

THE
GREAT WALL
OF INDIA

IAN HAY
1933

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**THE
GREAT WALL OF
INDIA**

[Frontispiece: (roadside intersection sign)]

THE
GREAT WALL OF
INDIA

by
IAN HAY

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

India is very much in the air just now, and one's friends may be divided, for purposes of argument on the subject, into two classes:

- I. People who have been in India.
- II. People who have not been in India.

Class II can be subdivided into:

(a) People who have read all about India.

(b) People who have read nothing about India.

(c) People whose knowledge of India is mainly derived from lifelong intimacy with the writings of Rudyard Kipling.

I come under the heading of Class II, sub-section (c). Or rather, I did. Since the spring of this year I have qualified for admission into Class I. I should hate to tell you, as they say across the Atlantic, how long my stay was. Anyhow, I qualified, with the result that I now find myself, in some trepidation, committing my impressions to paper. These impressions are of an entirely personal nature—I believe the right word is 'subjective'—and I therefore hope that I may be forgiven for employing the egotistic 'I' throughout. I would much rather write in more formal vein, but that might attach to my observations an authority which they do not in point of fact possess.

Still, first impressions, however crude, have their uses. They take note of things which the writer will never notice again—or at least, never consider worth recording again. When an *habitué* attempts to describe a place, it usually happens that he omits all the points of interest which the uninstructed hearer wishes to be told about. That is why a novice's description possesses a definite value all its own.

For instance, if ever I wake up in Bombay Harbour again, I shall no longer be interested to note the sounds and smells and infinite variety of colour and creed and costume on Ballard Pier. I shall be entirely occupied in scheming how to get through the Customs with the least possible worry and delay. The glamour of a first experience will be gone: I shall be an ordinary, fussy, gangway-crasher.

I

THE FRONTIER MAIL

The incoming P. & O. mailboat disgorges its passengers at Bombay at a remorselessly early hour each Friday morning, so if you are going north you have to wait until the Frontier Mail starts in the evening. ('Frontier Mail'—there is a thrill for you, right away!) But before we board it we have to fill in a whole day in Bombay—and exploring a big city for the first time has a peculiar fascination of its own, provided you can do it by yourself and in your own way.

Viewed from London, through the eyes of our more emotional publicists, Bombay is mainly populated at the present moment by riotous adherents of Mr. Gandhi. But there are others. This great city seethes and teems with people of every political and religious creed. Parsees, Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs—they are all there; and they are all marked in plain figures, for each sect wears its own

distinctive head-gear. (A useful notion, worthy of extension to London. It would save much misapprehension, for instance, in Hyde Park on a Sunday afternoon.) This makes it possible to identify the supporters of Mr. Gandhi, and so bring them into their proper perspective. They wear little white caps of the type favoured, in pattern though not in colour, in English convict prisons. They are not particularly numerous or noticeable against this great and variegated background. True, the morning paper mentions that they have been rioting again on the Maidan—a great, brown, dusty sort of Clapham Common in the northern part of the city—but this means no more to Bombay as a whole than the news of a Communist demonstration in Limehouse last night would mean to London as a whole. For the moment, the Bombay police, in their smart blue uniforms and yellow *bérets*, seem to have little more to do than direct the traffic. The only visible obstacle to the smooth running of the wheels of Empire this morning is a young Hindu lady sitting on a campstool outside a large outfitter's shop. She wears a placard round her neck, which implores you not to patronize this particular establishment. Nobody takes the slightest notice of her, and she seems well content.

Bombay itself is a big, sprawling, noisy, haphazard, entirely prosaic sort of place. Electric trams clank along the principal thoroughfares, and the shops, which vary from a kind of miniature railway-arch (under which the proprietor sits surrounded by his wares) to the modern European department store, are all busy.

The streets are filled with motor-cars—mostly blowing horns. The populace which throngs the fairway takes no

more notice of these than of the young lady on the campstool—either because they are too busy chattering, or because they are asleep. The capacity of the Oriental for profound slumber in uncomfortable and dangerous attitudes in public places is illimitable. He can sleep on the roadway or the pavement, with traffic roaring past or passers-by stepping over his body, with equal facility and immunity. I have frequently seen a man sound asleep on the stone parapet of a narrow country bridge. Half a turn, and he would have been in the stream twelve feet below. But he never did turn, and doubtless never does.

Another pedestrian to whom you must get accustomed in the streets—and for that matter on the pavement—is that sacred but occasionally thoughtless animal, the cow, which roams abroad with none to say her nay, whether she be holding up an electric tram or making herself embarrassingly at home in a shop-door.

One soon notices that few Europeans walk the streets of Bombay. They nearly all drive, partly because it is usually rather too warm to walk with comfort, and partly because shopping is almost invariably done by servants. One of the first things a white man must learn in this land of caste is that he may not run his own errands or otherwise cheapen his own status. Which is in its way a parable, capable of a larger application.

Speaking of errands, here is another interesting and decorative little custom. Native bank-messengers, office porters, and all that brown-faced, white-robed section of the community which begins where the white-collared European

section leaves off, wear upon their chests a bright brass plate, upon which is engraved their exact office and designation. Another good notion for London—though I have a feeling that an Englishman required in this year of grace to display upon his bosom the legend 'Income Tax Assessor' (as his opposite number in Bombay does, with infinite pride) would probably adopt some sort of camouflage until he got within point-blank range of his victim.

II

However, the day is over all too quickly, and now we all foregather at the Ballard Pier Railway Station, where the Frontier Mail is waiting for us.

Here are Government officials bound for Delhi; here are British officers returning from leave to military stations like Umballa and Amritsar, or distant Frontier stations like Peshawar. There is a special saloon attached for a youthful Maharajah, who has come out from school in England in order to preside at some special function in his own capital. He is attended by his State officials, who have met him in Bombay, and his English guardian, who has brought him out from home.

There is a good sprinkling of portly, prosperous-looking Hindu business-men. One of them is talking in an earnest, sing-song voice to an elderly Englishman—a Commissioner, perhaps, returning to his District.

"Yes, sah, I *have* become anti-British," you overhear him say. "Why? You give us no security of expectation these days, either in politics or business. You put your foot down—and then take it up again! You must govern, you know, or get out!"

The train itself consists of numerous classes, as is inevitable in this land of many races and castes, ranging from the first-class sleeping-coach—an unexpectedly spacious affair, ten feet wide, with two long leather sleeping-couches running lengthwise—to the wooden-seated and windowless third-class, crammed with people who look and sound like the chorus of *Chu Chin Chow*. The engine itself is English-built, and is always in the charge of a European driver.

Presently we start, clank over the points, and slip out of Bombay in the falling darkness. All pretence of European modernity ceases on the outskirts of the city. We pass by endless rows of open mud huts, each with a wood fire twinkling in front of it, over which a woman is cooking the evening meal, while brown naked babies roll about in the dust. There are millions of families like that in India. They, and perhaps the abjectly servile sweeper who will dust out our railway carriage every time the train stops, represent one end of the scale; at the other come the Native Prince, the Nawab, the Maharajah. Midway or thereabouts stands the Babu, educated beyond his opportunities, brain without brawn, clamouring for an independent India. A difficult combination to satisfy with any safety to itself.

At the first stop we return from the dining-car—my stable companion, by the way, is a Gunner officer bound for the

Staff College at Quetta—to find that in our absence our servants have laid out our bedding-rolls on the two leather couches, and disappeared for the night into the noisome cubby-hole at the forward end of the coach which they share with the rest of their kind, and from which they will emerge at the crack of dawn with tea and shaving water. We also find that another traveller has invaded our compartment, and is now asleep in the upper-berth—a hinged arrangement which is only let down when required. That is the trouble about Indian night travel. You may be awakened at any hour by the irruption of a fresh passenger, who will introduce blasts of cold air, turn on all the lights, and smoke cigarettes until he has unrolled his bedding and made his arrangements for the night. However, only the *habitué* minds these things: to the novice everything is part of the adventure.

III

The next fifty hours I spent in the train. During the first day we passed through Rajputana—flat, brown, and completely dried up at this time of year, for we are almost exactly between two rainy seasons.

