stripped of its stucco surface, is rude but often impressive. But what impresses most is not the art but the religion of the place. In this terrible country, where the great forces of nature, drought and famine and pestilence, the intolerable sun, the intolerable rain, and the exuberance of life and death, have made of mankind a mere passive horde cowering before inscrutable Powers – here, more than anywhere, men were bound under a yoke of observance and ritual to the gods they had fashioned and the priests who interpreted their will. Then came the Deliverer to set them free not *for* but *from* life, teaching them how to escape from that worst of all evils, rebirth again and again into a world of infinite suffering, unguided by any reason to any good end. "There is no god," said this strange master, "there is no soul; but there is life after death, life here in this hell, unless you will learn to deliver yourselves by annihilating desire." They listened; they built monasteries; they meditated; and now and again, here, perhaps, in these caves, one or other attained enlightenment. But the cloud of Hinduism, lifted for a moment, rolled back heavier than ever. The older gods were seated too firmly on their thrones. Shiva – creator, preserver, destroyer –

expelled the Buddha. And that passive figure, sublime in its power of mind, sits for ever alone in the land of his birth, exiled from light, in a cloud of clinging bats.

But outside proceeds the great pageant of day and night, and the patient, beautiful people labour without hope, while universal nature, symbolised by Shiva's foot, presses heavily on their heads and forbids them the stature of man. Only the white man here, bustling, ungainly, aggressive, retains his freedom and acts rather than suffers. One understands at last the full meaning of the word "environment." Because of this sun, because of this soil, because of their vast numbers, these people are passive, religious, fatalistic. Because of our cold and rain in the north, our fresh springs and summers, we are men of action, of science, of no reflection. The seed is the same, but according to the soil it brings forth differently. Here the patience, the beauty, the abjection before the Devilish-Divine; there the defiance, the cult of the proud self. And these things have met. To what result?

III

ULSTER IN INDIA

"Are you a Home Ruler?" "Yes. Are you?" Instantly a torrent of protest. He was a Mahometan, eminent in law and politics; clever, fluent, forensic, with a passion for hearing himself talk, and addressing one always as if one were a public meeting. He approached his face close to mine, gradually backing me into the wall. And I realised the full meaning of Carlyle's dictum "to be a mere passive bucket to be pumped into can be agreeable to no human being."

It was not, naturally, the Irish question for its own sake that interested him. But he took it as a type of the Indian question. Here, too, he maintained, there is an Ulster, the Mahometan community. Here, too, there are Nationalists, the Hindus. Here, too, a "loyal" minority, protected by a beneficent and impartial Imperial Government. Here, too, a majority of "rebels" bent on throwing off that Government in order that they may oppress the minority. Here, too, an ideal of independence hypocritically masked under the phrase "self-government." "It is a law of political science that where there are two minorities they should stand together against the majority. The Hindus want to get rid of you, as they want to get rid of us. And for that reason alone, if there were not a thousand others" – there were, he hinted, but, rhetorically, he "passed them over in silence" –

"for that reason alone I am loyal to the British raj." It had never occurred to me to doubt it. But I questioned, when I got a moment's breathing space, whether really the Hindu community deliberately nourished this dark conspiracy. He had no doubt, so far as the leaders were concerned; and he mistrusted the "moderates" more than the extremists, because they were cleverer. He "multiplied examples" – it was his phrase. The movement for primary education, for example. It had nothing to do with education. It was a plot to teach the masses Hindi, in order that they might be swept into the anti-British, anti-Mahometan current. As to minor matters, no Hindu had ever voted for a Mahometan, no Hindu barrister ever sent a client to a Mahometan colleague. Whereas in all these matters, one was led to infer, Mahometans were conciliation and tolerance itself. I knew that the speaker himself had secured the election of Mahometans to all the seats in the Council. But I refrained from referring to the matter. Then there was caste. A Hindu will not eat with a Mahometan, and this was taken as a personal insult. I suggested that the English were equally boycotted; but that we regarded the boycott as a religious obligation, not as a social stigma. But, like the Irish Ulstermen, he was not there to listen to argument. He rolled on like a river. None of us could escape. He detected the first signs of straying, and beckoned us back to the flock. "Mr. Audubon, this is important." "Mr. Coryat, you must listen to this." Coryat, at last, grew restive, and remarked rather tartly that no doubt there was friction between

the two communities, but that the worst way to deal with it was by recrimination. He agreed; with tears in his eyes he agreed. There was nothing he had not done, no advance he had not made, to endeavour to bridge the gulf. All in vain! Never were such obstinate fellows as these Hindus. And he proceeded once more to "multiply examples." As we said "Good-bye" in the small hours of the morning he pressed into our hands copies of his speeches and addresses. And we left him perorating on the steps of the hotel.

A painfully acquired mistrust of generalisation prevents me from saying that this is *the* Mahometan point of view. Indeed, I have reason to know that it is not. But it is a Mahometan point of view in one province. And it was endorsed, more soberly, by less rhetorical members of the community. Some twenty-five years ago, they say, Mahometans woke to the fact that they were dropping behind in the race for influence and power. They started a campaign of education and organisation. At every point they found themselves thwarted; and always, behind the obstacle, lurked a Hindu. Lord Morley's reform of the Councils, intended to unite all sections, had had the opposite effect. Nothing but the separate electorates had saved Mahometans from political extinction. And precisely because they desired that extinction Hindus desired mixed electorates. The elections to the Councils have exasperated the antagonism between the two communities. And an enemy might accuse the Government of being actuated, in that reform, by the Machiavellian maxim "Divide et impera."

What the Hindus have to say to all this I have not had an opportunity of learning. But they too, I conceive, can "multiply examples" for their side. To a philosophic observer two reflections suggest themselves. One, that representative government can only work when there is real give and take between the contending parties. The other, that to most men, and most nations, religion means nothing more than antagonism to some other religion. Witness Ulster in Ireland; and witness, equally, Ulster in India.

