

CHAPTER IX

POONA had greatly changed since the days when the last Peshwa fled from Parwati Hill or the subsequent era of decay when the old palaces crumbled into dusty ruin and Lady West glanced disgustedly at the ceremonies celebrated with dwindling pomp in the former royal chapel. It was now the headquarters of the Southern Command. Its pleasant climate, the ease with which English flowers could be grown during the rains, the facilities for riding and almost every kind of sport had made it a favourite station with both military and civilian. The Cantonment was well laid out, with wide straight roads (the first car that drove along them was Mr. R. Lamb's 12-h.p. Orleans registered in 1905) lined with shady trees. The river had been dammed by a public-spirited Parsi so that boating could be enjoyed during most of the year. And in the gardens by the dam a band played on warm evenings to the carriages drawn up in rows and the strolling couples by the river bank. A pleasant spot on April or May evenings when the hot wind that elsewhere blew over an ochre landscape was here cooled by the wide expanse of the river.

Rather an eyesore had recently appeared here, a new Parsi house facing the gardens and built in a somewhat flamboyant chateau style ; in the garden a large statue of a lady in European dress with a parasol open over her head, that curious Indian fondness of statuary. It was far worse in Bombay, of course, where in the gardens of many of the biggest houses on Malabar Hill were forests of Venuses and Athenes holding up lamps or pointing to clocks in their

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stomachs, statues that were a source of pride to their owners who would drape mackintoshes round them during the monsoon.

But it was wonderful how Europeanised many of the Parsis were becoming. They themselves were fond of explaining that this was due to the fact of their not being Indians at all but Persians, and of course during Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia many Greeks married Persians, so you could say that the Parsis were half-Greek really. They were most hospitable people and some of the tea-parties they gave were very pleasant in their way. The paterfamilias with little goatee beard and rimless pince-nez would come hurrying out into the veranda to greet his European guests with a low bow and to lead them into the long drawing-room with its rocking chairs ranged in a straight row, the enormous cut-glass chandelier, the model of the Taj Mahal on a blackwood table, the glass cupboards full of English china, the dark oil-paintings of ancestors, the highly coloured prints of King Edward VII's coronation and of Zoroaster in meditation. On the table a silver teapot even more massive than those commonly seen in European bungalows, and an array of sugared cakes and plates of sandwiches (Uncle Noshirwan had been sent out for the afternoon because he would wander round peering inquisitively into the contents of the sandwiches and then restoring them to their plates with a sniff). And nestling modestly in the shadow of the teapot a plate of Indian potato-cakes. "One of our little native preparations. My wife insisted on making them for you. Oh yes, like sampling foreign dishes." The ungloved hand advanced, selected one of the soft, luke-warm yellowish blobs. A moment of panic; had the cook remembered not to put any chillis in? The Englishwoman's face was inscrutable in the shadow of that

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huge hat with its pyramid of vertical flowers nodding on green wire stems. A whalebone-stiffened collar enclosing the throat almost concealed the faint swallowing motions. There was an encouraging nod, "Yes, very nice. An unfamiliar taste, of course. And now I will like a cucumber sandwich, please." And after tea the photograph album with the snapshots of their host taken during his visit to England last year ; posed on a promenade in white trousers, blazer and straw hat ; on the racecourse with tilted topper and orchid buttonhole ; in tail-coat with silver-mounted stick tucked under the armpit, drawing on white gloves. And the daughter's collection of pressed wild flowers ("only our common Indian flowers, I'm afraid. Not those glorious blossoms you have at Home"). And the new gramophone with the records recently purchased in Bombay, "When Irish eyes are smiling" and Harry Lauder singing, "I love a lassie, a Bonnie Hiellan Lassie"—a catchy tune which set them all swaying a little in their rocking chairs.