The railway stations are, in their small way, a reflection of the complicated social structure of India. There are separate waiting-rooms for Hindu and Muslim passengers; there is even a female ticket-collector whose duty it is to collect the tickets of ladies travelling *purdah*, behind darkened-glass windows. Otherwise railway travel is a sociable business.

Everybody gets out at every stop, and the occupants of the Intermediate and Third Classes buy refreshments from itinerant vendors—sticky sweetmeats and mysterious dainties resembling rissoles, kept hot on a portable charcoal stove. The bookstalls are filled with English magazines, a welcome and homely spectacle for which the weary traveller has to thank the energy and enterprise of that remarkable distributing agency, the great house of Wheeler. At the quieter stations friendly monkeys lope about the platforms, chattering and asking for food.

In the afternoon we parted from our little Maharajah. He was greeted at his own station, with full honours, by an assembly of brightly-attired local notables, supported by local riff-raff. A white cloth covered the platform, and there was a military guard of honour—stalwart Jats, with full band, which, rather surprisingly, played *Over the Sea to Skye* on bagpipes by way of a Royal Salute. His Highness had changed his clothes in the train. He no longer wore the preparatory-school flannel shorts in which he had romped with us on board ship: he was attired in white *jodhpurs*, a light-blue satin tunic, and a pink turban with an osprey plume in it—a very picturesque and a very sedate little figure. Garlands of flowers were piled high round his neck. The procession drove off in a haze of saffron dust as the train moved out.

At Umballa my companion left me, at half-past two in the morning, and I travelled on alone. We were in the Punjab now—a green and well-cultivated land, though much colder. Sikhs with red-dyed beards, wearing their jaws wrapped up as if against toothache, crowded the platform at Amritsar,

where I woke. Each of them was encumbered with a home-made bubble-bubble pipe fully three feet long, which appeared to be his sole article of luggage. I could not help thinking of the story of the man who walked down a street carrying a grandfather's clock, and was asked by a well-meaning passer-by why he did not try a wrist-watch.

The national gift for small-talk showed no falling off. In Waterloo Station in London the noise is considerable, but it is furnished in the main by the trains. In Lahore Station, where I breakfasted, it was deafening, but it emanated not from the trains but from the people. It was in Lahore, you will recall, that Kim, sitting astride Zam Zammah, acquired the first rudiments of the art of vernacular backchat.

Now we began to climb, with the Grand Trunk Road from distant Calcutta running beside us. In the afternoon we reached a wild, eerie country of soft brown rock, like chocolate-cake, all carved up into isolated square blocks, presumably by the action of water. At Attock we crossed the Indus, creeping in the dusk across the lofty bridge which spans the gorge through which the great river flows. Then darkness fell, but not before the Himalayas had shown themselves away on our right. At Rawalpindi I lost my sole remaining white companion on the train—an Engineer on some remote surveying expedition—and ate my solitary evening meal under the oppressive supervision of the entire strength of the white-robed and heavily-bearded dining-car staff.

At last came Peshawar, the terminus of the line, and my friend and host, whom I will call Major Kenmar,

commanding the North-West Irregulars—which is not their proper name. He had motored a hundred and fifty miles—o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent—to meet me. Having criticized my dazzlingly white solar *topi*, which he said reminded him of the second act of a musical comedy, he announced that on the morrow, before departing for his Headquarters, we would visit the Khyber Pass.

II

THE KHYBER

Peshawar lies in the centre of a vast, stony plain in the very left-hand-top corner of India. To the north stretches the mountainous Mohmand country, leading to Malakand and Chitral. On the south lies the North-West Frontier Province itself, deeply indented here by what is known as the Tirah Salient, home of the Adam Khel Pathans. The east is bounded by the rich and fertile valley of the Kabul River, which, having penetrated the rocky barrier separating British India from Afghanistan north of the Khyber, here curls south to join the Indus. To the west lies the Khyber Pass itself.

Like most Indian cities, Peshawar is divided into two halves—the native city, or Bazaar, and the Cantonments, which house the Garrison, the Administrative Headquarters, and the British population generally.

The contrast is strange. Old Peshawar, one of the toughest spots in all India, is a walled town—the resort of innumerable tribes and factions—turbulent, suspicious, and credulous to a degree. Start any kind of inflammatory rumour, and you have a conflagration at once. Naturally, Peshawar affords a fertile field to the trouble-makers—the agents of the self-styled Congress—the Gandhiites, in short—and the 'Redshirts.' In this mainly Muslim territory the Gandhiites, who are Hindus, are comparatively innocuous; but the Redshirts, who draw their instructions and their pay from a European power on the north side of the Hindu Kush, are a perpetual menace.

[Illustration: (turbaned man)]

Of course turbulence in Peshawar is nothing new. Ninety years ago the city formed part of the Sikh Kingdom, and was governed for the Sikhs by an interesting old gentleman named Avitabile, an Italian soldier of fortune who had been imported for that express purpose. His method of maintaining order was simple. Whenever murder or rapine broke out in the city, he sent out into the streets for the nearest passer-by, and hanged him over the Palace gate, continuing the treatment, at the rate of one pedestrian per day, until tranquillity reasserted itself. We have to be content with more diplomatic, if less efficacious, methods now. For instance, in the summer of 1930 the Afridis came down from the hills and tried to besiege Peshawar. They were repulsed without much difficulty; but obviously this sort of thing had to be discouraged, so Government troops occupied the Kajori Plain south-west of Peshawar, whither the Afridis were accustomed to descend from the snowbound valleys of Tirah

for the winter grazing, and the plain was not evacuated until the Afridis had acknowledged the error of their ways and given guarantees for future good behaviour. It was almost a bloodless campaign, and comparatively cheap. It is still referred to locally as the Woolworth War. One would like to know what old Avitabile would have called it.

This morning, however, as we push our way through the crowded bazaar, accompanied by a plain-clothes police official, all is quiet. In a political sense, that is: vocally, needless to say, everybody is in full blast. Each trade has its own street—the street of jewellers, or coppersmiths, or bird-sellers, or sweet-sellers, or shawl-sellers, or tinware merchants. Everybody is selling something, or manufacturing something, or both; and everybody is bargaining. Food, as usual, is being cooked, sold, and eaten in every unlikely spot—as often as not in the middle of the dusty roadway, under the feet of the crowd. Big Pathan policemen stand about armed with *lathis*, or brass-tipped staves. They have nothing to do to-day, but a fortnight ago they were at grips with a first-class Redshirt upheaval, and the city gates were closed. The political barometer rises and falls easily in Peshawar.

The Cantonments just outside the town breathe a very different atmosphere. Here are straight roads, orderly lines of verandahed barrack-buildings, gravel paths bordered with whitewashed stones—and the old familiar Aldershot smell of incinerated refuse. There is an excellent hotel by the railway station; and here we may note that the Indian hotel differs from the American hotel in this material point, that it resembles a skyscraper laid on its side. In other words, it is a

long, rambling building one storey high. Each guest has his own suite and verandah. Behind the verandah lies a small sitting-room; then a bedroom furnished with little but a bed and a dressing-table; finally, a stone-floored whitewashed bathroom, containing an enormous crock of water and a tin bath. This bathroom has a door of its own opening out on to the backyard, for the exclusive use of the sweeper who attends to it. His caste is so low that he may not enter by any other door, or penetrate into the other two rooms. High life below stairs is not confined to Mayfair, apparently.

There is also a golf course (with an armed sentry over the ninth hole) upon which British officers and their wives can be seen playing. You can even see English babies in perambulators. There is a European bazaar, wherein you may buy such necessities of English life as tooth-paste and Edgar Wallace novels. Here, at the stern behest of my host, my Bond Street headgear was replaced by a smaller and more subdued article of khaki colour.

II

Most of us have tried at one time or another to picture for ourselves what the Khyber Pass is like. To me it has always been a deep, black, frowning gorge, with a road winding through it upon which you may at any moment encounter a sniper's bullet. I was not far out, except that the rocks are not black but clay coloured, and in this land of perpetual sunshine smile rather than frown. As for the snipers' bullets,

they are not so numerous as they used to be, for reasons which will presently appear.

The entrance to the Pass is nine miles from Peshawar, and is guarded by a gate, through which you may not penetrate until you have signed your name in a book and generally given some account of yourself; for here you are leaving British India, and the direct protection of the British Raj, in order to enter that strip of No-Man's-Land known as Tribal Territory, beyond which lies mysterious Afghanistan.

