

# LAND OF NO REGRETS

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COLLINS · PUBLISHERS  
FORTY-EIGHT · PALL MALL · LONDON

1938

## CHAPTER XX

NOWADAYS, when to the railway train and the fast ship have been added the motor-car and the aeroplane, it is interesting to consider how leisurely were the means of travel one hundred years ago. People now flit backwards and forwards to India in a few days' time, and think nothing of it.

Captain Hervey, who left England in 1833, records in his diary how it took him four months to reach Madras by way of the Cape: and the journey was not accomplished with any too much comfort. Earlier than that, starting in the hottest time of the year, my great-grandmother had occupied nine and a half months in travelling from Calcutta to Meerut, a distance which can now be covered in a railway-train in no great number of hours.

The journal from which the following extracts are taken was kept by my great-grandmother with the idea of amusing her children. To the general reader it will be of interest to learn that she was an aunt of William Makepeace Thackeray, the novelist.

Before her marriage with John Talbot Shakespear of the Bengal Civil Service she had been Emily Thackeray, one of the twelve children of William Makepeace the elder, and a granddaughter of Doctor Thomas Thackeray, Archdeacon of Surrey and at one time Head Master of Harrow. Those were the days of large families; and one may note in passing that the Archdeacon, who was born in 1693, had himself possessed a quiver filled with as many as sixteen arrows.

The Governor-General of those days was Lord

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Moira, whose tenure of office in India lasted from 1813 to 1821, and who was created Marquis of Hastings in 1817. He was accompanied on this tour by his wife—the Countess of Loudoun—and three of their children.

The events chronicled in the journal occurred during the latter half of the year 1814 and the first half of 1815—years notable for the abdication of Napoleon, the publication of *Waverley* and the battle of Waterloo.

Perhaps the main impression left by a perusal of the journal upon the mind of the present writer is one of intense admiration for the spirit and stout-heartedness of our ancestors of those times, especially as regards the feminine portion of them. One feels that compared with them we are a race of pygmies grumbling unduly at the lateness of a train, a mishap to a motor-car, the misbehaviour of an electric-fan, or the waywardness of a refrigerator. In 1814 the highest in the land journeyed across India as best they might by means of boats, elephants, camels, bullock-carts, or on horseback, accepting cheerfully the risks and discomforts inseparable from such modes of travel. There were no “hot-weather” hill-stations, and “a profusion of ice” was something to be recorded in a diary.

On June 20th my great-grandmother, with her husband, three of her children, and Mr. Macnabb, her husband’s assistant, set sail from Calcutta with a favourable breeze upon the *Hooghly* for Chinsurah (formerly an old Dutch settlement), where they were to await the arrival of the Governor-General’s fleet. One of the children was afterwards Colonel Sir Richmond Shakespear, who died in India after a long and distinguished career during which he had enjoyed only a fortnight of leave in England.

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This potentate made his appearance with true Oriental splendour. He was preceded by innumerable men bearing little silken flags, on which were embroidered in gold and silver, his arms and devices. Then followed the *sowaree* (escort) on State elephants and camels adorned with the most sumptuous trappings. State palanquins next appeared, followed by gold and silver mace-bearers and a numerous body-guard. At length came the Nawab in an embossed golden *howdah* on a noble elephant, whose legs were embellished with many costly gold and silver ornaments. Behind the Nawab were two *choureeburdars* waving *chourees* of golden peacock's feathers; and an umbrella (the insignia of royalty) of blue satin embroidered with gold and silver was supported over his head. He was accompanied by his sons and brothers and the nobles of the Court also riding on elephants. A huge following of spare elephants, led horses, State camels, horsemen, a chariot and a barouche closed the procession.

At the State banquet there were varieties of "English and Hindostanee dishes, breads and confectionery and ice in great abundance." The Nawab wore a high Mogul cap of black velvet entirely covered with diamonds and emeralds of great value. His dress was in imitation of the English fashion, "by no means becoming to a native of India. It consisted of a scarlet shawl made nearly in the style of a coat trimmed with gold. Round his waist was a *cummerbund* of figured shawl. He wore a neckcloth, boots and inexpressibles."

After much ceremonial and a round of entertainments the land journey from Cawnpore to Lucknow commenced on October 21st. The Governor-General's suite and staff consisted of some six and thirty adults and fifteen children, with an escort of a squadron of

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inscription simply stating that he came out to India as a private soldier in such a year, and died on such a date a Major-General. Opposite the door of entrance is placed his bust, which is said to be a good resemblance. The features are strong and the countenance good. The effect of the mausoleum has been spoiled by the good intentions, but bad taste, of a friend who, desirous of showing his respect for the memory of the departed, had placed in niches four ridiculous figures of Grenadiers as large as life, their arms reversed and their heads reclining on their folded hands bewailing the loss of the departed hero. These weeping Sons of Mars were made of mud very gaudily painted. They were all manifestly from the same mould, and were fat uncouth figures which looked as if they were stuffed with cotton. There were lights constantly burning in the vault. The house itself was a strange medley of French, Dutch and Hindostanee architecture and embellishment. In short it beggared all description. I believe it was designed to represent a Gothic castle."

One of the Nawab's entertainments took the form of an elephant-fight, of which the lady of the journal was an unwilling witness:—

"Two large males were brought forward from opposite sides, each attended by a female. These noble animals had been previously enraged in a variety of ways; a stimulus which appeared unnecessary, for they immediately rushed at each other. The charge was tremendous. They attacked each other with their heads, tusks and trunks; and fought till one of them fled, when he was pursued by the other who with one blow precipitated him

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to the earth. The combatants fought until one had disabled the other, or until both had suffered. They were with great difficulty separated by means of lighted squibs and by the aid of the females who enticed them away. To me it was highly distressing."

The Governor-General and Lady Loudoun gave a grand entertainment at "*Constantia*" in celebration of the peace concluded with France, my great-grandmother opening the ball; but the dancing soon ceased, as the English ladies were averse to "exhibiting before Indians, among whom dancing is entirely confined to *nautch-walas* or professional dancers."

A *cheeta* hunt took place in the Dilkoosha Gardens.

"The *cheeta* is a hunting leopard. Four of these animals were in succession slipped at deer, of which there were a great number in the park; but they were all unsuccessful. If the *cheeta* fails in his first effort to spring on his prey, he rarely makes a second attempt. Your two small brothers, who were with me on an elephant were not a little delighted to see the deer escape."

After the *cheeta* hunt there was a combat between fighting rams; but the children preferred seeing the two young rhinoceroses which "were perfectly tame and gentle and ate bread from the hands of several of the gentlemen."

The amusements of Oriental potentates at that period seem to have resembled those of the ancient Romans. There is a description of a tiger and buffalo fight:—

"A temporary enclosure of bamboo trellis