It was not till June that it was really fashionable to be in Poona. For then the Bombay Government (having spent the cold weather in Bombay and the hot in Mahabaleshwar) arrived for a four-months' residence. This was the Poona Season. Everyone in Bombay who was anyone came up to Poona for week-ends during the Season, or, in the case of wealthy merchants, rented bungalows for the Season and installed their wives there to avoid the tiresome climate of Bombay during the monsoon. There was then what the Press called a "ceaseless round of entertainment" and the correspondents of Bombay newspapers kept their readers informed about the trend of fashion in the ballroom or on the croquet-lawn. New-comers to the Poona Season were warned not to "do too much", and above all not to eat too many mangoes, which in the first half of June are most

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luscious and enticing. Too many mangoes gave one diarrhoea, or as it was carefully called, "Poonaitis". (In Karachi it was called, more allusively but more revealingly, "Karachi Trotters".) And if you were laid low with this unfortunate complaint there was an end for many weeks to the daily visit to Gymkhana where all one's friends gathered. While the ladies drove to the Gymkhana soon after tea, the gentlemen drove there straight from office so as to be able to put in a full hour or two hours at tennis or croquet. Many of the ladies played croquet too, but others preferred to sit on the basket-chairs in the veranda and sew (knitting did not "come in" till the war). They would visit the Club Library, but would be unlikely to find any books there. It boasted of very few books and those were in constant demand. No one under the rank of a Collector's wife had a hope of securing one except by luck. So they would content themselves with gossip about the last ball at Government House, the delinquencies of their servants and the health of their children. And, indeed, what else should they talk about? There were no theatres or cinemas and only an occasional concert. One could exchange news from home, of course, and the ladies who had correspondents in London were able to pass on the information that it had been, or looked like being, a brilliant season; or that it had been a poor summer and really one was lucky to be here, for cold north-east winds in June made England a poor place to be in; or that, as in 1911, it had been a very hot summer, the temperatures in London for weeks on end as high as those in Poona and no Anglo-Indian comforts to mitigate the heat, no fans, no veranda bedrooms, no khus-khus tatties over the doors on which a servant poured water every half-hour so as to keep a cool draught blowing into the bungalow. And the Durbar was a recurrent

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subject of conversation. All one's friends and relatives in England were anxious for details, and the place swarmed with reporters and Raven Hill had drawn a series of such amusing drawings in *Punch* about India and Indians. There had been produced a moving-picture film of the ceremony, in colours too, which was being shown in London, but it can't have been anything like the Real Thing. One would always remember it ; the King and Queen coming up the steps to the Gateway of India in Bombay, the King in his white Admiral's uniform and the Queen with the ribbon of the Garter and a great hat at a becoming angle, the umbrellas of state, and the rajas in their turbans and sashes and pointed patent leather button boots ; and the King and Queen in their crowns and robes at Delhi, receiving the homage of the Princes and later sitting on the balcony on the palace wall where the old Mogul Emperors sat while the crowds filed past, the royal velvet and ermine and jewellery under the hard white sunlight. It had all been wonderful, they agreed, smiling and nodding on the veranda of the club. Their children rolled and crawled and played on the lawn that was of almost English thickness and was bordered by the banks of many-coloured cannas for which Poona was justly famous and by the blue-grey shrubs of sensitive plant whose leaves withered at the lightest touch (as the children were never tired of demonstrating) and in their delicate decay gave out a faint but unforgettable perfume. By each child squatted a white-cotton-robed ayah and (if the child came from an official household) a red-coated orderly as well. There were a few English and Eurasian nurses and these kept rigidly to themselves, sewing like their mistresses and nodding together over the events at the Sergeants' Dance on Saturday night—those dances in the Canteen at which the etiquette was of terrifying strict-

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ness and a girl's reputation was gone if she were not returned to her parents by her partner as soon as each dance was over. And up and down the centre of the lawn, followed by a few of the older children marching in step, paraded the military band. It was generally the band of an English regiment, for of course only English bandsmen could be expected to cope with the really new tunes from England. But for a change the bands of Baluch or Punjabi regiments were often invited. They played bagpipes, really extraordinarily well considering, and to heighten the Scottish effect the men wore bits of tartan, though it was a pity they were so oddly shy about showing their knees and so would not wear kilts. They would play old Scottish airs too with quite a swing; and they sometimes played some of their own border tunes which were surprisingly melodious, unlike these horrid Hindu efforts at music. There was one Pathan marching song which was especially popular. It was called "Zakhmi Dil", which means "Wounded heart", a nice romantic title, and the ladies sometimes showed some curiosity over the words of the pleasant lilting song. But even if the gentlemen knew enough Urdu to interpret them it would have been quite impossible for them to satisfy the ladies' curiosity, for the least obscene lines in the song were those of the first verse which ran, "There is a boy across the river with a —— like a peach. But, alas, I cannot swim."