On the road to the Khyber, by the way, just outside Peshawar, you may observe a considerable building. This is the Islamia College, run upon very much the same lines as the Gordon College at Khartum, in which the sons of Frontier chieftains are receiving an education which may enable them, in time, to appreciate the superiority of reason over force in the game of Border politics.

The gate into the Pass is guarded by a brick fort—Jamrud—a curious affair with wireless masts on top, which, as you approach, looks exactly like a stranded battleship. A week or two ago we should not have been allowed through this gate at all, owing to the outbreak of a periodical 'spot of bother' somewhere. The first thing the British Government does when trouble breaks out in the North-West is to close the Khyber Pass—much as a prudent householder turns off the gas at the meter on the first alarm of fire.

Now we are in the Pass, and we note that there are three roads and not one. The first is the old caravan road, which winds and twists interminably, and thereby keeps as level as

is humanly possible when you have to climb four thousand feet in fifteen miles. A great caravan of pack animals from Kabul still passes through twice a week. The other is of more modern construction, and is intended for motor traffic only. Occasionally the two roads converge or cross, and here, to prevent confusion, signposts are erected, of a primitive but unmistakable design. The motor road is designated by a stencilled silhouette of a motor-car, the other by those of a camel and a donkey.

The third road is the new railway, which spends most of its time emerging from one tunnel only to dive into another. Occasionally it crosses one of the roads by an ordinary level-crossing. At each of these a hut is erected, in which squat some half-dozen contemplative gentlemen, whose duty it is to bar the road with a pole whenever a train is about to cross it. I asked casually how often a train did cross it. 'Twice a week,' was the answer. The ideal job, in fact.

The motor road is finely engineered and the drive fascinating. Occasionally we encounter other vehicles. First, a couple of big cylindrical petrol-lorries, rumbling through to Kabul; then a small motor-car, on its second speed, containing a British Major-General and his A.D.C., probably on their way to an Inspection. There are few pedestrians: they are mostly on the other road. But occasionally we pass a picturesque figure, or group of figures, stationed at a road-bend or silhouetted against the sky upon some outstanding rock. These are Khassadars, or Irregular Armed Constabulary. If they were not Irregular Armed Constabulary they would be Irregular Armed Bandits; so the British Government, with its usual uncanny instinct for turning

poachers into gamekeepers, has diverted them into the paths of usefulness by giving them a regular job, of which they are inordinately proud, and the rudiments of discipline. They are only employed by day, for the Khyber Pass closes (like Kensington Gardens) at dusk.

There are few trees to be seen, but here and there we pass small patches of intensely green cultivation. These are usually in the neighbourhood of a village. The villages themselves are rare and small; indeed, they do not house much more than a single family and its ramifications: life here is still entirely patriarchal. The villages are surrounded by a mud wall, perhaps twelve feet high, with a lofty watch-tower in the corner. When night falls the villagers, men, women, and children, with their camels, goats, and donkeys, crowd inside; the gate is shut and barred against marauders, and the watch-tower is manned until daybreak. There are villages like this stretching half across Asia, and they have been going through the same nightly routine since the days of the Psalmist. "Unless the Lord keep the city, the watchman..."—we understand that phrase now.

In the neighbourhood of each village there is usually a small walled-in enclosure, containing an untidy-looking collection of miscellaneous rubbish—an old packing-case, some logs of wood, a roll of rusty wire-netting—heaped round a pile of stones, in which is planted an upright stick with a few tattered rags tied to it. This is a *Ziarat*—the grave of a local Holy Man—and is employed for a curious purpose. The inhabitants of Tribal Territory care nothing for the laws of *meum* and *tuum*—it is doubtful if they have heard of them—but they are profoundly superstitious, especially in the

matter of places which they regard as being haunted. This fact renders a *Ziarat* an ideal safe-deposit—or left-luggage office—or parking-place. You may leave your property there for months, and nobody will touch it.

We are now in a wide, shallow valley, some three thousand feet up. And here we come to the end, the extreme end, of that long, unobtrusive arm which furnishes to this part of the Frontier such tranquillity as it can boast—a collection of tidy, symmetrical barrack-buildings, and the busy, well-ordered atmosphere of a British military outpost. Landi Khotal, the place is called. Troops are drawn up on the parade-ground—a battalion of Indian Infantry and two Companies of Highlanders—Gordons. Evidently we were right about the General in the car. We should like to pause and pass the time of day with these old friends, but we have to be out of the Khyber Pass by closing-time; so on we go.

We are almost at the highest point now. On our left, still on flat ground, stands a serai, or halting-place for passing caravans—a great walled enclosure, with stalls running all round inside, like cloisters. It is empty now, but the bi-weekly caravan from Kabul is due here to-night.

The road climbs a little higher, takes a twist to the right, then to the left again round a hairpin turn at the head of a deep gully, then a final twist, and we are at the summit of the Pass, looking down into Afghanistan.

It is a tremendous vista. Forty miles away we can discern the great snowy barrier of the Hindu Kush, nineteen thousand feet high. On our right the two roads continue by

easy gradients down the valley-side. The railway is there too, discernible by reason of an occasional tunnel-mouth. The spot on which we stand is called Michni Kandao. There is a gate here across the road, guarded by a bearded sentry in a species of frock-coat, a bandolier, and an astrakhan cap. He is a Khassadar, and it is his duty to see that you do not enter Afghanistan without the necessary credentials. He does not remain here at night, though, after legitimate traffic has ceased: the serious work of guarding the Pass is done by the occupants of that three-storey stone tower, or picket-post, on our left. Let us pay them a visit.

[Illustration: (sentry at tower)]

The ground-floor of the tower, for obvious reasons, possesses neither door nor window: you enter by the first-floor, up a ladder. The post is held by a detail of the famous Guides, themselves one of the original units of that historic Corps the 'Piffers,' or Punjab Frontier Force. They are sturdy Pathan troops, under a sergeant, or havildar, who welcomes us effusively.

Being welcomed by a Pathan is a rather overpowering business. He possesses a great deal of the natural cordiality, genuine anxiety to make you feel at home, and complete insincerity of the West Highlander. His greeting takes the form of a double hand-shake and a flowery compliment, which you are expected to return. Another compliment follows *instanter*, and you have to cap that; and so on. My own personal contribution to the ceremony was limited to a single recently acquired salutation, which sounds like 'Sturry Mashie'—and means, I believe, "O brother, may you never

be tired!" Then I threw my hand in. But my Major Kenmar was undefeatable. He answered the havildar phrase for phrase, standing up to him until both were out of breath and ready to call it a draw.

After that we were conducted to the flat roof of the post. Here were machine-guns behind sandbags, and an immovable sentry, with his face set towards Afghanistan. The havildar did the honours. He showed us the little town of Landi Khana lying four thousand feet below us, where the railway ends and Afghanistan begins. The Frontier is indicated by white stones, at intervals: we pick them out one by one, as they climb the hill on either side of the valley to our right and left. This is the famous Durand Line, which for nearly forty years has marked the eastern limits of Afghan territory and influence.

Down on our left the havildar showed us the faintly discernible outline of the steep mountain-track up which Alexander the Great led his host, to the piercing of the Pass and the conquest of the Punjab, twenty-two centuries ago. He seemed to know all about it, Major Kenmar told me. Tradition in the East needs no printed page.

The conversation takes a more general and, I shrewdly suspect, more frivolous turn. It is interlarded now with what sounds like Rabelaisian jests; anyhow, ribald laughter is continuous. My Major seems to be doing his bit: he has ceased translating to me, which is ominous. All the same, to hold one's own in an exchange of sophisticated wise-cracks with a handful of remote tribal humorists at the top of the Khyber Pass is a more important accomplishment than it

sounds. Nor is it easily come by. I happen to know that the Major spent most of a long leave some years ago studying Pushtu, and passing the necessary examinations. Then, when he returned to duty, he made a point of inviting one of his native officers to his quarters for an hour every afternoon for three months, to take tea and exchange laborious small-talk in the vernacular. Men have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for less.

