The Mysteries of Asia

Manly P. Hall

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by Manly P. Hall

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THE MYSTERIES OF ASIA

THE LAND OF THE LIVING SAINTS

It is not difficult to understand why the great industrial civilization of the West is at a loss to comprehend the asceticism of the East. The Occident sees the Orient steeped in superstition and social degradation; the Orient conceives the Occident to be a vast financial mechanism wherein all of the higher issues of life are sacrificed upon the altar of Mammon. To the Hindu, the very ground upon which he walks is hallowed; the hills and valleys of his native land have been sanctified by tradition. Treading reverently the *via dolorosa* where once the Master Jesus walked, the pious Christian feels very close to his Redeemer. Dwelling in the very fields harrowed first by the immortals, or wandering along dusty roads where once the gods walked with men, the East Indian is profoundly impressed by the sacredness of his surroundings. He feels the dignity of his race and his kinship with the deities. To him the gods are beings very real who, descending from their abode of bliss, disguise themselves as men and concern themselves with mundane affairs.

In the West, where gods are a very uncertain quantity, men are prone to worship their own creations. The Occidental is convinced that he is making history while the Oriental is worshipping history. So, while the superstitious and impractical East was building temples, palaces, and tombs, the practical and enlightened West was erecting office, factories, and stores, thereby gradually gaining control of the commerce of the earth. Katherine Mayo was duly horrified by the daily sacrifice

of goats in the temple of Kali in Calcutta. Equally horrified is the Hindu by the daily sacrifices of human life in America and Europe, where the first-born of man are the sacrificial offerings upon the altar of industrialism. In the mind of the philosopher, there is some question as to which is the more idolatrous: he who worships the shining face of Brahma, or he who grovels before the shining face of the almighty dollar.

To the Occidental mind, the age of miracles is but one of the divisions of ancient history. Water could be changed into wine two thousand years ago, but not now. The prophets and saints of the past could divide oceans and pass through barred doors, but these things are simply not in vogue nowadays. Consequently, to enter into the spirit of East Indian life, is to drop back through the centuries to the age of miracles; to live again in those days when the Great Ones, gathering their disciples about them and seating themselves on a little hillock by the country roadside, preached to the multitudes about the mysteries of life and death. Still, as in Biblical days, however, the halt and the blind are brought to the living saints of India to be made whole, and the sick are carried to the pools of healing.

The East has never been able to understand why the West does not believe in miracles. To the Oriental mind, it is incomprehensible that anyone should scoff at the raising of the dead and the cleansing of the leper. While in Calcutta, I met a young man, educated in the university and preparing himself for a scientific career, who told me a story typical of the attitude of the Hindu mind toward the supernatural. It should be borne in mind that this young man spoke several languages, was from the higher stratum of Indian society, and had received several years training in a Western college. The youth was studying East Indian philosophy with a very eminent and highly revered holy man who was famous all over India as a miracle-worker. As a part of his training, the young disciple

Holy Man at a Temple in Delhi, India

was sent for a period of several years into the vastness of the Himalayas, there to fast, meditate, and pray. Taking with him only the sacred books and the memory of his master's instructions, he retired into the mountains, living alone in a little hut fashioned of tree branches and stones. Each day he would wander about the hills, his mind absorbed in the contemplation of cosmic verities. Here he found spiritual peace by leaving far behind the illusionary and impermanent world of human vanity and ambition.

One day while walking along a narrow path bordered by heavy vegetation on either side, he was suddenly hurled into a clump of bushes, where he lay for a second terrified and half stunned. Looking to see the source of the blow, he was amazed to see his aged teacher standing in the center of the path and pointing his finger to the ground. Following the direction of the Mahatma's

gesture, the youth saw coiled in the road a death's head cobra ready to strike. He then realized that in another step or two he would have trod upon the body of the snake, which would have resulted in certain death. As the boy watched, his aged master simply faded from his sight into the depth of the forest. Upon his return to Calcutta, the youth discovered that the holy man had taught a class in Calcutta the same day he had appeared to him two thousand miles away in the Himalayas.

That the young student was not lying was very evident. What he said he believed to be the absolute truth, and nothing could shake his faith in the reality of the incident. The only inexplicable thing was that an American should doubt the story or consider it in any way remarkable. To him it was an everyday experience; similar things had happened to him before and were daily occurrences among the students of the Indian Adepts.