With the coming of the quick Indian twilight the military band would march off, and inside the club building violins tuned up for a waltz or two-step, for on most evenings (though never on Sundays) there were "flannel dances". They did not last long; since almost everyone had a dinner engagement. As Miss Maud Diver wrote (in a little book, *The Englishwoman in India*, designed to correct stories

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of Anglo-Indian immorality put about by critics like Kipling)—

The amount of entertaining accomplished in a year by a Colonel's wife in India would, if set down in full, contrast curiously with the hospitality shown by a woman of the same standing in England . . . India is the land of dinners, as England is the land of five o'clock teas. From the Colonels' and Commissioners' wives, who conscientiously "dine the station" every cold weather, to the wives of subalterns and junior civilians—whose cheery informal little parties of six or eight are by no means to be despised by lovers of good company and simple fare—all Anglo-India is in a chronic state of giving and receiving this—the most delightful or the most excruciating form of hospitality. And who but the hostess is responsible for the destined adjective? She it is who consigns the nervous *débutante* to the latest joined "thrice-born civilian," who will not stir his little finger to set her at her ease. She it is also who detects the budding love affair and lays her covers accordingly.

Of course the crowd of servants made housekeeping easy, "which enables girls, whose training for marriage has been carried on mainly in ballrooms, and at picnics and tennis parties, to blossom eventually into creditable housekeepers". The Servant Problem in England (and Mr. Lloyd George's iniquitous new Insurance Scheme) had made Anglo-Indians more tolerant to the failings of their domestic staffs. As Miss Diver remarked, "The worst charges brought against native servants are uncleanness and a propensity to petty thefts and lies. But, when all is said, are the lower classes of England—despite the advantages of wholesale civilisation—so amazingly clean and honest?" And unlike the idle hussies in England, Indian servants "never demand an evening out". Of course, sometimes there were almost too many entertainments.

It is no rare thing for a girl to go to twelve or fourteen dances in a single season. Save for arranging a wealth of cut flowers,

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laid to her hand by the faithful Mali, an Anglo-Indian girl's domestic duties are practically nil. Intellectual pastimes are not within her reach and religion is left to those who have given up their lives to it. Small wonder that . . . even the more seriously inclined succumb for a while to the irresistible charm, the lightness and brightness of Anglo-Indian social life.

And so at the Poona gymkhana the "flannel dance" was but a prelude to a more elaborate entertainment. The carriages were soon called and drove off down the gravel path of the club. Carriages, and presently a few motors. But these were still unpopular. They frightened the horses and on the whole seemed rather out of place in a country where everyone was supposed to be horse-minded from the subaltern to the Viceroy. Had not His Excellency himself in Simla, abandoning in a moment of commendable enthusiasm all official circumlocutions, minuted on a proposal to maintain the breed of the Burmese pony, "I agree. The Burma pony is a damned good little piece of stuff"? And had not that minute been incorporated in an official communication, "Sir, I am directed to inform you that in the opinion of the Governor-General in Council the Burma pony is a damned good little piece of stuff"? Moreover, the wretched vehicles were always breaking down as soon as they left the smooth roads of Poona and then you would see the undignified spectacle of an official being towed back to his bungalow behind a Maratha peasant's bullock-cart. Indeed some car-owners were so pessimistic as to order relays of bullock-carts to be kept waiting all along the route where they proposed taking an evening drive so that when the inevitable breakdown occurred they would not have to wait long for relief.

European bungalows were still of the traditional kind, steep-roofed with a long low-ceilinged veranda, screened from the road by a huge arbour of trellis work in which