Presently we depart, under a hail of cheerful benediction, for it is high noon, and we must be back at Jamrud before dusk. So I take my place at the wheel—it is my turn to drive—and swing the car round, wishing in my heart that people at home could be brought to realize and appreciate the work that is being done for them, all day and every day, in out-of-the-way but none-the-less vital corners of the Empire, by that unrecognized, unrivalled diplomatist, the British soldier abroad.

III

A SCOUT POST

We left Peshawar next morning. At the garage we met a young officer of the police, setting out for Haripur Gaol, a hundred miles away, upon a professional summons connected with the immediate future of a group of subsidized

hooligans who had been a little too prominent in the disturbances a fortnight ago.

"At last," he announced cheerfully, "we aren't going to be made to look like fools. These lads come up for sentence to-day—and this time the sentences are going to be served! It will be a nice change for us, and a bit of a surprise for them. Thank God the Government are giving us a break!"

"He seems pleased with life," I remarked, as we drove off.

"And so would you be. For four years the Government have been trying the policy of conciliation—which means giving hired assassins a slap on the wrist and telling them to be good boys in future. Well, of course, to these people conciliation only means one thing, and that is, that you are afraid of them. You can imagine what sort of a deal the police have been getting lately. Time after time they risk their lives rounding up some particularly dangerous gang, and secure a conviction. The gang is sentenced to a long term; then, after a week, word comes from above that they are all to be let out again—as a gesture of goodwill and magnanimity! Their friends call for them at the prison gates with a brass band, and they drive away in motor-cars, thumbing their noses at the warders! Well, that period of lunacy is over, anyhow! Still, perhaps it was wise to give it a trial, just to show the genuine upholder of the *suaviter in modo* that it wouldn't work. You turn left here, by this sentry. I'll take the wheel after lunch."

We have about a hundred and fifty miles to do, and a hard route to cover. At present we are driving along a straight,

dusty, military highway, filled with traffic making for Peshawar—sadly overloaded little donkeys, camels in single file, slow-moving bullock-carts, two-wheeled tongas, each drawn by a lean horse almost lifted off its legs by the uptilted shafts, and that last word in civilized transport, an occasional ramshackle motor-van, rattling along at breakneck speed in a cloud of dust, with passengers clinging to it like brown bees to a grimy comb.

There are pedestrians too, mostly men. Such women as are permitted to walk abroad in this Muslim stronghold are completely covered in a long white garment rather like a candle-extinguisher, with two small square holes, cut Ku-Klux-Klan fashion, for the eyes. The Muslim standard of personal modesty is quite definite. A Muslim woman is *purdah* from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet; a man, from neck to knee. One cannot help wondering what these unenlightened Orientals would think of a European bathing *plage*.

Wheeled traffic is mainly confined to the towns and their neighbourhood. As we travel farther afield we shall meet only camels and donkeys. These donkeys have a hard life. They are never fed—merely turned loose to browse among rock and scrub when not working, which is seldom. They are chiefly employed to carry wood for fuel and stones for building. The stones are obtained from the bed of the nearest river, which is usually dry. Wood, which is growing scarcer and scarcer, is now conveyed from great distances. Indeed, one of the gravest problems of the north-west is the increasing rarity of water, and consequently of vegetation: it

may render necessary a complete transference of the population to irrigated districts farther south.

The camel has a slightly better time of it. It is occasionally fed and watered, and there are Government regulations as to how heavy a load it must carry—five maunds, or four hundred pounds, to be precise. But these regulations, alas, apply only to Government camels. Still, it is difficult to be really sorry for a camel: it has such an ineffably supercilious air. The Pathans have an explanation for this.

The Prophet himself, they tell you, was one day reciting to his followers the different names of God, of which there are exactly one hundred. He recited ninety-nine of these, then paused.

"The hundredth name," he said, "you are not worthy to hear; I shall not declare it unto you. Instead, I will whisper it into the ear of this camel." And he did so.

That is why the camel, to this day, looks so infernally superior.

We are out of the Peshawar Plain now, and are painfully surmounting the Kohat Pass, along a road of tortuous windings and horrific curves. It rather resembles the Corniche Road in the French Riviera, except that we are several hundred feet up in the air instead of at sea-level. The journey, too, involves us in a mileage quite out of proportion to the distance covered; for very often, to avoid a steep drop and climb, the road turns and runs a mile or two up a gully into the heart of a mountain, then doubles back on itself and

emerges a hundred yards or so from where it entered. You have to be careful round corners too, for at any moment you may encounter a camel carrying something longitudinal, such as a horizontal telegraph pole; and if a camel so burdened should shy across the road—as he frequently does—and you are travelling too fast, you have your choice between hitting the camel, running into a lofty cliff on your right, or plunging over a precipice on your left. Still, the Kohat Pass is preferable to the Portsmouth Road on a wet Sunday.

At last we come down to earth again, in a green and smiling plain, and pass through the pleasant cantonments of Kohat itself. There is a surprising little English church here, brick built, with stained glass, mural brasses, and all—mainly memorials to that long-defunct but gallant band, the Punjab Frontier Force. This is the last British outpost that we shall see, for we are now about to swing west and make for a region where the King's writ does not run—more Tribal Territory, in fact.

Kohat was not always as peaceful as it looks to-day. In the period of turmoil which followed the end of the Great War it acquired notoriety as a place in which white women were no longer safe. It witnessed the murder of Colonel and Mrs. Foulkes by a gang of raiders in 1920; and it was from Kohat that Miss Ellis was carried off by an Afridi gangster named Ajab Khan in 1923. The abduction and subsequent gallant rescue of Miss Ellis made some stir in England at the time, but it is doubtful if many remember the story in these days. England has grown somewhat introspective of late: she has troubles of her own. Why worry about India?

Our road is not so steep now, but it is almost as tortuous and much more bumpy. We creep round sharply curving hillsides and open up fresh vistas of treeless, rocky valleys. Sometimes we cross a riverbed. One or two of the principal watercourses—you can hardly call them rivers, for although they may be hundreds of yards wide in places, their waters, except at spate time, are but the merest trickle among the stones—are spanned by substantial bridges constructed by our own ubiquitous Sappers. But for the most part we dispense with such luxuries. Many of the smaller streams are crossed by what is known as an 'Irish bridge'—which means that there is no bridge at all; merely an inverted arch (like one of the concave sections of a switch-back railway) made of concrete and neatly fitted to the bed of the stream. Down you drop, splashing through the water at the bottom, to emerge rattling and steaming on the other side. Sometimes there is not even an Irish bridge—in which case you simply get down to your lowest gear and bump gingerly over the stones and through the water-splash, praying that your tyres and magneto may survive.

At a remote and lonely spot we cross the Frontier. Here stands a Frontier Post, not much bigger than an old-fashioned tollhouse, at which every roving tribesman entering British India must deposit his rifle, just as you must deposit your umbrella when you enter the Royal Academy—and rifles in this district are quite as common as umbrellas in Piccadilly. They are of all makes and ages—Martini Henrys, Lee Metfords, Lee Enfields, sometimes a medley of all three—and most of them have been smuggled. They are cherished far more tenderly than children. Lock and barrel are kept scrupulously clean, and the stock, besides being frequently

inlaid with ivory, is usually decorated with gay-coloured tassels.

At length, towards the end of the afternoon, we cross another river, the Kaitu, by a steel and concrete bridge, swing round a corner into yet another stony valley, and come suddenly upon the first of Major Kenmar's Scout Posts. We will call it Spin Khel.

It is a square mud fort, with a crenellated parapet, pleasingly reminiscent of Zinderneuf, in *Beau Geste*. One almost expects to see the heads of those dead sentries lolling in every opening. But this place is very much alive. As we approach, the great gate swings back and the guard turns out—a smart little guard of Major Kenmar's own Pathans, under a highly efficient havildar. The British Officer-in-Command of the Post appears, and greets us. He is a sun-burned young man of thirty or so, and he is stationed in this desolate spot for a month at a time, the only white man among two hundred. After that he gets back to Headquarters for a spell, where he sometimes sees as many as half a dozen white faces at once.

[Illustration: (interior of fort)]

He gives us tea, with jam, and talks geography to me. Spin Khel forms the right flank of the long outpost line, facing north-westward towards the Afghan province of Khost, which constitutes Major Kenmar's command. The left flank, Kadda Post, is a hundred miles away. (Kadda Post has a history of its own, as you shall hear.) Chashmai Fort, Major

Kenmar's headquarters, for which we are bound, stands about midway.