The same youth also related another experience—one which had occurred to his father when he attended a gathering of holy men in one of the passes leading into the Himalayan highlands. A number of mendicants had departed into the wilderness to propitiate the goddess Kali. Having found a suitable opening in the jungle, they erected an altar in the center, upon which they placed an offering of grain and fruit. Near the altar they tethered a number of goats. The devotees then seated themselves in a great circle around the improvised shrine and with mantrams invoked the black daughter of Shiva.

According to the young man's father, who was an eye witness of the entire ceremony, the holy men had no sooner begun their chant than a gray haze settled over the mountains, obscuring the light of the sun and causing a condition resembling twilight to appear. In the center of this haze was a cone-shaped cloud of swirling black mist. This cloud moved slowly into the midst of the circle of chanting worshippers. Riding upon the

The Jain Temple at Mount Abu

cloud was the gigantic form of the many-armed Kali, swinging a great mace. Leaning from her chariot of clouds, Kali struck both the altar and the heard of goats with the same blow. As the mace swished through the air, a blinding flash of lightning caused the very earth to shake, and the light faded out, Kali vanished over the mountain in the black haze.

It is difficult for the Western mind to understand the intricate workings of Eastern thought by which the exact elements of Occidental learning are harmoniously combined with the abstract metaphysics of true East Indian philosophy. That any

man in his right mind should claim to have seen a goddess riding on a cloud is inconceivable to the trained scientists of the West. Nevertheless, the naïve way in which the Hindu described the incident left no room to doubt his integrity. Kipling, whose clear insight into Eastern ethics is so wonderfully portrayed in *Kim*, probably realized the magnitude of the philosophical interval between Western physics and Eastern superphysics when he wrote those immortal words, "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."

To illustrate another peculiarity of Oriental religious thought, let us take an episode which occurred at Mount Abu in Central India, where stand the world-famous temples of the Jains. Near the temples is a little lake, and near the shore of the lake, a rest home for the holy men who stop there while en route to certain national shrines in secluded parts of the mountainous country. One day the rest house was sheltering a very aged and wild-looking mendicant, who was sitting in the doorway sunning himself. His clothing consisted of a single rag wrapped about his loins. Both his hair and beard were unkempt and had not been cut for years. His sole earthly possessions where a brass water bowl and a small bundle of holy relics. Several Americans stopping at the nearby hotel had availed themselves of the brief interval between sight-seeing tours to walk along the path leading by the door of the rest house. It was apparently the first time they had concerned themselves with Indian holy men and, stopping a short distance from the doorway, they discussed the mendicant's peculiarities and laughed heartily at his ridiculous appearance. One of the tourists, presumably of a religious disposition, delivered a lengthy dissertation in which he expressed great pity for the benighted state of the wretched figure taking a sun-bath.

Unable longer to keep quiet, the holy man gazed mildly upon the group of gawky globe-trotters and, in flawless King's

English, requested them to choose a less personal subject for discussion. The tourists, who had no inkling whatever that the old man understood English, were profuse in their apologies and finally persuaded the holy man to tell them about himself. They learned that he had been educated at Oxford, had traveled in both Europe and America, and was thoroughly conversant with all the elements of Occidental culture. For some years, he had been a practicing physician in Bombay, but had decide that as the result of a great sin, he was obligated to leave all comforts and joys behind him and devote the remainder of his earthly existence to expiation of his heinous crime. Concerning the nature of his offense, he was very reticent, but finally unburdened his soul. When he was a prosperous young man practicing medicine, a holy man had come to his door asking rice, and he had thoughtlessly failed to give him any. As years passed by, this sin so preyed upon the good doctor's conscience that he had set for himself a fifty-year penance. This incident is typical of the seriousness with which the Eastern mind faces the problems of spiritual salvation. To the Orient, only the spirit is real and permanent; only time devoted to the unfoldment of the spiritual self is well spent.

THE MYSTERIES OF ASIA

THE SECRETS OF THE GOBI DESERT

To the Occidental, the Gobi Desert may be merely a spot on the map. To the Oriental, however, it is a place of solemnity and mystery, guarded by evil monsters, for it is the chosen dwelling place of the gods and demi-gods who, descending from the spheres of bliss, take human forms and tread its golden sands. Myth-ridden Asia abounds in legends of creatures of supernatural origin becoming concerned with the affairs of men. The blue veil which divides the visible from the invisible is very thin to the Eastern mind, and the eye of the soul reveals to the ascetic the shadowy shapes of the immortals who ever stand their silent watch over humanity.