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pots of ferns and small palms were arranged on green-painted wooden shelves. Many of these bungalows had already been condemned (the judge's bungalow, the building that had once been the British residency in the days of the Peshwa, was condemned as dangerous soon after 1900 and to-day is still occupied by the judge), but they continued to be patched up and renovated; the modern box-shaped suburban-villa style of official dwelling would have been impossible in days before electricity. Few people bought their own furniture (though many more than in more recent years) for it was easy to hire from the Borah merchants in the bazaar who kept a supply of furniture especially for the bungalows of Europeans. But if in general most bungalows looked rather alike inside they were most completely furnished with sofas and deep arm-chairs and a piano carrying silver-framed photos of a Governor and his lady and of the children at home—perhaps a tinted photo of the girl with her yellow ringlets taken just before the end of last leave, when she had been left with her grandmother or of the boy in his Eton collar and new suit for his preparatory school. In rooms like these guests gathered for dinner night after night, the ladies moving their pink or white ostrich fans and agreeing that it was stuffy this evening or exclaiming at their hostess's dahlias ("You must have a very clever gardener?"—"Yes, I took him over from Lady Smith. She trained her servants very well, oh a real *sukht burra mem*") or exchanging hasty tit-bits of *gup* (as gossip was called) while the brass ornament on the mantelpiece and on the numerous gate-legged occasional tables glittered from recent polishing and a faint, faint odour of disinfectant ("those mosquitoes!") hung about the corners of the room.

Then the butler, a wrinkled veteran ("been with us for years, knows all my husband's little ways") wearing a sash

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and turban-band of regimental, or other service colours, padded in and announced dinner. Forming up by twos in strictest precedence they went slowly, between bead curtains held apart by servants, into the dining-room. 'The ladies' high-heeled shoes and the patent-leather pumps of the gentlemen made no sound on the thick red carpet (made in the local jail). The senior guests sailed straight to their inevitable places near one or the other end of the table but the more junior hunted about for their name cards that indicated their places (calculated with some care and after frequent consultations of the *Green Book* or Civil List) about the centre of the table. Behind each chair a servant (for the guests would generally bring their butlers with them) helped the diners to be seated and the stiff folds of the heavy white tablecloth rasped faintly as knees jerked forward under the table. If the mosquitoes were very bad, guests might be equipped with mosquito-boots, but ordinarily a light burning beneath the table was sufficient to discourage the brutes. The table-surface was patterned with ropes of flowers which wound between the Indian-silver fretwork-designed dishes of Marzipan, toffee fudge and chocolate creams. In the centre would be a great rose-bowl. Flower-scent hung heavy on the warm evening and blended oddly with the lavender-water of the ladies and the hairwash of the gentlemen. On the walls tigers' heads snarled, the dim figures of a polo team (topi held stiffly against the thigh, a thick unlighted cigarette clipped nonchalantly between the first and second finger) peered out from the heavy blackwood frame. On the mausoleum-like sideboard glimmered silver toast-racks, boiled-egg sets, wedding presents of monumental size, and modest trophies of golf and tennis tournaments. The lamps in their great globes shone on stiff and crackling shirt-fronts with one or two plain gold studs and on white

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shoulders and lace and velvet dresses. Dresses that the wearers all swore came from England (the senior ladies often felt bound to change, with advancing dignity, to Paris) but were generally made by a bazaar tailor. And nowadays what pains were taken to conceal this! The tailor had to do his work in the bungalow (for if he was allowed to take away one's material and pattern-book one's friends or their ayahs, in neighbouring bungalows might notice) and in a side-room concealed by a screen in case an unexpected caller chanced upon the plebeian secret.

The long, frayed rope, emerging limply from an iron-rimmed hole far up the wall, now drew taut with a sudden jerk. The punkah moved slowly over the table. In silent procession the servants entered with the soup. These "double khans", as dinner-parties were known, taxed the originality of hostesses. There had to be an almost endless array of courses, and it was difficult to think of new dishes. The cook was of little help in this, for he was inevitably a Goanese who had learned his art from a cousin employed in the kitchen of a Bombay hotel, and had few ideas of his own. If you left him to himself you could be certain that the menu would be clear soup, cold pomfret, mutton cutlets with tomato sauce from a bottle, roast chicken, caramel custard and craigie toast. And even if you gave him a menu of your own you had to be very careful that one or other of the cook's own dishes (which gave him so little trouble) did not turn up in place of your suggestion for a course. The cook would generally get the cooks of some of the other guests to help him in his arduous task of preparing a "double khana" and the blame for the regrettable appearance of caramel custard could be laid on one of the other cooks, laid most convincingly with tears and imprecations and references to several Saints who would

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bear out his tale. The only way to control his flood of falsehood was to threaten to report him to his priest ; for it was assumed that a Roman Catholic priest, and especially a black one, would welcome information about the misdeeds of one of his flock so that he might put a little more pressure on him financially.