We are shown round the Post. Post is a modest term, for this is a considerable stronghold. Buildings run all round the interior of the walls, their flat roofs forming a firing platform just below the crenellated parapet. Introductions follow, to various upstanding *subahdars* and *jemadars* (corresponding to First and Second Lieutenants) with much hand-shaking and numerous openings for the 'Sturry Mashie' ritual. We mount to the firing platform and look over the parapet. The Fort itself is surrounded by a stout ring of barbed-wire fencing, beyond which the Post garden has been laid out. Green vegetables rank as rare and refreshing fruit in this arid land, and are prized accordingly. Fortunately, there is a stream not far off, and with four platoons available, gardeners are three a penny.

But they do other things besides garden here. The Post, as usual, is ringed about by dark, frowning hills. On the hillsides certain Roman numerals are discernible, painted on rocks, in large plain figures. These furnish the key to the range-card which hangs by each machine-gun. The Fort boasts no artillery, but the machine-guns can comb out those hillsides quite effectively in a few minutes. Given these fixed ranges, too, they can be fired at night with equal accuracy.

"I suppose," I suggest casually, "that if any trouble arose at any time, your work would be entirely defensive. I mean, you wouldn't go outside and ask for it?"

"Wouldn't we? Listen!"

To employ a convenient colloquialism, I have started something.

"At any moment we may get word of some funny business in those hills over there—a raid, or a riot, or a kidnapping-for-ransom-party, or a rumpus of some kind which has to be dealt with promptly before it grows into anything really serious. We can't afford to sit tight inside the Post then: we have to go out and do something about it, and do it quick, or the whole Frontier might fizz over. Would you like to see? We're about due for a *chigba* party, in any case."

"What is a *chigba* party?"

"Literally, a 'hue and cry'—a sort of emergency muster. We have one periodically, just to keep the men on their toes. We'll have one now, and time it."

I glanced down from the firing platform into the interior of the little fort, where men were sleeping, cooking, polishing their equipment, and doing all the hundred-and-one odd jobs which have occupied the soldier's spare time for thousands of years. Few of them were in uniform; in fact, most of them were in their shirts.

The officer turned to a *subahdar* and gave an order. The *subahdar* disappeared: a few seconds later the bugles rang out. Instantly the scene was one of seemingly blind confusion. Men sprang to their feet and dashed off in every direction. Then the bugles stopped: there was no further noise, but an infinity of movement. Most of the men had disappeared altogether.

"They have gone to their quarters to get into uniform," explained my host. "We allow them twelve minutes. Within that time three platoons have to parade in full marching order, with every man carrying sufficient ammunition, food, and water to make him a perfectly self-supporting marcher and fighter for the next twenty-four hours. Here they are."

Already the men were emerging, and falling in on their markers. They were in uniform now—khaki shorts, khaki shirt, worn outside—every true Oriental wears his shirt outside his trousers—khaki turban, puttees, and *chaplis*, which are stout leather nail-studded sandals. The British officers wear these, too, over thin soleless boots. *Naiks* (corporals) were fussily counting their own particular chickens.

Presently the lines clicked to attention, and the *subahdar* in command reported. My host looked at his watch.

"Eight and a half minutes," he remarked. "Good! Dismiss the *chigba* party!"

IV

WATCH AND WARD

Chashmai Fort is much more than a fort; in fact, you might call it a *multum in parvo*. Externally it is a rectangular

stronghold built of *kacha* brick, about five hundred yards long by three hundred wide, with high crenellated walls and the Union Jack flying over the main gate. It stands in a fairly green and cultivated plain about forty miles west of Bannu—and incidentally of the nearest white woman. To the north-west lies the rocky barrier of the Mazdak Range, which separates Tribal Territory from the adjacent Afghan province of Khost. The Durand Line is only twelve miles away.

For fifty miles on either flank stretches the exiguous line of scout and picket-posts which forms the rest of Major Kenmar's command. There are a thousand men in Chashmai; another thousand are distributed among the Posts. There are twelve British officers in all, and some seventy Indian officers.

A word about the troops themselves. They are Pushtu-Speaking Pathans, hardy and war-like. They are a proud race, with a code of honour as rigid as our own, though not invariably conforming to British legal standards. For instance, insult or injury, especially to one's family or womenkind, can only be wiped out in blood. In the little officers' garden inside the walls of Chashmai to-day you will find an upstanding officer's servant, peacefully watering the grass in his intervals of duty. His is a case in point. He volunteered for service in the War, and was away for some years. When he returned he found his wife and family in the clutches of the local *bania*, or usurer—in the last stages of destitution, in fact. He thereupon sought out the *bania*, and despatched him with an axe. Pathan honour being now satisfied, British justice had to have its prosaic say. The man

served a sentence of ten years' penal servitude, and is now back at his job—with no hard feeling on either side.

[Illustration: (Pathan)]

The Pathan may be a relentless, and sometimes a treacherous, foe, but he has many attractive qualities. He is sober, religious, and on the whole clean-living. He is an athlete and a sportsman. He possesses a robust sense of humour, and like most humorists, does not suffer fools gladly. Obviously you cannot break in this type of recruit to regular soldiering by ordinary barrack-square methods. A Guards' drill-instructor would finish him in a week—or more probably, he would finish the Guards' drill-instructor. Neither can he be entrusted to a callow subaltern. He must be trained and handled by men—men as he understands the term. Fortunately, our country still produces such: there are half a dozen of them in Chashmai Fort to-day.

Now for the Fort itself. A great part of its available space is occupied, naturally, by barrack accommodation. And here let me say a word about the domestic economy of the North-West Irregulars, as I am calling them. They are not on the strength of the Army of India, for the simple reason that they do not serve in India, and are not British subjects. They are technically part of the Border Militia, and provision is made for their upkeep under the picturesque heading, *Watch and Ward*, in Section 19*a* of the Indian Budget. They draw no pay from the Army Pay Corps, no rations from the Royal Army Service Corps. Instead, they receive a modest annual grant from the Indian Treasury, out of which they make their own

arrangements for pay, rations, and transport. In other words, they are on board-wages.

Such a military establishment possesses special and unusual features. For instance, Chashmai Fort contains a mosque—a very beautiful little mosque, built entirely by the troops, at their own expense—with hot water laid on just outside, so that ceremonial ablution may be performed in comfort. As for non-ceremonial ablution, the Pathan sees as little sense in that as the average preparatory schoolboy. Recruits are compelled to wash once a week; thereafter it is a case of 'I leave it to you, Pathan.'

The Pathan soldier, again, under the board-wages system (he receives six rupees messing allowance a month), does his own catering and cooking; so meals are not so stereotyped as to form or time as in more regular units. He consumes vast quantities of tea, and eats meat when he feels like it, and when he can afford it; but his chief article of subsistence is a sort of flat loaf, baked quickly on a hot iron plate. Alcohol, as a devout Muslim, he never touches.

The Fort, of course, contains a hospital, with a presiding genius—quite literally a genius—whom we will call the Medical Major. He is a full-blooded Pathan, and is a member of that distinguished and eclectic Corps, the Indian Medical Service. Last week a *sowar* of the Mounted Infantry Section was run away with by his horse. The horse charged into a stiff barbed-wire fence, and rolled over in it, with the man underneath. Both were cruelly mangled: the man had a kidney torn in two, and ruptured his colon. He was carried into the hospital more as a matter of routine than anything:

he was plainly dying, and with Oriental fatalism was perfectly prepared to die. But the Occidental training of the Medical Major rose up in revolt. He performed an operation; as a matter of fact, he performed a miracle. He removed the damaged kidney entirely, and stitched up the colon. The man is now on the high road to recovery.

The horse, too, is getting well. It stands in the horse-lines outside the Fort to-day, an interesting invalid, wearing a saucy blue gauze apron over its lacerated chest, to keep the flies off. Its *sowar*, however, knows how the cure was really effected: it was by virtue of the tiny scrap of paper, inscribed with a verse from the Koran, which hangs round the animal's neck in a little leather bag. They are sturdy little horses, these—Baluchis, with crescent-shaped ears, and no head or shoulders to speak of. When you mount one you feel as if you were sitting upon the extreme end of the vaulting-horse in a gymnasium.