IV

ANGLO-INDIA

From the gallery of the high hall we look down on the assembled society of the cantonment. The scene is commonplace enough; twaddle and tea, after tennis; "frivolling" – it is their word; women too empty-headed and men too tired to do anything else. This mill-round of work and exercise is maintained like a religion. The gymkhana represents the "compulsory games" of a public school. It is part of the "white man's burden." He plays, as he works, with a sense of responsibility. He is bored, but boredom is a duty, and there's nothing else to do.

The scene is commonplace. Yes! But this afternoon a band is playing. The music suits the occasion. It is soft, melodious, sentimental. It provokes a vague sensibility, and makes no appeal to the imagination. At least it should not, from its quality. But the power of music is incalculable. It has an essence independent of its forms. And by virtue of that essence its poorest manifestations can sink a shaft into the springs of life. So as I listen languidly the scene before me detaches itself from actuality and floats away on the stream of art. It becomes a symbol; and around and beyond it, in some ideal space, other symbols arise and begin to move. I see the East as an infinite procession. Huge Bactrian camels balance their bobbing heads as they pad deliberately over the burning dust. Laden asses, cattle, and sheep and goats move on

in troops. Black-bearded men, men with beard and hair dyed red, women pregnant or carrying babies on their hips, youths like the Indian Bacchus with long curling hair, children of all ages, old men magnificent and fierce, all the generations of Asia pass and pass on, seen like a frieze against a rock background, blazing with colour, rhythmical and fluent, marching menacingly down out of infinite space on to this little oasis of Englishmen. Then, suddenly, they are an ocean; and the Anglo-Indian world floats upon it like an Atlantic liner. It has its gymnasium, its swimming-bath, its card-rooms, its concert-room. It has its first and second class and steerage, well marked off. It dresses for dinner every night; it has an Anglican service on Sunday; it flirts mildly; it is bored; but above all it is safe. It has water-tight compartments. It is "unsinkable." The band is playing; and when the crash comes it will not stop. No; it will play this music, this, which is in my ears. Is it Gounod's "Faust" or an Anglican hymn? No matter! It is the same thing, sentimental, and not imaginative. And sentimentally, not imaginatively, the Englishman will die. He will not face the event, but he will stand up to it. He will realise nothing, but he will shrink from nothing. Of all the stories about the loss of the *Titanic* the best and most characteristic is that of the group of men who sat conversing in the second-class smoking-room, till one of them said, "Now she's going down. Let's go and sit in the first-class saloon." And they did. How touching! How sublime! How English! The *Titanic* sinks. With a roar the machinery crashes from stem to bow. Dust on the

water, cries on the water, then vacuity and silence. The East has swept over this colony of the West. And still its generations pass on, rhythmically swinging; slaves of Nature, not, as in the West, rebels against her; cyclical as her seasons and her stars; infinite as her storms of dust; identical as the leaves of her trees; purposeless as her cyclones and her earthquakes.

The music stops and I rub my eyes. Yes, it is only the club, only tea and twaddle! Or am I wrong? There is more in these men and women than appears. They stand for the West, for the energy of the world, for all, in this vast Nature, that is determinate and purposive, not passively repetitionary. And if they do not know it, if they never hear the strain that transposes them and their work into a tragic dream, if tennis is tennis to them, and a valse a valse, and an Indian a native, none the less they are what a poet would see them to be, an oasis in the desert, a liner on the ocean, ministers of the life within life that is the hope, the inspiration, and the meaning of the world. In my heart of hearts I apologise as I prolong the banalities of parting, and almost vow never again to abuse Gounod's music.

V

A MYSTERY PLAY

A few lamps set on the floor lit up the white roof. On either side the great hall was open to the night; and now and again a bird flew across, or a silent figure flitted from dark to dark. On a low platform sat the dancers, gorgeously robed. All were boys. The leader, a peacock-fan flashing in his head-dress, personated Krishna. Beside him sat Rhada, his wife. The rest were the milkmaids of the legend. They sat like statues, and none of them moved at our entry. But the musicians, who were seated on the ground, rose and salaamed, and instantly began to play. There were five instruments – a miniature harmonium (terrible innovation), two viols, of flat, unresonant tone, a pair of cymbals, and a small drum. The ear, at first, detected little but discordant chaos, but by degrees a form became apparent – short phrases, of strong rhythm, in a different scale from ours, repeated again and again, and strung on a thread of loose improvisation. Every now and again the musicians burst into song. Their voices were harsh and nasal, but their art was complicated and subtle. Clearly, this was not barbarous music, it was only strange, and its interest increased, as the ear became accustomed to it. Suddenly, as though they could resist no longer, the dancers, who had not moved, leapt from the platform and began their dance. It was symbolical; Krishna was its centre, and the rest were wooing

him. Desire and its frustration and fulfilment were the theme. Yet it was not sensual, or not merely so. The Hindus interpret in a religious spirit this legendary sport of Krishna with the milkmaids. It symbolises the soul's wooing of God. And so these boys interpreted it. Their passion, though it included the flesh, was not of the flesh. The mood was rapturous, but not abandoned; ecstatic, but not orgiastic. There were moments of a hushed suspense when hardly a muscle moved; only the arms undulated and the feet and hands vibrated. Then a break into swift whirling, on the toes or on the knees, into leaping and stamping, swift flight and pursuit. A pause again; a slow march; a rush with twinkling feet; and always, on those young faces, even in the moment of most excitement, a look of solemn rapture, as though they were carried out of themselves into the divine. I have seen dancing more accomplished, more elaborate, more astonishing than this. But never any that seemed to me to fulfil so well the finest purposes of the art. The Russian ballet, in the retrospect, seems trivial by comparison. It was secular; but this was religious. For the first time I seemed to catch a glimpse of what the tragic dance of the Greeks might have been like. The rhythms were not unlike those of Greek choruses, the motions corresponded strictly to the rhythms, and all was attuned to a high religious mood. In such dancing the flesh becomes spirit, the body a transparent emblem of the soul.