So that it was with a sigh of relief that the conscientious hostess noticed that the courses succeeded each other in accordance with her instructions and that the guests seemed to be enjoying the roast duck with the stuffing and apple sauce and roast potato and two kinds of greens.

Conversation was intimate and friendly. They knew everything about each other, their incomes, their hobbies and interests, how much they paid their servants and all the details of the gossip retailed behind the back of every member of that small and closely linked society. Business men up from Bombay for a visit discussed the chances at the Governor's Cup Race-meeting ; or congratulated residents in Poona on their luck in having so pleasant a climate. In Bombay, after a month or two of rain, one was tortured by prickly heat. Did anyone know of a cure for that nuisance ? No, I've tried that. It's as useless as any other nostrum. The thing is incurable. As *Momos* amusingly wrote in the *Times of India* :

In the symptomatic stage, savage warfare did I wage
'Gainst a trifling erubescence on the arm,
For I scratched it night and day, till I heard some idiot say,
That a little iodine would do no harm.
When it spread to hip and shoulder, then I grew a little bolder,
And agreed with all the experts at the club,
That germicidal soap was the only certain hope,
Used gently in the matutinal tub.
But each day I'm getting worse, (which explains this scratchy verse)
So my own advice I'll sell you for a song,
Every nincompoop you meet, has a cure for prickly heat,
And every single one of them is wrong.

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So the only thing to do was to come up to the cooler air of Poona for a change ; but one did not look forward to the return to offices in the Fort. Everyone in Poona had some sort of nickname or pet name ; and the idiosyncrasies or mannerisms of other members of the Gymkhana offered a pleasant topic and an opportunity for little stories and jokes. If there were officials among the guests they would talk a certain amount of shop. What on earth did old Tubby get a C.S.I. for in the Birthday Honours? And when was Jimmy going on leave? He had hung on to that post far too long and someone else ought to have a shot at it. The ladies were as interested in the shop as the men and they knew all the nicknames of their husbands' colleagues and discussed as eagerly as anyone the chances of an "act" next hot weather when So-and-so went on leave. But though they might know all the men's nicknames the ladies seldom addressed any gentleman except with a formal Mr. even if he were a friend of twenty years' standing ; and the gentlemen were equally formal to their friends' wives. Two ladies who were devoted friends would greet each other with the greatest affection but address each other as Mrs. —.

They formed a happy united community. The future seemed very sure. Promotion came slowly, but it came regularly. There had been everywhere an increasing prosperity since the turn of the century. The currency troubles and famines of the previous century were almost forgotten. Industry was flourishing and the scale of living in Bombay was steadily rising. The subversive movement seemed to have been brought under control. It was true that there had been that lamentable attack on the Viceroy as he entered Delhi on an elephant but fortunately His Excellency had been spared. He had acted with great courage and con-

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sideration. There was even a story (alas, apocryphal) that His Excellency's first words after the shock of the explosion were "Save the elephant!"

And so in great contentment the diners went slowly through the many courses and sipped their champagne (which was the only appropriate wine for a dinner-party). And after dinner there would be "music"; a few serious songs by the lady who had brought her music with her and a comic song by the major who had a fine baritone. Or else there would be guessing games and competitions. An hour or so after dinner the butler brought round whisky-and-soda and then it was time to go, though no one could move under any circumstances until the Senior Lady present "made the first move", as it was called. In the garden, as one drove away, the passion-flowers smelt very sweet. In the distance one could just see the red light burning over Government House, which showed that His Excellency was in residence.

A faint and murky glow came from the direction of the teeming city, the Native Quarter, but that stirred little interest in the departing sleepy guests. Few of them had ever driven through the streets of the city. They were narrow and dusty with probably many disease-germs and there would be an occasional act of disloyalty (though the ladies who returned home excitedly to say they had been "spat at" were usually flattering themselves, having misinterpreted the casual and regular expectorations of the bazaar dwellers). For one's shopping one would sometimes visit East Street or Main Street which ran along one side of the city, straight and dusty roads where Eurasian boys practised bicycling, Parsi shopkeepers gossiped in shirt-sleeves and bored unhappy Tommies trudged up and down in pairs, uncomfortable in their high-buttoned tunics and