The far end of this *multum in parvo* Fort is entirely given over to the Royal Air Force, for this is an important military airport. The landing-ground is just outside the wall. The Fort also houses a Sapper unit, the Military Engineering Section, which is responsible for our excellent water-supply—it has sunk two deep wells within the Fort itself—and moreover runs a power station which furnishes us with the luxury of electric light.

But the least obtrusive and most interesting corner of the Fort has yet to be visited. This is the Civil Post, within which resides the Political Agent and his miniature staff. The Political Agent is a young Englishman of little more than

thirty, with a Beattyesquely cocked *topi*, and an air of wisdom beyond his years. He resides here in Tribal Territory under a friendly arrangement between the Government of India and the Tribes themselves, for the express purpose of advising them upon questions of law and equity, use and custom, and of composing their differences, which needless to say are endless. If—I say *if*—the Tribes should reject his advice, or start settling their differences in their own way—if they should get rough, in fact—then Major Kenmar and his followers might have to intervene. But not unless. Nominally, the Political Agent is the whole show—the velvet glove. That is how *Pax Britannica* is maintained along this uneasy borderland. We shall meet the Political Agent later.

II

Outside the walls you will find practically everything that need not be inside. There is the parade ground, which also forms a rough polo ground. Polo is a cheap game here: the Mounted Infantry horses are the ponies, and expense is limited to the cost of sticks and balls. Everybody participates, British and Indian officers alike. Occasionally a match is arranged with some other solitary brotherhood from distant posts like Razmak or Wana, valleys and valleys away.

Then there is the rifle range. (I fired a group there before breakfast one morning, in company with a recruits' class, and found that my vision was not what it used to be.) There is the usual indispensable vegetable garden. Major Kenmar is an

inveterate gardener, and will spend whole minutes in a kind of trance, brooding ecstatically over vistas of dried mud which one day will be onions. There is an open-air swimming bath, made by the men themselves; a lawn-tennis court, chiefly utilized by the Babu clerks of the Civil Post; the aerodrome; a petrol station; a bomb-store; and several exceedingly brown and gritty football grounds, with dust-devils for ever dancing down the middle. The Pathan has recently taken to soccer, and plays with all the fanaticism of the recently converted.

For the moment, indeed, he seems to have abandoned his former medium of healthy exercise—a vigorous ceremonial dance known as the Cuttack Dance—in favour of inter-platoon league matches.

But all these are the ordinary and inevitable appurtenances of a military station. Let us pass through this gateway in the barbed wire, and take a morning stroll of half a mile or so along the road which runs towards the Tochi River.

A word about these roads. They are all of post-War construction. Heaven knows they are rough enough and few enough, but they have simplified the problem of Frontier control out of all knowledge. Formerly, if some marauding tribe swept down from the mountains and cut up a British outpost, they could retire thereafter into remote valleys where nothing short of an elaborately organized and slow moving punitive expedition could deal with them. Now a *chigha* party, backed by motor transport, can penetrate into almost any fastness in a few hours.

The old Frontier Road (pre-War) runs south from Peshawar, well behind the Frontier, through Kohat and Bannu to Dera Ismail Khan—one hundred and sixty miles, or about the distance from London to Crewe. This has now been supplemented by a great loop which swings westward into Tribal Territory over a great pass, Razmak Nerai, climbing as high as eight thousand feet. From this road others branch westward at intervals; Chashmai Fort stands at the end of one of these.

These Tribal Territory roads are safe enough so long as you do not stray from them. Once you are out of sight of the highway, among the rocky *nullahs*, there is always the risk of encountering a misanthrope with a perfectly good rifle. And after dark, when the Khassadars have gone home to bed, the road itself is none too secure. Only two nights ago a belated motor-lorry was held up on its way from Bannu to Chashmai, and the driver shot.

But here, on this sunny stretch of tamarisk-bordered road just outside the Fort, all is peace. Presently we surmount a low rise, and find ourselves looking down on Chashmai *Serai*. This is an ordinary mud-walled village, and may be described as the civilian annexe to the Fort. It contains the married quarters of the garrison and the headquarters of a Khassadar Company—the latter a bit of a pigsty after the ordered cleanliness of the Fort. The *serai* itself is none too tidy: it resembles a vast farmyard cluttered with low mud buildings and plentifully endowed with livestock and children.

But there is a surprise coming—in so far as one has retained any further capacity for surprise in this land of the unexpected. Our friend the Medical Major has just emerged from a low doorway.

"Come and look at my civil hospital," he says.

I follow him in. The hospital is low and dark: the walls and floor are of dried mud, but the place is clean and cool and free from flies. The accommodation is primitive—*charpoy*s, or string beds, covered by a couple of Army blankets, together with a few simple nursing appliances. Some of the cases are grisly enough. Needless to say, the sick Pathan tries every other variety of the healing art—charms, incantations, or the application of cow-dung—before entrusting his person to the perils of modern scientific treatment. Consequently, most of the cases, by the time they reach the hospital, are in the condition technically known as 'advanced.' The female ward contains women with ulcers and tumours which should have been attended to months ago. The men are mostly in need of surgical treatment—for camel-bite (gangrenous, of course, by this time) and gun-shot wounds, chiefly. One man to whom I spoke was suffering from a large hole in the small of his back: he had been shot there from point-blank range by a relative. The patient was quick to add, apparently in extenuation, that he was looking the other way at the time.

But the prize exhibit is to be found in the children's ward. He is a little boy of seven, who was born with lockjaw. For seven long years his parents kept him alive by squirting milk through his clenched teeth. Then they brought him here. A

few weeks ago our invincible Medical Major operated on the tendons of the jaw—with the result that the young patient is now sitting up in bed, with an old stocking wrapped over his head and under his chin, indulging in the new and delightful pastime of opening and shutting his mouth. He was a living skeleton when he came; now he is actually getting fat. The fame of that kindly miracle will penetrate to every valley in Tribal Territory: it may do as much to maintain peace and goodwill along the Border as the most efficient *chigha* party.

V

A "JIRGAH"

We are outside Kadda Post, which you may remember forms the left and most remote flank of Major Kenmar's line. Kadda is one of the most exposed outposts in the Empire: it has had to withstand a siege as recently as May 1930—for the usual reason.

In that month Congress propaganda penetrated to the Kadda district, with one of its periodical announcements that the British had evacuated India. Having no means of verifying the statement, the tribesmen accepted it with enthusiasm, and a mixed force—mixed in the sense that the men were accompanied by their womenkind, also armed with rifles—promptly advanced on the Post to the number of about three thousand, calling out to the garrison inside to

throw open the gates and share the loot with their loving relatives. The garrison responded by barring the gates and opening fire. The attackers were soon driven off, to take cover in surrounding *nullahs* and other points of vantage, whence they maintained an intermittent fire for the next five days. Meanwhile the British officer in command of the Post had established wireless communication with Chashmai. The prompt despatch of a relieving column from Razmak, and a few salutary bombs (after due warning) upon the raiders' landed property, brought the proceedings to an end, and the district has been perfectly quiet ever since.

This morning this solitary Post presents a most unusual appearance of animation, for we are about to hold *Jirgah*. A *Jirgah* is a meeting of tribal dignitaries—chiefs, village headmen, or *maliks*, and the like. These assemble periodically, to transact the business of Tribal Territory in such a manner as to reconcile British law with tribal custom.

They have been arriving all the morning, some of them from great distances. Each hands in his cherished rifle at the usual Gentlemen's Cloak Room by the gate in the barbed wire, and takes his place in the close-packed throng which squats in crescent-shaped formation upon the open ground outside the Post, between the wire and the walls. Before them stands a table with a white cloth on it; behind the table are four Windsor chairs. The most important of these—the one with arms to it—will presently be occupied by the Political Agent; for this, on the face of it, is an entirely civil function. A certain unobtrusive military chaperonage is evident in the presence all round the stony landscape of a string of sentries with fixed bayonets, and of a machine-gun

peering through a loophole on top of the wall; but otherwise the atmosphere is as free from militarism as an American Dentists' Convention.