The West conceives governments to consist of groups of human beings controlling their brothers by virtue of the authority vested in them by birth or ballot; the East declares mankind to be guided through the ages by a divine administration. As kings and presidents preside over nations, so the entire earth is ruled by *The Great White Lodge*, and executive body composed of demi-gods and supermen, which meets every seven years in the sacred City of Shamballa in the heart of the Gobi Desert. Thus, from the unexplored wastes of Mongolian sand come forth the edicts by which the destinies of all men are determined.

If you ask the Oriental mystic to describe the Sacred City, he will tell you that it is composed of etheric substances cognizable only to those in whom the *Eye of Shiva* (pineal gland) has been

awakened. The Temple of the Great White Lodge stands upon an outcropping of Azoic rock which is called the Sacred Island. When the Gobi Desert was one vast ocean, this rock alone rose above the level of the waters and was never submerged. The Asiatic philosophers recognize several motions of the earth, one of them the alternation of the poles. When the molten body of the planet first began to cool, the poles solidified first, thus creating an island in each polar region. Descending upon these polar caps, the immortals from the sun first brought to earth the germinal life of every creature. As the earth gradually assumed its present condition of habitability, the polar life migrated to various parts of the globe. Upon the cap of the primary North pole the gods erected their temple and consecrated the whole island, protecting it with charms and magic against the vandalism of the profane. Guardian spirits assumed the forms of snakes and surrounded the sacred area with a ring of Nagas, or serpent angels.

As the ages passed, the third motion of the earth (alternation of the poles) resulted in the true pole of the planet occupying that area now known as the Gobi Desert. Therefore, to the Easterner, this is a holy spot, for it was the place upon which the gods first rested and from which all mortal beings have had their origin. They further believe that each new race or species that comes forth upon the earth has its source in Inner Mongolia. The Aryan race (of which both the modern Hindu and the Anglo-Saxon are sub-races) had its beginning somewhere in Central Asia. While Western anthropologists even admit this, they do not link this fact in any way with the Hindu belief that the race migrated from the Gobi Desert, where the first white man was born.

It is worthy of not that while the Roy Chapman Andrews expedition did not discover the Sacred Gobina (Holy City) during

The Black Sands of Gobi

its exploration of the great Mongolian desert, it did find verification for many of the Eastern legends concerning it. When the scientific world received word that the entire desert was rich with fossil remains and other strange evidence of previous and now extinct forms of life—that in all probability the oldest and best preserved remains upon the surface of the earth were to be found there—the superstitions of untutored Asia began to assume an impressive aspect. Modern scientists were unable to distinguish ordinary snakes from Naga spirits in disguise. But the snakes were there, tens of thousands of them, just as the Eastern Scriptures had declared, and of a sudden, the entire subject became one of popular interest.

The fabled Mahatmas of Asia have been a constant source of worry to Western scientists, who feel that not only is the age of miracles over, but that it never existed outside of the vivid imagination of the gullible. For years European influence in

the East has sought in vain to shake the faith of those who believe that supermen with supernatural powers are indeed a reality. However, the most interesting development in connection with the problems is that, instead of changing the convictions of the Asiatics, the Asiatics have converted a large number of Europeans to their ridiculed beliefs.

The Mahatmas are not regarded as isolated wise men but as members of an exalted fraternity which has been called the *Trans-Himalayan Brotherhood*. This order of exalted souls is supposed to gather in conclave with the Lords of the World and outline the destiny of mundane affairs. The Mahatmas are presumed to possess the power of separating their souls from their physical bodies, and while apparently lying asleep, their consciousness is speeding through space to the Sacred Island where the great conclave of spirits takes place.

In India I have met persons who declared that they not only knew great adepts who had accomplished this feat, but that they themselves had been to the etheric temple and had seen it glittering and shining in the air like some iridescent bubble.