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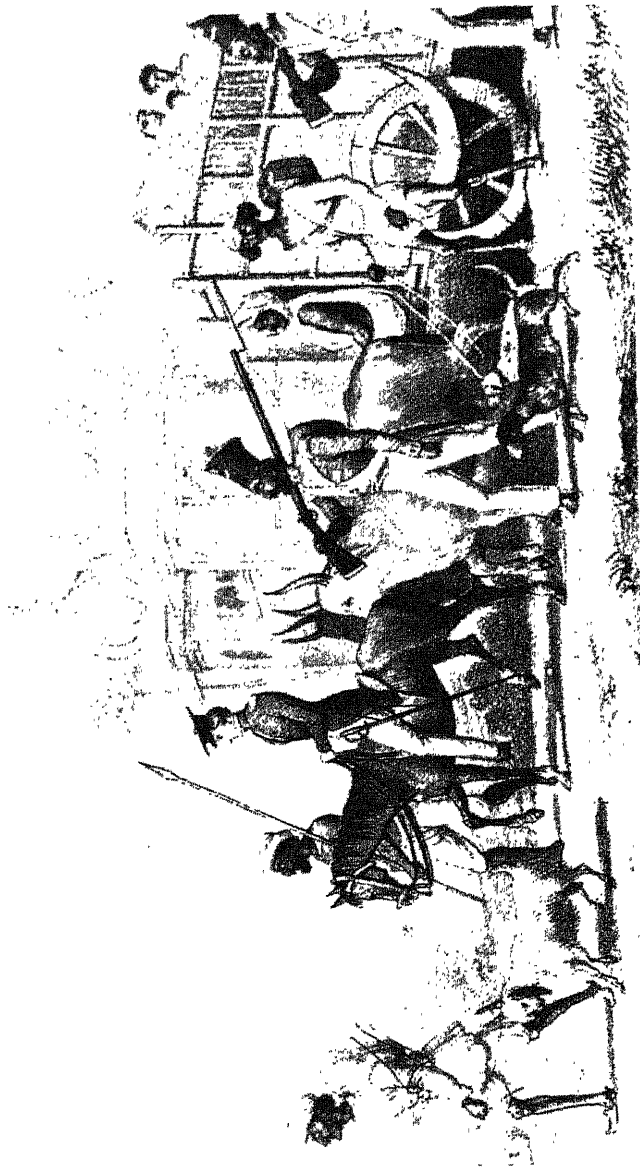
seldom with enough money for beer. The Tommies would stop for a moment outside a fancy-goods shop (called Cheap Jack's) and, tapping their canes against their legs, stare at the sets of gents' studs, the cheap watches, the children's buckets and spades and the green-lustre vases with pink china rose sprouting from one side and "A Present from Poona" inscribed between two loveknots. Such a vase they would buy one day, they would decide, and send home to Mother or to Mabel (to whom it was so difficult to write in the barracks with the precious stamp one had remembered to buy at the canteen curling up in the heat and other fellows rocking the trestle-table); but when payday came the temptation was too great; and they would stroll without enthusiasm into Mr. Pinto's Billiard Saloon and order a beer, a warm pale tasteless bottled beer, to drink at a froth-bedewed marble-topped table in a corner beside a declining palm, between shelves piled with cheap ping-pong outfits, gym-shoes and bottles of melting acid-drops; to drink in lonely gloom while Indian purchasers of whangee canes or spotted made-up ties glanced doubtfully at the two representatives of a "brutal and licentious soldiery". Another beer; for there was little else to do. Their predecessors in the eighteenth century had found some happiness in irregular unions with native girls. But official morality had changed considerably since then. "Sweat the sex out of you" was the watchword as more and yet more games of football were arranged through the long hot weather; all parts of the town supposed to harbour "undesirable women" were out of bounds and their approaches patrolled; the mounting statistics of disease were countered with renewed encouragements to "restraint" and stricter regulations of leave. So that the soldier who had somehow failed to find emotional satisfaction in longer drill and more football,

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was driven to a whispered bargaining with a tonga-driver for a "four-anna-walla" and an assignment in a ditch.