[Illustration: (turbaned man)]

Presently all are assembled—some three hundred all told, and an astonishingly picturesque crowd they are—heavily turbaned, bearded, voluble, and smelly to an increasing degree, as the sun grows stronger. Now the British officials appear—the Political Agent himself, Major Kenmar and the officer commanding the Post, and what reporters used to call 'the present scribe.' We are accompanied by the Indian Assistant Political Agent, and a number of Babu clerks bearing account books, minute books, and a large mysterious japanned tin box.

Soon the mystery is revealed. The box contains money, mostly in Indian paper currency, which is about to be given away. Everyone here, be he considerable tribal chieftain or *malik* of a small mud village, draws pocket-money from the British Government. This pocket-money may range from as high as a hundred rupees a month (about seven pounds ten) to eight annas (ninepence). The recipient of such emoluments is expected in return to maintain discipline in his own particular district. No discipline, no pocket-money. The whole thing works like a charm.

One by one the tall, dignified figures move to the table. A name is called, reference is made to a ledger, and the money is handed over. It is accepted without acknowledgment or thanks. The recipient merely stuffs it somewhere into the

panoply of majestic rags in which he is clothed, and stalks away. It is not good form in Waziristan to exhibit enthusiasm over what Mr. Mantalini would have called 'demnition halfpence.'

Occasionally there is a check, and a little discussion. This man claims to be collecting for his brother, who is sick. The question of his *bona fides* is referred to the assembly as a whole: various voices are uplifted in guarantee. He receives his money, and passes on.

Another says, "I am owed something from last time." The register is consulted, and he is refuted. Having been tersely admonished not to try that game on again, he retires with unruffled dignity, followed by the uproarious laughter of his friends, who dearly love a joke of this kind, especially when it is rubbed in by an expert hand.

A small boy of four, with many charms and the inevitable little leather pouch containing a verse of the Koran round his neck, is brought forward to be paid in lieu of a deceased parent. He is lifted on to the table bodily, and receives his portion with becoming dignity.

Then comes another check. The Babu clerk is about to count some notes into the outstretched hand of an applicant, when the Political Agent looks up from the register.

"No you don't," he says. "Oh dear, no! There was a small matter of an abduction in your district a month ago—a rather nasty bit of work, the book says." He goes into fluent and convincing detail. "Have you sought out the guilty one?"

Have you handed him over to justice? No! That won't do, you know. Go and find him, and bring him to Chashmai Fort, and then perhaps we will talk about your five rupees. Pass along, please!"

II

At last everybody is paid off, and we proceed to general business—the settlement of disputes, mainly, and the consideration of petitions.

Ali Baba and Cassim—or two near relatives of theirs—stand up and claim succession to the same *malikship*. Both speak at once, and with appalling eloquence. Each is supported by a rumbling *obbligato* from friends and relations. The young Political Agent sits immovable, with his *topi* a little more on one side than usual, taking everything in. Finally he gives judgment—in favour of Ali Baba. It is obvious from the approving murmur which follows that it is the right one. Cassim exhibits neither surprise nor resentment; he merely sits down again. It was worth having a shot for, anyhow.

Then comes a petition—something about a contract for road-building, and the reinstatement of some dismissed labourers. There is considerable argument here, and much eloquence from rival contractors. The proceedings are complicated and lengthened by the intervention of a discursive old gentlemen with a henna-dyed beard, who

delivers himself of an interminable discourse with an elusive point. Major Kenmar murmurs to me that the speaker is declaring himself fully prepared to replace the dismissed labourers with ten times as many, all from his own village, and all quite free of charge! Apparently the orator is a well-known character. He has no village: his hordes of workmen exist only in his imagination. In fact, he is not a malik at all—merely a grandiloquent old nobody who is not quite right in his head. The East is specially tender to such. At last, when his friends consider that he has had a fair innings, they tell him to sit down, and he does so. We get back to the point, and the Political Agent gives judgment.

Another petition follows—this time for the restoration of certain rifles, taken as a fine for a tribal misdemeanour.

"We have been without arms these many months," pleads the protagonist, a sinister-looking individual with one eye. "The offence is expiated, and we are still defenceless. May not the rifles be restored to us *now*!"

The Political Agent shakes his head.

"It was a particularly bad case," he says. "Nothing doing, my brother! Buzz off, and come back in a year. Then we will think about it. Next!"

'Next' is a very aggrieved landowner, upon whose property the garrison of some Post unnamed have constructed an emergency aeroplane landing-ground, without so much as by your leave. His grievance is a perfectly genuine one: he is entitled to compensation.

"I have heard nothing about this," says the Political Agent, frowning. "It's a mess, all the same," he adds to me.

"Where does the compensation come from?" I ask.

"That's just the mess. There isn't any!" He turns to Major Kenmar. "What a curse you soldiers are!"

"Don't curse me, old man," says Kenmar: "they weren't my soldiers."

"Then whose were they?"

"Tony Knox's. This landing-ground isn't in our parish at all."

"Sure?"

"Certain. I heard all about it from the R.A.F. only the other day."

The Political Agent looks genuinely relieved.

"This is grand," he says. "I can pass the buck to old ——" He mentions the name of the Political Agent in the next district. Then he turns to the plaintiff, and informs him, with a seraphic smile, that he has come to the wrong *Jirgah*.

The plaintiff withdraws sorrowfully, and in his place rise up the members of a rather numerous family. They explain that they are the joint owners of a piece of land: now they are parting company. What about it? Needless to say, young Solomon ultimately divides that land as dexterously as, and

far more thoroughly than, his prototype divided the baby, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Now comes the last case of the day—an argument about somebody's share in a watercourse—always a thorny question in this country, for this reason.

The whole problem of the Frontier is water. There is little or no rainfall, and wells are scarce. Practically all water comes from the nearest river, whose bed lies in some neighbouring valley. I say bed advisedly, because there is usually a good deal more bed than river. Occasionally, after a tropical thunderstorm, some mighty spate comes roaring down, submerging fords and Irish bridges, isolating whole districts, and bringing traffic to a standstill. But only for a few hours. Next day the waters have gone from the face of the earth: they have rushed on to join the Tochi, which itself never gets any where, but dries up by degrees in the sandy plain to the west of Bannu. Nothing is left save a shallow trickle among the stones. It is upon this trickle that the life of the Pathan cultivator depends. If he can convey it to his own little patch among the rocks, that patch will blossom green with wheat, barley, and millet. He cannot carry it by hand: the distance is too great. Instead, he taps the parent river at just the right spot, constructing a tiny runnel—a mere gutter banked with mud—which carries the precious fluid on an almost imperceptibly falling gradient across the flat and round the corners of hills until it reaches its destination. This simple husbandman possesses a most uncanny eye for ground. He seems invariably to tap the river at exactly the right level and without the aid of any kind of surveying instrument.

Naturally these meandering little watercourses, passing as they do round and through various other people's property, come in for a good deal of unauthorized tapping. All you have to do is to stop one of them up with a handful of earth and cut another outflow more favourable to your own needs. It is asking almost too much of human nature to resist such a temptation. Supposing your neighbour's gas main ran through your kitchen in Kennington, and gas-meters were uninvented?

One of these perennial cases has arisen now, and the Political Agent is called upon to settle it. Feeling runs high. There are accusations and counter-accusations: voices are raised, and long brown fingers pointed. Gradually, under shrewd and patient questioning, the facts emerge: so does the guilty party. The Political Agent puts the fear of death into him, and we adjourn for our frugal lunch.

The *Jirgah* is over. The motley throng rise and stream away, reclaiming their rifles at the gate. A few remain: they have matters on their minds which a man's sense of pride—or sense of shame, perhaps—forbids him to disclose in open assembly. He will unburden his soul in private audience to the Political Agent in the afternoon.

I am surprised to find that we have been out in the hot sun for more than three hours. It has been a most absorbing morning, and leaves an uneffaceable picture in the mind—the picture of justice at its best, because at its simplest—the open sky, the open court, the firm hand, the light touch, the square deal. There are nations in enlightened Europe itself which would welcome such.

VI

THE MAN ON THE SPOT

Chashmai Fort was not always as tranquil as it looks today. It has been fiercely attacked more than once, but has never fallen. Its direst perils were encountered just after the War, before the beginning of what is known now as the Reconstruction Period.