After that the play, I confess, was a drop into bathos. We descended to speech, even to tedious burlesque. But the analogy

was all the closer to mediæval mysteries. In ages of Faith religion is not only sublime; it is intimate, humorous, domestic; it sits at the hearth and plays in the nursery. So it is in India where the age of Faith has never ceased. What was represented that night was an episode in the story of Krishna. The characters were the infant god, his mother, Jasodha, and an ancient Brahmin who has come from her own country to congratulate her on the birth of a child. He is a comic character – the sagging belly and the painted face of the pantomime. He answers Jasodha's inquiries after friends and relations at home. She offers him food. He professes to have no appetite, but, on being pressed, demands portentous measures of rice and flour. While she collects the material for his meal, he goes to bathe in the Jumna; and the whole ritual of his ablutions is elaborately travestied, even a crocodile being introduced in the person of one of the musicians, who rudely pulls him by the leg as he is rolling in imaginary water. His bathing finished, he retires and cooks his food. When it is ready he falls into prayer. But during his abstraction the infant Krishna crawls up and begins devouring the food. Returning to himself, the Brahmin, in a rage, runs off into the darkness of the hall. Jasodha pursues him and brings him back. And he begins once more to cook his food. This episode was repeated three times in all its detail, and I confess I found it insufferably tedious. The third time Jasodha scolds the child and asks him why he does it. He replies – and here comes the pretty point of the play – that the Brahmin, in praying to God and offering him the food, unwittingly is praying to him and

offering to him, and in eating the food he has but accepted the offering. The mother does not understand, but the Brahmin does, and prostrates himself before his Lord.

This is crude enough art, but at any rate it is genuine. Like all primitive art, it is a representation of what is traditionally believed and popularly felt. The story is familiar to the audience and intimate to their lives. It represents details which they witness every day, and at the same time it has religious significance. Out of it might grow a great drama, as once in ancient Greece. And perhaps from no other origin can such a drama arise.

VI

AN INDIAN SAINT

It was at Benares that we met him. He led us through the maze of the bazaars, his purple robe guiding us like a star, and brought us out by the mosque of Aurungzebe. Thence a long flight of stairs plunged sheer to the Ganges, shining below in the afternoon sun. We descended; but, turning aside before we reached the shore, came to a tiny house perched on a terrace above the ghat. We took off our shoes in the anteroom and passed through a second chamber, with its riverside open to the air, and reached a tiny apartment, where he motioned us to a divan. We squatted and looked round. Some empty bottles were the only furniture. But on the wall hung the picture we had come to see. It was a symbolic tree, and perhaps as much like a tree as what it symbolised was like the universe. Embedded in its trunk and branches were coloured circles and signs, and from them grew leaves and flowers of various hues. Below was a garden lit by a rising sun, and a black river where birds and beasts pursued and devoured one another. At our request he took a pointer and began to explain. I am not sure that I well understood or well remember, but something of this kind was the gist of it. In the beginning was Parabrahma, existing in himself, a white circle at the root of the tree. Whence sprang, following the line of the trunk, the egg of the universe, pregnant with all potentialities.

Thence came the energy of Brahma; and of this there were three aspects, the Good, the Evil, and the Neuter, symbolised by three triangles in a circle. Thence the trunk continued, but also thence emerged a branch to the right and one to the left. The branch to the right was Illusion and ended in God; the branch to the left was Ignorance and ended in the Soul. Thus the Soul contemplates Illusion under the form of her gods. Up the line of the trunk came next the Energy of Nature; then Pride; then Egotism and Individuality; whence branched to one side Mind, to the other the senses and the passions. Then followed the elements, fire, air, water, and earth; then the vegetable creation; then corn; and then, at the summit of the tree, the primitive Man and Woman, type of Humanity. The garden below was Eden, until the sun rose; but with light came discord and conflict, symbolised by the river and the beasts. Evil and conflict belong to the nature of the created world; and the purpose of religion is by contemplation to enable the Soul to break its bodies, and the whole creation to return again to Parabrahma, whence it sprung.

Why did it spring? He did not know. For good or for evil? He could not say. What he knew he knew, and what he did not know he did not. "Some say there is no God and no Soul." He smiled. "Let them!" His certainty was complete. "Can the souls of men be reincarnated as animals?" He shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say?" I tried to put in a plea for the life of action, but he was adamant; contemplation and contemplation alone can deliver us. "Our good men," I said, "desire to make the world better, rather

than to save their own souls." "Our sages," he replied, "are sorry for the world, but they know they cannot help it." His religion, I urged, denied all sense to the process of history. "There may be process in matter," he replied, "but there is none in God." I protested that I loved individual souls, and did not want them absorbed in Parabrahma. He laughed his good cheery laugh, out of his black beard, but it was clear that he held me to be a child, imprisoned in the Ego. I felt like that, and I hugged my Ego; so presently he ministered to it with sweetmeats. He even ate with us, and smoked a cigarette. He was the most human of men; so human that I thought his religion could not be as inhuman as it sounded. But it was the religion of the East, not of the West. It refused all significance to the temporal world; it took no account of society and its needs; it sought to destroy, not to develop, the sense and the power of Individuality. It did not say, but it implied, that creation was a mistake; and if it did not profess pessimism, pessimism was its logical outcome. I do not know whether it is the religion of a wise race; but I am sure it could never be that of a strong one.

But I loved the saint, and felt that he was a brother. Next morning, as we drifted past the long line of ghats, watching the bright figures on the terraces and stairs, the brown bodies in the water, and the Brahmins squatting on the shore, we saw him among the bathers, and he called to us cheerily. We waved our hands and passed on, never to see him again. East had not met West, but at least they had shaken hands across the gulf. The

gulf, however, was profound; for many and many incarnations will be needed before one soul at least can come even to wish to annihilate itself in the Universal.