The name of the Gobi Desert is indissolubly linked also with the life and achievement of the world's greatest general, conqueror, and statesman, Genghis Khan, upon whom was bestowed the title, "The Emperor of the Earth." Of this man little is known today, and that little is tainted with the venom of his enemies. In his own day, he was called the "Son of God," and victory marched with him and his arms. Genghis Khan traveled in a great portable castle borne upon the backs of a number of elephants. This castle was equipped to serve as a palace in time of peace and as a fortress in time of war. When Genghis Khan advanced into battle at the head of his lacquered army, his great moveable fort bristled with spears and a continuous stream of arrows poured from it. Into the very heart of the en-

emy's ranks the huge elephants carried the house of the Great Khan, trampling underfoot all who sought to stay its progress.

In Asia battles have been fought equal in magnitude to those of the late World War. There is a record of one battle, which has escaped the pages of history, where four million men went into action simultaneously over a front hundreds of miles long. The victorious Khan—one moment a soldier and the next a philosopher—passed like a glorious comet across the face of Asia and sank into the oblivion of the Gobi Desert. He was born amid the yellow sands, and under the same sands he lies buried in a ruined tomb whose location is known only to a privileged few.

In a certain spot on the edge of the ancient desert, bordered on one side by rocks and desolate hills, and on the other by an eternity of billowy sand, crossed only by an occasional caravan trail, is a lonely pyramidal-shaped monument, now falling into decay. In a vault of glass under this melancholy marker lies the body of Genghis Khan, preserved in a mysterious fluid. According to the legends of his people, he will continue to sleep in the peace of the desert, whose spirit is one with his own, until that great day when Asia shall rise in her might and cast off the bondage of foreign oppression.

When the time of liberation comes, the glorious Khan, rising from his sleep of the ages, will call to the sands of the desert and the rocks of the hills, and the spirit of his horde will answer and come forth at this command, and all men will follow him. Race and religion will be forgotten, and the legion of the living and the legion of the dead will not be stayed until Genghis Khan is once more Emperor of the Earth.

So the East turns with longing eyes to the yellow desert—that dry and desolate place where their gods still live and watch, and where the hosts of the past still slumber, awaiting the time that is written in the Golden Book, when the oppressed shall be freed and the wrongs of the centuries shall be righted.

Beneath the yellow sands of the Gobi lie civilizations unnumbered and unknown. The desert night is as fathomless as Asia's spirit and as hopeless as seems Asia's lot. But the spirits of heroes lie buried there, and the fiery sheen of the sand is not greater than their courage. It is written that out of the Gobi Desert shall come a great light, and from Mongolia a master of men. He shall come with the strength of aloneness, riding upon the sandstorm, and his army shall be as the grains of sand. The sting of the sand shall be their weapon, and serpents shall be the strings of their bows. They shall descend like locusts and establish an empire that shall endure until the very sands themselves shall perish.

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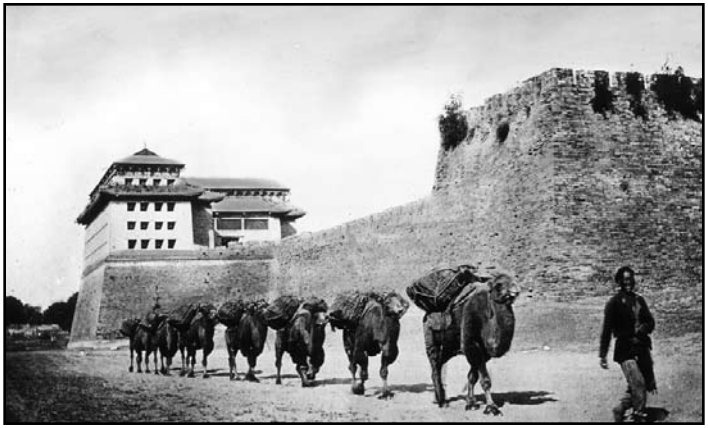
THE SORCERY OF TIBET

About 600 A.D., Srong-btsan-sgampo ascended the throne of the consolidated clans of Central Tibet. Being only about sixteen years of age, the young king was easily influenced by his two young and attractive wives—one a Chinese princess, and the other a daughter of the King of Nepal—who were both firm adherents to the Buddhist faith. In this manner was Buddhism introduced into Tibet. The young king dispatched Thoumi Sambhota, the wisest of his ministers, to India, where he remained studying with the Buddhist monks. A number of years later, he returned to Tibet, bringing back with him the Tibetan alphabet and certain fundamental books of the Buddhist Scriptures. Srong-btsan-sgampo, undoubtedly the greatest king of Tibet, was canonized after death and regarded as an incarnation of the great Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, known to the Chinese as Kwan-Yin. His two wives were also canonized as female aspects of this divine power, become the White and the Green Tara.