The outbreak of the Great War gave a glorious opportunity to the forces of disaffection on the North-West Frontier. India was denuded of troops, including thousands of loyal denizens of the Frontier itself. Rumour was rife, and German and Turkish propaganda working full time. The Turkish menace was the gravest, for it involved the religious issue.

Our outstanding safeguard during those troublous times was the rocklike fidelity to his plighted word of a really strong man, Habibullah Khan, Amir of Afghanistan, who from start to finish never wavered in his attitude of complete neutrality. Had he given way, Afghanistan and the hostile tide which lay heaped up behind it would have been let loose on us. Even then the situation was tense enough. In 1915 Chashmai Fort itself was attacked from Khost, but withstood the onset. Sporadic fighting followed up and down the Tochi Valley for the best part of a year. There was a more serious outbreak farther north, in the Mohmand and Malakand

districts. But gradually the situation improved. Fresh troops came out from home to take the place of the absent Regulars; white tents sprang up everywhere. The Amir of Afghanistan and the Afridis of the Khyber continued unshaken in their neutrality, and the last two years of the War passed off in almost complete tranquillity.

It was after the Armistice that the real trouble began. Our friend and benefactor, the Amir, was murdered in Jalalabad in 1919. His successor, the weak and vain-glorious Amanullah—recently the guest of the Lord Mayor at the Guildhall, and more recently still an exile, heaven knows where—yielded to the optimistic representations of his counsellors and decided to pierce the Khyber and capture Peshawar. The Third Afghan War resulted. Amanullah and his troops made a poor show against our war-hardened veterans, and his main thrust was an ignominious failure. But one of his Generals, Nadir Khan, a really able soldier, made such play in Waziristan and the Tochi Valley that as a measure of precaution the garrisons of various outlying posts were withdrawn to safer ground. Such a step, at such a moment, in such a country, is nearly always fatal. Withdraw a single outpost garrison, dismantle a single picket-post or watch-tower, and word runs round the Frontier that the British are evacuating India. The inevitable resulted. The whole Frontier blazed up. There were serious tribal outbreaks. There were even mutinies in important Frontier posts. There was one in Chashmai itself, but the loyal section won the day and the Fort was held.

Long and stern was the struggle which followed. It cannot be described here: let it suffice to say that at last, in

November 1923, an understanding was reached and an agreement signed.

Then came Reconstruction, and a golden opportunity for a broad and comprehensive tackling of the Frontier problem as a whole. It was admirably utilized. A railway was constructed through the Khyber, and certain roads, already described, of enormous material and moral value, were built in Tribal Territory.

There were interruptions, of course. The old Hindu-Muslim antagonism raised its head once more: there were inter-communal riots at Kohat, accompanied by murder and kidnapping. But the work went on. The status of the Tribal Territories was more clearly and firmly defined. Tribal chieftains and *maliks* were given regular privileges and regular responsibilities. The Khassadar Force was established. The Frontier began to settle down, and a friendlier and more trustful relationship began to grow up, not only between the Tribes and the Government, but between the Tribes themselves. The velvet glove again.

II

Let us take a final glance over Major Kenmar's line of outposts. They represent a mere fraction of a great system, for this long jagged Frontier stretches from the southern edge of the Hindu Kush to the northern confines of Baluchistan. But they will serve.

To visit them in detail would take several days. They are comparatively close to one another, but such road connections as they possess involve a long and circuitous journey, *viâ* the main Frontier road, far back in British India. Let us content ourselves by taking a bird's-eye view from the air—with the assistance of the R.A.F. We shall have to climb, for the intervening mountains rise up as high as thirteen thousand feet....

We are up at last, high in a cloudless sky. It is perishingly cold, but the prospect pays for all. Below us for the moment lies the wide valley of the Tochi River, which we are crossing from north to south. Along its borders are bright patches of vivid green: these are the cultivated holdings which are fortunate enough to possess a water supply; doubtless each of them has furnished a topic for debate at many *Jirgah*.

Behind us lies another valley, which we have just traversed, with a river in it. The river must have been the Kaitu, for close beside it lay Spin Khel Post, our first point of call on the run from Peshawar. To the right is the dark barrier which separates Tribal Territory from Afghanistan. We never cross this in peace-time. On the left rises a huge rocky shoulder with a ribbon-like road running over it, and a lone building at its very summit. The road is the loop road through Tribal Territory, already described, and it is climbing over Razmak Nerai, nearly eight thousand feet up. The building is Alexandra Post, held by a detachment from the Razmak garrison.

For the most part the valleys below us are grey, rocky, and barren—steep and deep, mere gorges, and entirely waterless. I gaze down into the one we are passing over, and wonder what would happen to the aeroplane if it had to make a forced landing—or what would happen to us if we survived the impact. But my young pilot does not seem to mind: he zooms cheerfully up another thousand feet to clear the next range, and opens up another valley.

Now we are looking down on Kadda Post, the scene of our recent *Jirgah*. It lies in a saucer-shaped hollow, some four or five thousand feet above sea-level: I can read the white range-marks painted on the rocky hillsides quite easily. Not far off, among the foothills to the west, we discern the villages from which the Post was attacked in 1930.

We swing round, and set out for home. One by one I pick out the other Posts which complete this little line of defence—solitary, unfriended, but sleeplessly vigilant. Presently Chashmai Fort comes into view once more, looking like a plasticine model on a nursery table. Let us come to earth again, and ponder a little before we bring this rambling narrative to a close.

III

Roads, Scout Posts, Tribal Territory, Border Militia, Khassadars, board-wages, *chigha* parties, *Jirgahs*, civil hospitals—all functioning under the reassuring shadow of the

Regular Army—such is the British way of maintaining tranquillity along the North-West Frontier to-day. The Romans would probably have built a wall, with a continuous city of soldiers and camp followers along its entire length on the one side, and a wide strip of carefully maintained desolation on the other. The Chinese once did the same thing. But the Great Wall of India is different. You cannot see it, but it is there just the same; and up and down its invisible length are scattered men whom Hyde Park orators have never heard of—soldiers, airmen, police, civil servants—holding their Wall year in year out, and keeping it in repair by the use of certain rare and infallible elements—common sense, fair dealing, humour, and stark courage.

These men, as we have seen for ourselves, are frequently stationed far apart from one another, which means that to a great extent each of them has to be a law unto himself. Nominally each is responsible to the next in rank above him, and he to the next above him; and so on until we come to the Agent to the Governor-General—which is what the Governor of the North-West Frontier Province has to call himself when he leaves British India and gets into Tribal Territory. But in the main each man has to rely upon his own judgment and his own initiative. His judgments may be reversed by a higher authority, or his use of initiative may be officially censured upon any and every occasion; but he has to chance that; it is all part of the game. As a rule he has neither the time nor the opportunity to take advice or consult precedents.

And so, along that Frontier line to-day—a line as long as the railway from London to Glasgow—the Man on the Spot is getting on with jobs, shouldering responsibilities,

improvising expedients, meeting emergencies, making the wheels go round somehow. He expects no thanks, and he is not disappointed. Occasionally he will grumble and grouse—it is one of his most valued and natural privileges—and tell you that he is fed up, and usually he is. But the Great Wall of India stands, and that is all he cares about.

One thing, and one thing only, does he ask of us—and that is to be let alone and not messed about. It seems a natural request, for this especial reason.

The history of our country owes little or nothing to inspired leadership. In fact, it is hardly too much to say that we have seldom been wisely directed or well led in all the thousand years of our existence. Our strength has always lain in the middle—in the natural courage and sturdy common sense of our Other Ranks. Most of our victories, whether in war, industry, or politics, have been what we are proud to call 'soldiers' battles.' This means that the Englishman, though he is neither imaginative nor spectacular, can usually be trusted to do a subordinate job in a workmanlike manner, without graft or thought of self-interest, and, above all, without any particular supervision or encouragement from people higher up. That was how we won the War; that is how we have built up an Empire. That is why on the North-West Frontier to-day the wisest thing we can do is to trust to our Major Kenmar and those whom he represents. All he needs, to quote the young police officer in Peshawar, is a break. In other words, leave him to hold his Wall in his own rule-of-thumb, fearless, tactful, inimitable way, fortified by the knowledge that he will neither be attacked from behind nor overborne from

above, and he will not fail you. After all, he never has, has he?

[The end of *The Great Wall of India* by Ian Hay]