VII

A VILLAGE IN BENGAL

At 6 A.M. we got out of the train at a station on the Ganges; and after many delays found ourselves drifting down the river in a houseboat. To lie on cushions, sheltered from the sun, looking out on the moving shore, to the sound of the leisurely plash of oars, is elysium after a night in the train. We had seven hours of it and I could have wished it were more. But towards sunset we reached our destination. At the wharf a crowd of servants were waiting to touch the feet of our hosts who had travelled with us. They accompanied us through a tangle of palms, bananas, mangoes, canes, past bamboo huts raised on platforms of hard, dry mud, to the central place where a great banyan stood in front of the temple. We took off our shoes and entered the enclosure, followed by half the village, silent, dignified, and deferential. Over ruined shrines of red brick, elaborately carved, clambered and twined the sacred peepul tree. And within a more modern building were housed images of Krishna and Rhada, and other symbols of what we call too hastily idolatry. Outside was a circular platform of brick where these dolls are washed in milk at the great festivals of the year. We passed on, and watched the village weaver at his work, sitting on the ground with his feet in a pit working the pedals of his loom; while outside, in the garden, a youth was running up and down setting up, thread by thread,

the long strands of the warp. By the time we reached the house it was dusk. A lamp was brought into the porch. Musicians and singers squatted on the floor. Behind them a white-robed crowd faded into the night. And we listened to hymns composed by the village saint, who had lately passed away.

First there was a prayer for forgiveness. "Lord, forgive us our sins. You *must* forgive, for you are called the merciful. And it's so easy for you! And, if you don't, what becomes of your reputation?" Next, a call to the ferry. "Come and cross over with me. Krishna is the boat and Rhada the sail. No storms can wreck us. Come, cross over with me." Then a prayer for deliverance from the "well" of the world where we are imprisoned by those dread foes the five senses of the mind. Then a rhapsody on God, invisible, incomprehensible. "He speaks, but He is not seen. He lives in the room with me, but I cannot find Him. He brings to market His moods, but the marketer never appears. Some call Him fire, some ether. But I ask His name in vain. I suppose I am such a fool that they will not tell it me." Then a strange ironical address to Krishna. "Really, sir, your conduct is very odd! You flirt with the Gopis! You put Rhada in a sulk, and then ask to be forgiven! You say you are a god, and yet you pray to God! Really, sir, what are we to think?" Lastly, a mystic song, how Krishna has plunged into the ocean of Rhada; how he is there drifting, helpless and lost. Can we not save him? But no! It is because his love is not perfect and pure. And that is why he must be incarnated again and again in the avatars.

Are these people idolaters, these dignified old men, these serious youths, these earnest, grave musicians? Look at their temple, and you say "Yes." Listen to their hymns, and you say "No." Reformers want to educate them, and, perhaps, they are right. But if education is to mean the substitution of the gramophone and music-hall songs for this traditional art, these native hymns? I went to bed pondering, and was awakened at six by another chorus telling us it was time to get up. We did so, and visited the school, set up by my friend as an experiment; a mud floor, mud-lined walls, all scrupulously clean; and squatting round the four sides children of all ages, all reciting their lessons at once, and all the lessons different. They were learning to read and write their native language, and that, at least, seemed harmless enough. But parents complained that it unfitted them for the fields. "Our fathers did not do it" – that, said my impatient young host, is their reply to every attempt at reform. In his library were all the works of Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Wells, and Shaw, as well as all the technical journals of scientific agriculture. He lectured them on the chemical constituents of milk and the crossing of sugar-canes. They embraced his feet, sang their hymns, and did as their fathers had done. He has a hard task before him, but one far better worth attempting than the legal and political activities in which most young Zemindars indulge. And, as he said, here you see the fields and hear the birds, and here you can bathe in the Ganges. We did; and then breakfasted; and then set out in palanquins for the nearest railway station. The bearers sang a

rhythmic chant as they bore us smoothly along through mustard and pulses, yellow and orange and mauve. The sun blazed hot; the bronzed figures streamed with sweat; the cheerful voices never failed or flagged. I dozed and drowsed, while East and West in my mind wove a web whose pattern I cannot trace. But a pattern there is. And some day historians will be able to find it.

VIII

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

As we dropped down the Hooghly they pointed to a temple on the shore as lately the home of Sri Ramakrishna. He was only a name to me, and I did not pay much attention, though I had his "Gospel" ² actually under my arm. I was preoccupied with the sunset, burning behind a veil of smoke; and presently, as we landed, with the great floating haystacks smouldering at the wharf in the red afterglow. As we waited for the tram, someone said, "Would you like to see Kali?" and we stepped aside to the little shrine. Within it was the hideous idol, black and many-armed, decked with tinsel and fed with the blood of goats; and there swept over me a wave of the repulsion I had felt from the first for the Hindu religion, its symbols, its cult, its architecture, even its philosophy. Seated in the tram, it was with an effort that I opened the "Gospel" of Sri Ramakrishna. But at once my attention was arrested. This was an account by a disciple of the life and sayings of his master. And presently I read the following:

"Disciple. Then, sir, one may hold that God is 'with form.' But surely He is not the earthen image that is worshipped!

"Master. But, my dear sir, why should you call it an earthen

² *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.* Second Edition. Part 1. Madras: Published by the Ramakrishna Mission. 1912.

image? Surely the Image Divine is made of the Spirit!

"The disciple cannot follow this. He goes on: But is it not one's duty, sir, to make it clear to those who worship images that God is not the same as the clay form they worship, and that in worshipping they should keep God Himself in view and not the clay images?"

* * * * *

"*Master.* You talk of 'images made of clay.' Well, there often comes a necessity of worshipping even such images as these. God Himself has provided these various forms of worship. The Lord has done all this – to suit different men in different stages of knowledge.

"The mother so arranges the food for her children that every one gets what agrees with him. Suppose she has five children. Having a fish to cook, she makes different dishes out of it. She can give each one of the children what suits him exactly. One gets rich *polow* with the fish, while she gives only a little soup to another who is of weak digestion; she makes a sauce of sour tamarind for the third, fries the fish for the fourth, and so on, exactly as it happens to agree with the stomach. Don't you see?"

"*Disciple.* Yes, sir, now I do. The Lord is to be worshipped in the image of clay as a spirit by the beginner. The devotee, as he advances, may worship Him independently of the image.

"*Master.* Yes. And again, when he sees God he realises that

everything – image and all – is a manifestation of the Spirit. To him the image is made of Spirit – not of clay. God is a Spirit."