Beyond East Street and Main Street was the real city, humming with an intense and secret life of its own. Occasionally it overflowed at the great festivals. The Moharrum of the Muhammadans when one's servants begged for leave and then reappeared almost naked, daubed with streaks of black and yellow and sporting a tail of silver paper and one had to simulate a patronising amusement and hand over bakshish—and then on the last evening of the feast the great *tazias* would be dragged through the streets and pushed into the river near the judge's bungalow. The judge would give a tea-party so that his guests could enjoy the quaint sight. The ladies sat about on the lawn looking cool in their flowered muslin and gentlemen gathered near the buffet for a chota peg, while with yells of excitement the flimsy towers, hung with streamers of coloured paper, were toppled over the bridge by bands of black-turbaned devotees; and they fell with a dull splash and the cardboard crenellations crumpled limply and the swift water bore away the flags and tinselled banners. And then there was Ganesh Chaturthi when Hindus took images of the Elephant-God in procession and ayahs presented the children with little elephant-idols to play with—though this was discouraged in the stricter houses as such heathen customs might disturb the child's Christianity. And Dasara when the servants would paint the tails of one's horses saffron, and one's dogs too, and for this tiresome trick expect more bakshish. And later Diwali when the Native Quarter really looked rather pretty with all the coloured lights.

After the rains it grew hot again in Poona for a few weeks. It would be necessary to run up to Mahableshtar where, in October, the wild flowers were at their loveliest and the



AN INDIAN CADET--MARCHING TO JOIN HIS STATION IN
PATRIARGHAL STYLE

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air fresh and delightful after the monsoon. But it was in May that Mahableshwar was most crowded ; for then Poona was almost unbearably hot and it was difficult to play games or take any exercise in comfort, while in Mahableshwar one could play golf all day. There were other contrasts too, which were neatly expressed by *Momos* :

The Ladies of Mahableshwar
Have strawberries for tea,
And as for cream and sugar
They add them lavishly ;
But Poona ! oh, in Poona,
Their hearts are like to break
For while the butter's melting
The flies eat up the cake.

The Ladies of Mahableshwar
In wraps and furs delight,
And often get pneumonia
'Neath blankets two at night ;
But Poona ! oh, in Poona,
The gauziest wisps appal,
And ladies sleep (they tell me)
With nothing on at all.

The Ladies of Mahableshwar
In such sweet charms abound
That doctors say their livers
Are marvellously sound ;
But Poona ! oh, in Poona,
They scold and nag all day,
And contradict their husbands
Until they fade away.

A sufficiently dramatic contrast. But in days before motors the journey was as tiresome as all Indian journeys. By train as far as Wathar ; in the hot weather an exhausting experience. The food in the restaurant-car (if there was one) seldom inspired confidence, so that it was necessary to take all one's food with one, and if a child were travelling too, a goat would be tied in the guard's van and an orderly would hurry off to milk it when the train stopped at some

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station in the evening. If the train stopped for some time the child would be carried out of the stifling carriage (for the windows had to be shuttered tight against the hot dust-laden wind that blew in sudden gusts), its camp-cot erected on the platform with mosquito net on four bamboo supports, while the Indian passengers gathered round wonderingly, careful not to express any admiration for the child they might feel, for fear of the evil eye. At the foot of the hills there followed a long and slow ascent in carriage, cart or tonga. A steep climb and a steady thrashing of the horses got on the nerves of the more sensitive travellers who would complain to the Government. Government would then issue an order directing that horses should be less cruelly flogged on the ascent. This would lead to a strike of the carriage-owners (mostly Parsis) who refused to run carriages up to Mahableshtar if they were to be hampered and harassed like this, and the order would be allowed to lapse. The road wound round the curve of the ghat until the jagged hills of the Deccan faded into the mist of summer afternoon. As the carriage turned the corner of the ghat towards Panchgani the wind came cool and sweet over the high plateau. The horses were changed here and as the travellers rested under the whispering casuarinas and admired the "neat cottages and villas studded about" which so reminded Colonel Larking of England, hawkers clustered round them trying to sell them young parrots, bunches of wild flowers or home-woven basket-chairs. Presently they set out once more. The road wound slowly over the plateau, the wheels ran muffled through thick red dust, and gradually the trees closed in and the evening was loud with the calls of hill-birds, and they would agree with the enthusiastic panegyrist Mr. K. S. Dastur, who wrote in his *Guide to Mahableshtar*—

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No visitor arriving in this delightful hill-station can fail to be charmed by the foliage and verdure of the trees and the sweet songs of the birds. The trees are of all kinds and there is no space to name them here. Of the notable birds there is the Black Bird, a whistling bird, and the Thrush which has fine tone. Owing, however, to the thick foliage of the above mentioned trees the birds cannot be seen, so it is not necessary to name them.