Previous to the advent of Buddhism, Tibet was an inaccessible land peopled with savage and even cannibalistic tribes engaged in constant war. Occasionally these clans would consolidate for the purpose of invading Chinese territory. The Tibetan religion was a species of Shamanism, called the *Bon*, consisting chiefly of ritualistic dances and offerings to appease the hosts of demons who were presumed to take continual offense at the actions of men. Prior to the coming of the Buddhist monks,



Tibetan Monastery

the Tibetans possessed no history or written language and the arts and crafts were aboriginal in comparison to those of their Hindu and Chinese neighbors.

Lamaism was founded in Tibet about 750 A.D., by the sanctified Padma Sambhava, generally called the *Guru*, or *Teacher*. This great Buddhist magician marched through Tibet, converting the demons and destroying with his thunderbolts those devils who refused to accept the gospel of Sakya Muni (Gautama Buddha). Under the patronage of the Tibetan King, Padma Sambhava built the first monastery, or lamasery, to be erected in Tibet and founded the order of the Lamas, or Superior Ones. Lamaism passed through many vicissitudes, was reformed and the reformation in turn reformed, until the religion lost all resemblance to the simple philosophic atheism of Hindu Buddhism. Gradually the Shamanistic leanings of the Tibetan people were responsible for the revival, under the guise of Lamaism, of certain aspects reminiscent of the original devil worship of the country. The number of deities multiplied with astonishing rapidity, until Lamaism now classifies some eighty-thousand divinities of major and minor importance, an

overwhelming majority being demons of varying degrees of malignancy.

That Lamaism in its original form produced a vary constructive effect is undeniable. All that Tibet possesses of its civilization it owes to the efforts of these early Buddhist monks operating under the protection of various benevolently minded kings. Wood-block printing was brought into the country, and the Buddhist Scriptures were circulated throughout even the most distant provinces. Gradually the great Tibetan Bible was organized, a work which numbers over a hundred volumes of major text and countless volumes of commentary. Nearly all the large lamaseries now scattered throughout contain extensive libraries of the Hindu Scriptures, in which certain revisions have been made in order to conform to the present system of Lamaism. Education was encouraged by the Buddhist monks, and the arts and crafts flourished under their supervision. The country gradually took on an organized appearance, and the high plateaus resounded with the mantras of the pious. Through the centuries the prayer flags waved, the prayer wheels turned, and the mind of Tibet concerned itself with the problems of its eternal salvation.

While Buddhism was budding and flowering in these high fastnesses of the Himalayas, it was waning in the land of its birth. The Mohammedan was marching across the face of India, bearing aloft the triumphant crescent, and leveling with mace and scimitar the topes and dagobas of the Lotus Lord. The countless images of Buddha were torn from their shrines, and ground under the feet of conquering Islam. The saffron-robed monks were murdered at their devotions, and non-resisting Buddhism was practically exterminated in the land of its inception. A few intrepid saints and sages fled to distant corners of Hindustan and the Island of Ceylon, where they sought to preserve the body of the sacred lore. As the aftermath

of this wholesale destruction of Hindu Buddhism, the center of the faith gradually shifted to Burma, Tibet, China and Japan, with a few scattered remnants in Ceylon and Java.

Buddhism can now be divided figuratively into two major sects, one of which may be likened to the Protestant churches of Christendom, and the other to the High Episcopal or Catholic Church, with its ponderous ecclesiastical organizations. The Buddhism of Japan is an example of the Protestant form, while the Lamaism of Tibet finds its parallelism in the spiritual oligarchy of the High Church. With one notable exception, there is a definite resemblance between the ritualism and sacerdotalism of Lamaism and Catholicism. While the Grand Lama of Lhassa (generally termed the Dalai Lama) is regarded as the "Buddhist Pope" and, seated upon his throne of five cushions in the Potala, gazes down upon his multitudinous following from his station of inconceivable sanctity, he shares honors, to a certain degree, with the Grand Lama of Tashi Lunpo (more commonly called the Tashi Lama). The latter, being uncontaminated by worldly affairs and less concerned with the politics of Lamaism than his exalted confrere at Lhassa, is sometimes regarded as a much more spiritual man than the Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama is presumed to be an incarnation of the living Buddha, or Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, and the hierarchy of the Tibetan church is headed by a group of men termed the reincarnate Lamas. In other words, as soon as death takes one of them, his soul immediately passes into the body of an infant born at that moment. This child is discovered by certain sacred tests, and thus the line of succession is said to remain continually in the hands of one spiritual entity who passes from one body to another throughout the centuries. The "Buddhist Vatican" is the famous Potala of Lhassa, a great building clinging to the side of a steep hill. The palace resembles a fort more than a temple. Inside are preserved a number of sacred