As I read this, I remembered the answer invariably given to me when I asked about Hindu idolatry. The people, I was told, even the humblest and most ignorant, worshipped not the idol but what it symbolised. Actually, this hideous Kali stood to them for the Divine Mother. And I was told of an old woman, racked with rheumatism, who had determined at last to seek relief from the goddess. She returned with radiant face. She had seen the Mother! And she had no more rheumatism. In this popular religion, it would seem, the old cosmic elements have dropped out, and the human only persist. So that even the terrifying form of Shiva, the Destroyer, stands only for the divine husband of Parvati, the divine wife. Hinduism, I admitted, is not as inhuman and superstitious as it looks. But I admitted it reluctantly and with many reserves, remembering all I had seen and heard of obscene rites and sculptures, of the perpetual repetition of the names of God, of parasitic Brahmins and self-torturing ascetics.

What manner of man, then, was this Sri Ramakrishna? I turned the pages and read:

"The disciples were walking about the garden. M. walked by himself at the cluster of five trees. It is about five in the afternoon. Coming back to the verandah, north of the Master's chamber, M. comes upon a strange sight. The Master is standing still. Narendra is singing a hymn. He and three or four other disciples are standing with the Master in their midst. M. is

charmed with their song. Never in his life has he heard a sweeter voice. Looking at the Master, M. marvels and becomes speechless. The Master stands motionless. His eyes are fixed. It is hard to say whether he is breathing or not. This state of ecstasy, says a disciple in low tones, is called Samadhi. M. has never seen or heard of anything like this. He thinks to himself, 'Is it possible that the thought of God can make a man forget the world? How great must be his faith and love for God who is thrown into such a state!'"

"Yes," I said, "that is the Hindu ideal – ecstatic contemplation." Something in me leapt to approve it; but the stronger pull was to Hellenism and the West. "Go your way, Ramakrishna," I said, "but your way is not mine. For me and my kind action not meditation; the temporal not the eternal; the human not the ultra-divine; Socrates not Ramakrishna!" But hardly had I said the words when I read on:

"M. enters. Looking at him the Master laughs and laughs. He cries out, 'Why, look! There he is again!' The boys all join in the merriment. M. takes his seat, and the Master tells Narendra and the other disciples what has made him laugh. He says:

"Once upon a time a small quantity of opium was given to a certain peacock at four o'clock in the afternoon. Well, punctually at four the next afternoon who should come in but the selfsame peacock, longing for a repetition of the favour – another dose of opium!' – (Laughter.)

"M. sat watching the Master as he amused himself with the

boys. He kept up a running fire of chaff, and it seemed as if these boys were his own age and he was playing with them. Peals of laughter and brilliant flashes of humour follow upon one another, calling to mind the image of a fair when the Joy of the World is to be had for sale."

I rubbed my eyes. Was this India or Athens? Is East East? Is West West? Are there any opposites that exclude one another? Or is this all-comprehensive Hinduism, this universal toleration, this refusal to recognise ultimate antagonisms, this "mush," in a word, as my friends would dub it – is this, after all, the truest and profoundest vision?

And I read in my book:

"M.'s egotism is now completely crushed. He thinks to himself: What this God-man says is indeed perfectly true. What business have I to go about preaching to others? Have I myself known God? Do I love God? About God I know nothing. It would indeed be the height of folly and vulgarity itself, of which I should be ashamed, to think of teaching others! This is not mathematics, or history, or literature; it is the science of God! Yes, I see the force of the words of this holy man."

IX

THE MONSTROUS REGIMEN OF WOMEN

Here at Cape Comorin, at India's southernmost point, among the sands and the cactuses and the palms rattling in the breeze, comes to us news of the Franchise Bill and of militant suffragettes. And I reflect that in this respect England is a "backward" country and Travancore an "advanced" one. Women here – except the Brahmin women – are, and always have been, politically and socially on an equality and more than an equality with men. For this is one of the few civilised States – for aught I know it is the only one – in which "matriarchy" still prevails. That doesn't mean – though the word suggests it – that women govern, though, in fact, the succession to the throne passes to women equally with men. But it means that woman is the head of the family, and that property follows her line, not the man's. All women own property equally with men, and own it in their own right. The mother's property passes to her children, but the father's passes to his mother's kin. The husband, in fact, is not regarded as related to the wife. Relationship means descent from a common mother, whereas descent from a common father is a negligible fact, no doubt because formerly it was a questionable one. Women administer their own property,

and, as I am informed, administer it more prudently than the men.

Not only so; they have in marriage the superior position occupied by men in the West. The Nair woman chooses her own husband; he comes to her house, she does not go to his, and, till recently, she could dismiss him as soon as she was tired of him. The law – man-made, no doubt! – has recently altered this, and now mutual consent is required for a valid divorce. Still the woman is, at least on this point, on an equality with the man. And the heavens have not yet fallen. As to the vote, it is not so important or so general here as at home. The people live under a paternal monarchy "by right divine." The Rajah who consolidated the kingdom, early in the eighteenth century, handed it over formally to the god of the temple, and administers it in his name. Incidentally this gave him access to temple revenues. It also makes his person sacred. So much so that in a recent prison riot, when the convicts escaped and marched to the police with their grievances, the Rajah had only to appear and tell them to march back to prison, and they did so to a man, and took their punishment. The government, it will be seen, is not by votes. Still there are votes for local councils, and women have them equally with men. Any other arrangement would have seemed merely preposterous to the Nairs; and perhaps if any exclusion had been contemplated it would have been of men rather than of women.

Other incidental results follow from the equality of the

sexes. The early marriages which are the curse of India do not prevail among the Nairs. Consequently the schooling of girls is continued later. And this State holds the record in all India for female education. We visited a school of over 600 girls, ranging from infancy to college age, and certainly I never saw school-girls look happier, keener, or more alive. Society, clearly, has not gone to pieces under "the monstrous regimen of women." Travancore claims, probably with justice, to be the premier native State; the most advanced, the most prosperous, the most happy. Because of the position of women? Well, hardly. The climate is delightful, the soil fertile, the natural resources considerable. Every man sits under his own palm tree, and famine is unknown. The people, and especially the children, are noticeably gay, in a land where gaiety is not common. But one need not be a suffragette to hold that the equality of the sexes is one element that contributes to its well-being, and to feel that in this respect England lags far behind Travancore.