As they approached Mahableshwar they saw the famous strawberry beds on the left and on the right the lake where the children would be sent with their ayahs to sail their boats and play at fishing.

Most of the servants would have been sent ahead to arrange about the tents and to unpack. For bungalows were scarce and expensive (except for senior officials who could reserve one of the Government bungalows) and hotels were in those days regarded with horror by most Anglo-Indians. And justifiably; for there were not many European travellers (except the tourists who visited half a dozen northern cities and no one cared how they were housed) who could not stay with friends or at clubs. So that even hotels which were inaugurated with a flourish of advertisement as Up-to-date and Under Entirely European Management, soon declined into seedy disrepair; the discouraged proprietor shuffled about the dusty sitting-room in shirt-sleeves and bedroom slippers, adjusting here the artificial flowers in a china vase and arranging there a Union Jack-patterned cushion to cover the rusty spring which had worked its way through the faded chintz of the sofa; and in the bedrooms, where mosquito curtains hung in tatters and a flock-oozing mattress was piled against the wall, unpaid servants squatted over a game of dice.

So if one could not reserve a bungalow the best thing to do was, as in most places in India, to live in tents. In

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Poona one would pitch one's tents in a friend's garden ; but here one applied to the Superintendent for a plot in the jungle. Snakes and panthers were apt to be a nuisance ; but they generally went for the servants or the goats first. With basket-chairs and camp furniture one could make the tents very homely ; and to keep away the eyeflies one would burn sticks of insect-incense in vases. It was delicious in the evenings to sit outside the tents. A soft mist crept up from the valley. Thrushes and blackbirds sang. Gentlemen lay back full length in basket-chairs, lit cigars and called for chota pegs. Ladies sipped lemonade and looked forward to a Strawberry Tea at the Club on Friday. In addition to the attractions of the climate and the strawberries there were the wonderful views. Every afternoon the roads, carpeted with red dust and winding between the stunted, enamel-green trees, were filled with carriages taking groups of picnickers to one or other of the " Points " from which one gazed over the jagged hills of the Konkan, half veiled in a steely haze, and caught in the distance the rare flash of the sea. And on the golf-links people discussed the hazard of the Chinamen's Graveyard (a cemetery for Chinese coolies who having been employed in this upland Eden were so eccentric as to sicken rapidly and die) whose notorious difficulty was such that players often wondered with the poet *Senex* whether

Some subtle spell, exhaling
Out of their depths, some charm of old Cathay,
Unstrings the wrist and sets the eyesight failing,
Just when you think you've got her well away.

And in the red Gothic Club building with its high roof of corrugated iron they would be discussing to-morrow's Badminton Breakfast, a favourite entertainment of pre-war days, at which to refresh the wearied players the servants

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would hand round barley-water and bacon sandwiches and slices of cut cake. They sat in little groups round the square tables, upon each table was a red and white check tablecloth and, exactly in the centre, a brass bell to summon servants, having on one side an ashtray and on the other a brass match-box holder. Most of the club members had come up from Bombay or Poona, but a few came from farther afield and Colonel Larking, after the shooting expedition in the Nizam's territory which he described in *Bandobast and Khabar*, visited Mahableswar and was pleased to find that "being the headquarters of the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of Bombay during the hot season, society is a little more sacred, and is, therefore, not such a hotbed of cancons and gossip as the smaller hill stations". Occasional gossip and scandal there might be, but not on the scale suggested by cynical Mr. Kipling.

Jack's own Jill goes up the hill,
To Murree or Chakrata ;
Jack remains, and dies in the plains,
And Jill remarries soon after.

And even when there was material for gossip it was important to remember that, as Miss Maud Diver pointed out, "the grass widow in the Hills had pitfalls to contend with ; and perhaps the two most insidious are amateur theatricals and the military man on leave".