A Wizard-Priest of Tibet
— from Waddell's *Buddhism of Tibet*

relics, including an image of Buddha dating back to the actual lifetime of the Great Emancipator. Entrance to the Potala is had by ascending a long flight of steps, and the courtyard is decorated with tall banner poles, their upper ends ornamented with the tails of yaks. Within the last few years many modern improvements have been made, and the entire Potala is now illuminated by electric lights. There is a popular belief that all the main roads of Tibet meet at the Potala. The present building, which occupies the site of an early shrine, was restored in the 7th century. The main hall or chapel of the Potala is ornamented with rows of columns and was originally lighted by an opening in the ceiling. At one end of the hall is a shrine containing the image of the Lord Buddha, and in front of it are the thrones of the Dalai Lama and Tashi Lama and the seats of

the reincarnated Lamas in the order of their importance. The Potala contains a vast treasure of early Buddhist relics in the form of sacred books and priceless objects of art.

Tibet has continually resisted the coming of outside races into its national life. It desires to maintain isolated independence, feeling itself sufficient for itself. Located on high plateaus above twelve to fifteen thousand feet above sea level, and separated from the outer world by almost impassable mountain ranges, it has remained a land of fascination and romance and its people are the most remarkable on the face of the earth. Tibet knows all too well that in the wake of the white man there follows desolation and ruin; hence the struggle to prevent its national treasures from being dissipated and its religion from being overthrown by the vandalism of foreign nations. Tibet is a land of immense natural resources as yet untouched, which the Tibetans are resolved shall not be stolen or exploited by a money-mad world, but which shall inure to the sol benefit of Tibet and her people.

The average traveler contact Tibet at two points. The only official representative of the Tibetan government outside of Tibet is the Grand Lama of Peking. The temple of the Lama at Peking is notable for its art treasures, the most remarkable of these being the great figure of the Lord Maitreya, presumably formed from a single piece of wood. The statue is nearly seventy feet in height, and is covered throughout with gold bronze lacquer. The traveler again contacts the Lama in the northern India hill city of Darjeeling, which is but a few miles from the Tibetan border. Here those who are interested can witness many Tibetan ceremonials, including the famous devil dancers wearing grotesque masks made from simple native commodities. The Tibetan dancers perform the weird ceremony of frightening away demons. Here also the traveler can see curious examples of modern Tibetan art, strange images with many

heads, intriguing paintings of Buddha and demons, the bronze helmets and lacquered hats of the reborn Buddhas, and silver prayer wheels inlaid with enameled Tibetan beans. More and more, the influence of Tibetan art is being felt in the Occident, and the West is coming to realize that the strange people of this unknown land are master artisans, whose art reflects the veneration bestowed by the pious Lama upon the images and paintings of his creation.

THE MYSTERIES OF ASIA

THE WONDERS OF THE GOLDEN DRAGON

Rangoon, the capital of Burma [modern day Myanmar] and the third largest city of the Indian Empire [the British Raj], may justly be considered the "Mecca" of Buddhism. In the streets of Rangoon, the East and the West meet in exotic confusion. Modern office buildings stand side by side with gilded Buddhist shrines, and the Buddhist *Phongyees* in their claret-colored robes brush shoulders with immaculately clothed tourists. The general atmosphere of modern industrialism, however, cannot entirely dissipate that serenity which is the intangible, but all-powerful, element in Oriental life.

As one approaches Rangoon by way of the river, the city first becomes visible as a mysterious blur—shadowy buildings faintly outlined against a low-lying haze. The mist finally breaks. Suddenly a shaft of golden light seems to hover, gleaming and glistening above the gray skyline of the city. This point of light, this crystallized sunbeam, is the *Shwe Dagon*, or the Golden Dragon—the most sacred as well as remarkable of Buddha's countless shrines.