Echoes of the suffrage controversy at home have led me to dwell upon this matter of the position of women. But, to be candid, it will not be that that lingers in my mind when I look back upon my sojourn here. What then? Perhaps a sea of palm leaves, viewed from the lighthouse top, stretching beside the sea of blue waves; perhaps a sandy river bed, with brown nude figures washing clothes in the shining pools; perhaps the oiled and golden skins glistening in the sun; perhaps naked children astride on their mothers' hips, or screaming with laughter as they

race the motor-car; perhaps the huge tusked elephant that barred our way for a moment yesterday; perhaps the jungle teeming with hidden and menacing life; perhaps the seashore and its tumbling waves. One studies institutions, but one does not love them. Often one must wish that they did not exist, or existed in such perfection that their existence might be unperceived. Still, as institutions go, this, which regulates the relations of men and women, is, I suppose, the most important. So from the surf of the Arabian sea and the blaze of the Indian sun I send this little object lesson.

X

THE BUDDHA AT BURUPUDUR

To the north the cone of a volcano, rising sharp and black. To the east another. South and west a jagged chain of hills. In the foreground ricefields and cocoa palms. Everywhere intense green, untuned by grey; and in the midst of it this strange erection. Seen from below and from a distance it looks like a pyramid that has been pressed flat. In fact, it is a series of terraces built round a low hill. Six of them are rectangular; then come three that are circular; and on the highest of these is a solid dome, crowned by a cube and a spire. Round the circular terraces are set, close together, similar domes, but hollow, and pierced with lights, through which is seen in each a seated Buddha. Seated Buddhas, too, line the tops of the parapets that run round the lower terraces. And these parapets are covered with sculpture in high relief. One might fancy oneself walking round one of the ledges of Dante's "Purgatorio" meditating instruction on the walls. Here the instruction would be for the selfish and the cruel. For what is inscribed is the legend and cult of the lord of tenderness. Much of it remains undeciphered and unexplained. But on the second terrace is recorded, on one side, the life of Sakya-Muni; on the other, his previous incarnations. The latter, taken from the "Jatakas," are naïve and charming apologues.

For example: Once the Buddha lived upon earth as a hare. In

order to test him Indra came down from heaven in the guise of a traveller. Exhausted and faint, he asked the animals for help. An otter brought fish, a monkey fruit, a jackal a cup of milk. But the hare had nothing to give. So he threw himself into a fire, that the wanderer might eat his roasted flesh. Again: Once the Buddha lived upon earth as an elephant. He was met by seven hundred travellers, lost and exhausted with hunger. He told them where water would be found, and, near it, the body of an elephant for food. Then, hastening to the spot, he flung himself over a precipice, that he might provide the meal himself. Again: Once the Buddha lived upon earth as a stag. A king, who was hunting him, fell into a ravine. Whereupon the stag halted, descended, and helped him home. All round the outer wall run these pictured lessons. And opposite is shown the story of Sakya-Muni himself. We see the new-born child with his feet on lotuses. We see the fatal encounter with poverty, sickness, and death. We see the renunciation, the sojourn in the wilderness, the attainment under the bo-tree, the preaching of the Truth. And all this sculptured gospel seems to bring home to one, better than the volumes of the learned, what Buddhism really meant to the masses of its followers. It meant, surely, not the denial of the soul or of God, but that warm impulse of pity and love that beats still in these tender and human pictures. It meant not the hope or desire for extinction, but the charming dream of thousands of lives, past and to come, in many forms, many conditions, many diverse fates. The pessimism of the master is as little likely as his high

philosophy to have reached the mind or the heart of the people. The whole history of Buddhism, indeed, shows that it did not, and does not. What touched them in him was the saint and the lover of animals and men. And this love it was that flowed in streams over the world, leaving wherever it passed, in literature and art, in pictures of flowers or mountains, in fables and poems and tales, the trace of its warm and humanising flood.

Still, there is the other Buddhism, the Buddhism of the thinker; his theory of human life, its value and purpose. And it was this that filled my mind later as I sat on the summit next to a solemn Buddha against the setting sun. For a long time I was silent, meditating his doctrine. Then I spoke of children, and he said, "They grow old." I spoke of strong men, and he said, "They grow weak." I spoke of their work and achievement, and he said, "They die." The stars came out, and I spoke of eternal law. He said, "One law concerns you – that which binds you to the wheel of life." The moon rose, and I spoke of beauty. He said, "There is one beauty – that of a soul redeemed from desire." Thereupon the West stirred in me, and cried "No!" "Desire," it said, "is the heart and essence of the world. It needs not and craves not extinction. It needs and craves perfection. Youth passes; strength passes; life passes. Yes! What of it? We have access to the youth, the strength, the life of the world. Man is born to sorrow. Yes! But he feels it as tragedy and redeems it. Not round life, not outside life, but through life is the way. Desire more and more intense, because more and more pure; not peace, but the plenitude of

experience. Your foundation was false. You thought man wanted rest. He does not. We at least do not, we of the West. We want more labour; we want more stress; we want more passion. Pain we accept, for it stings us into life. Strife we accept, for it hardens us to strength We believe in action; we believe in desire. And we believe that by them we shall attain." So the West broke out in me; and I looked at him to see if he was moved. But the calm eye was untroubled, unruffled the majestic brow, unperplexed the sweet, solemn mouth. Secure in his Nirvana, he heard or he heard me not. He had attained the life-in-death he sought. But I, I had not attained the life in life. Unhelped by him, I must go my way. The East, perhaps, he had understood. He had not understood the West.

XI

A MALAY THEATRE

It seems to be a principle among shipping companies so to arrange their connections that the traveller should be compelled to spend some days in Singapore. We evaded this necessity by taking a trip to Sumatra, but even so a day and a night remained to be disposed of. We devoted the morning to a bathe and a lunch at the Sea View Hotel, and the afternoon to the Botanical Gardens, where the most attractive flowers are the children and the most interesting gardeners their Chinese nurses. There remained the evening, and we asked about amusements. There was a bioscope, of course; there is always a bioscope; we had found one even in the tiny town of Medan, in Sumatra. There was also an opera company, performing the "Pink Girl." We seemed to know all about her without going to see her. Was there nothing else? Yes; a Malay theatre. That sounded attractive. So we took the tram through the Chinese quarter, among the "Ah Sins" and "Hup Chows," where every one was either a tailor or a washerman, and got down at a row of red lights. This was the Alexandra Hall, and a bill informed us that the performers were the Straits Opera Company. This dismayed us a little. Still, we paid our dollars, and entered a dingy, dirty room, with a few Malays occupying the back benches and a small group of Chinese women and children in either balcony. We took our seats with half a dozen coloured

aristocrats in the front rows, and looked about us. We were the only Europeans. But, to console us in our isolation, on either side of the proscenium was painted a couple of Italians in the act of embracing as one only embraces in opera. We glanced at our programme and saw that the play was the "Moon Princess," and that Afrid, a genie, figured in the cast. It was then, at least, Oriental, though it could hardly be Malay, and our spirits rose. But the orchestra quickly damped them; there was a piano, a violin, a 'cello, a clarinet, and a cornet, and from beginning to end of the performance they were never in tune with themselves or with the singers. And the music? It was sometimes Italian, sometimes Spanish, never, as far as I could detect, Oriental, and always thoroughly and frankly bad.

No matter! The curtain rose and displayed a garden. The Prince entered. He was dressed in mediæval Italian costume (a style of dress, be it said once for all, which was adopted by the whole company). With gestures of ecstatic astonishment he applied his nose to the paper roses. Then he advanced and appeared to sing, for his mouth moved; but the orchestra drowned any notes he may have emitted. The song finished, he lay down upon a couch and slept. Whereupon there entered an ugly little girl, in a short white frock and black stockings and ribbons, with an expression of fixed gloom upon her face, and began to move her feet and arms in a parody of Oriental dancing. We thought at first that she was the Moon Princess, and felt a pang of disappointment. But she turned out to be the Spirit

of Dreams; and presently she ushered in the real Princess, with whom, on the spot, the Prince, unlike ourselves, became violently enamoured. She vanished, and he woke to find her a vision. Despair of the Prince; despair of the King; despair of the Queen, not unmixed with rage, to judge from her voice and gestures. Consultation of an astrologer. Flight of the Prince in search of his beloved. Universal bewilderment and incompetence, such as may be witnessed any day in the East when anything happens at all out of the ordinary way. At this point enter the comic relief, in the form of woodcutters. I am inclined to suppose, from the delight of the audience, that there was something genuine here. But whatever it was we were unable to follow it. Eventually the woodcutters met Afrid, whether by chance or design I could not discover. At any rate, their reception was rough. To borrow the words of the synopsis, "a big fight arose and they were thrown to space"; but not till they had been pulled by the hair and ears, throttled and pummelled, to the general satisfaction, for something like half an hour.

The next scenes were equally vigorous. The synopsis describes them thus: "Several young princes went to Genie Janar, the father of the Moon Princess, to demand her in marriage. Afrid, a genie, met the princes, and, after having a row, they were all thrown away." The row was peculiar. Afrid took them on one by one. The combatants walked round one another, back to back, making feints in the air. Then the Prince got a blow in, which Afrid pretended to feel. But suddenly, with a hoarse laugh, he rushed

again upon the foe, seized him by the throat or the arm, and (I cannot improve on the phrase) "threw him away." After all four princes were thus disposed of I left, being assured of a happy ending by the account of the concluding scene: "The Prince then took the Moon Princess to his father's kingdom, where he was married to her amidst great rejoicings."

Comment perhaps is superfluous. But as I went home in my rickshaw my mind went back to those evenings in India when I had seen Indian boys perform to Indian music dances and plays in honour of Krishna, and to the Bengal village where the assembled inhabitants had sung us hymns composed by their native saint. And I remembered that everywhere, in Egypt, in India, in Java, in Sumatra, in Japan, the gramophone harmonium is displacing the native instruments; and that the bioscope – that great instrument of education – is familiarising the peasants of the East with all that is most vulgar and most shoddy in the humour and sentiment of the West.

The Westernising of the East must come, no doubt, and ought to come. But in the process what by-products of waste, or worse! Once, surely, there must have been a genuine "Malay theatre." This is what Europe has made of it.

PART II

CHINA

I

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF CHINA

Some recent travellers have expressed disappointment or even disgust with what they saw or learned or guessed of China. My own first impression is quite contrary. The climate, it is true, for the moment, inclines one to gloomy views. An icy wind, a black sky, a cold drizzle. March in England could hardly do worse. But in Canton one almost forgets all that. Imagine a maze of narrow streets, more confused and confusing than Venice; high houses (except in the old city); and hanging parallel to these, in long, vertical lines, flags and wooden signs inscribed with huge Chinese characters, gold on black, gold on red, red or blue on white, a blaze of colour; and under it, pouring in a ceaseless stream, yellow faces, black heads, blue jackets and trousers, all on foot or borne on chairs, not a cart or carriage, rarely a pony, nobody crowding, nobody hustling or jostling, an even flow of cheerful humanity, inexhaustible, imperturbable, convincing one at first sight of the truth of all one has heard of the order, independence, and vigour of this extraordinary people.

The shops are high and spacious, level with the street, not, as in India, raised on little platforms; and commonly, within, they are cut across by a kind of arch elaborately carved and blazing with gold. Every trade may be seen plying – jade-cutters, cloth-rollers, weavers, ring-makers, rice-pounders, a thousand others. Whole animals, roasted, hang before the butchers' shops, ducks, pigs – even we saw a skinned tiger! The interest is inexhaustible; and one is lucky if one does not return with a light purse and a heavy burden of forged curios. Even the American tourist, so painfully in evidence at the hotel, is lost, drowned in this native sea. He passes in his chair; but, like oneself, he is only a drop in the ocean. Canton is China, as Benares is India. And that conjunction of ideas set me thinking. To come from India to China is like waking from a dream. Often in India I felt that I was in an enchanted land. Melancholy, monotony, austerity; a sense as of perennial frost, spite of the light and heat; a lost region peopled with visionary forms; a purgatory of souls doing penance till the hour of deliverance shall strike; a limbo, lovely but phantasmal, unearthly, over-earthly – that is the kind of impression India left on my mind. I reach China, awake, and rub my eyes. This, of course, is the real world. This is everyday. Good temper, industry, intelligence. Nothing abnormal or overstrained. The natural man, working, marrying, begetting and rearing children, growing middle-aged, growing old, dying – and that is all. Here it is broad daylight; but in India, moon or stars, or a subtler gleam from some higher heaven. Recall, for example,

Benares – the fantastic buildings rising and falling like a sea, the stairs running up to infinity, the sacred river, the sages meditating on its banks, the sacrificial ablutions, the squealing temple-pipes, and, in the midst of this, columns of smoke, as the body returns to the elements and the soul to God. This way of disposing of the dead, when the first shock is over, lingers in the mind as something eminently religious. Death and dissolution take place in the midst of life, for death is no more a mystery than life. In the open air, in the press of men, the soul takes flight. She is no stranger, for everything is soul – houses, trees, men, the elements into which the body is resolved. Death is not annihilation, it is change of form; and through all changes of form the essence persists.

But now turn back to Canton. We pass the shops of the coffin-makers. We linger. But "No stop," says our guide; "better coffins soon." "Soon" is what the guide-books call the "City of the Dead." A number of little chapels; and laid in each a great lacquered coffin in which the dead man lives. I say "lives" advisedly, for there is set for his use a table and a chair, and every morning he is provided with a cup of tea. A bunch of paper, yellow and white, symbolises his money; and perhaps a couple of figures represent attendants. There he lives, quite simply and naturally as he had always lived, until the proper time and place is discovered in which he may be buried. It may be months, it may be, or rather, might have been, years; for I am told that a reforming Government has limited the time to six months. And

after burial? Why, presumably he lives still. But not with the life of the universal soul. Oh no! There have been mystics in China, but the Chinese are not mystical. What he was he still is, an eating and drinking creature, and, one might even conjecture, a snob. For if one visits the family chapel of the Changs – another of the sights of Canton – one sees ranged round the walls hundreds of little tablets, painted green and inscribed in gold. These are the memorials of the deceased. And they are arranged in three classes, those who pay most being in the first and those who pay least in the third. One can even reserve one's place – first, second, or third – while one is still alive, by a white tablet. You die, and the green is substituted. And so, while you yet live, you may secure your social status after death. How – how British! Yes, the word is out; and I venture to record a suspicion that has long been maturing in my mind. The Chinese are not only Western; among the Western they are English. Their minds move as ours do; they are practical, sensible, reasonable. And that is why – as it would seem – they have more sympathy with Englishmen, if not with the English Government, than with any other Westerners. East may be East and West West, though I very much doubt it. But if there be any truth in the aphorism, we must define our terms. The East must be confined to India, and China included in the West. That as a preliminary correction. I say nothing yet about Japan. But I shall have more to say, I hope, about China.

II

NANKING

The Chinese, one is still told, cannot and will not change. On the other hand, Professor Ross writes a book entitled *The Changing Chinese*. And anyone may see that the Chinese educated abroad are transformed, at any rate externally, out of all recognition. In Canton I met some of the officials of the new Government; and found them, to the outward sense, pure Americans. The dress, the manners, the accent, the intellectual outfit – all complete! Whether, in some mysterious sense, they remain Chinese at the core I do not presume to affirm or deny. But an external transformation so complete must imply *some* inward change. Foreign residents in China deplore the foreign-educated product. I have met some who almost gnash their teeth at "young China." But this seems rather hard on China. For nearly a century foreigners have been exhorting her, at the point of the bayonet, to adopt Western ways and Western ideas. And when she begins to do so, the same people turn round and accuse her of unpardonable levity, and treachery to her own traditions. What *do* foreigners want? the Chinese may well ask. I am afraid the true answer is, that they want nothing but concessions, interest on loans, and trade profits, at all and every cost to China.

But I must not deviate into politics. What suggested this

train of thought was the student-guide supplied me at Nanking by the American missionary college. There he was, complete American; and, I fear I must add, boring as only Americans can bore. Still, he showed me Nanking, and Nanking is worth seeing, though the interest of it is somewhat tragic. A wall 20 to 40 feet thick, 40 to 90 feet high, and 22 miles in circuit (I take these figures on trust) encloses an area larger than that of any other Chinese city. But the greater part of this area is fields and ruins. You pass through the city gate in the train, and find yourself in the country. You alight, and you are still in the country. A carriage takes you, in time, to the squalid village, or series of villages, where are housed the 350,000 inhabitants of modern Nanking. Among them are quartered the khaki-clad soldiers of new China, the new national flag draped at the gate of their barracks. Meantime old China swarms, unregenerate, in the narrow little streets, chaffering, chattering, laughing in its rags as though there had never been a siege, a surrender, and a revolution. Beggars display their stumps and their sores, grovelling on the ground like brutes. Ragged children run for miles beside the carriage, singing for alms; and stop at last, laughing, as though it had been a good joke to run so far and get nothing for it. One monument in all this scene of squalor arrests attention – the now disused examination hall. It is a kind of rabbit-warren of tiny cells, six feet deep, four feet broad, and six feet high; row upon row of them, opening on narrow unroofed corridors; no doors now, nor, I should suppose, at any

time, for it would be impossible to breathe in these boxes if they had lids. Here, for a week or a fortnight, the candidates sat and excogitated, unable to lie down at night, sleeping, if they could, in their chairs. And no wonder if, every now and again, one of them incontinently died and was hauled out, a corpse, through a hole in the wall; or went mad and ran amuck among examiners and examinees. For centuries, as is well known, this system selected the rulers of China; and whole lives, from boyhood to extreme old age, were spent in preparing for the examinations. Now all this is abolished; and some people appear to regret it. Once more, what *do*

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