The pagoda of the Golden Dragon lies to the north of the city proper, and occupies the summit of a small hill which rises 166 feet above the level of the surrounding country. The surface of the hill has been smoothed off and the sides artificially built up to form what is now called the pagoda platform. This platform is approximately 900 feet long and 700 feet wide, and access to it is by means of four flights of steps, one at each of the four

cardinal points. The main entrance is on the south side, which faces the city of Rangoon.

As the visitor approaches the pagoda from the south, he is confronted by two massive *leogryphs*—Burmese lions made of white plaster, gaily painted and with leering, grotesque faces and tinsel eyes. The entrance proper is an imposing pagoda-like edifice, its roof terminating in countless points intricately carved. The architecture is typically Siamese. Almost invariably, long rows of shoes may be seen in front of this entrance. Here Burmese sandals bump toes with imported oxfords; well-dressed walking shoes and military boots share space alike with dainty high-healed slippers and well-worn clogs.

Nearby, on a low, rambling wall sit a number of Burmese boys, each with a nondescript water container and several pieces of old rags. These young business men have created a profession: they wash the feet of the tourists who must wander barefoot among the byways of the great pagoda. No one is permitted to enter the Shwe Dagon without first removing his shoes and stockings, a ceremony in the East which is equivalent to doffing the hat upon entering a Christian church. The rumor is current that the law compelling tourists to discard their footwear was passed by the Burmese solely because they discovered that this practice was objectionable to the British. Thus did Burma twist the tail of the British lion.

The flights of steps leading from the city level to the platform of the Shwe Dagon are enclosed with walls and roofs of teak, all covered with elaborate carvings. As the barefoot visitor carefully picks his way up the slimy, well-worn steps, he finds himself in a veritable bazaar of religious curiosities. The pilgrims who come from all parts of the world to expiate their sins in this most holy place, invariably desire to carry away some token of remembrance of their visit. To minister to this want, the road leading to the temple is lined with little shops, where

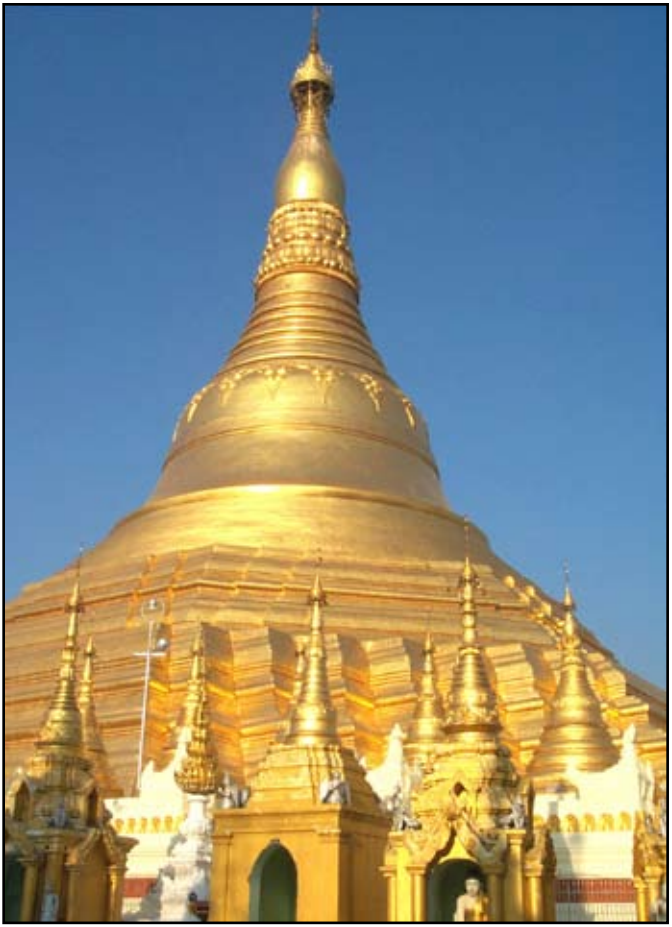
crude images and still cruder *chromos* are sold to the faithful for the equivalent of a few cents.

Upon reaching the top of the flight of steps and passing through the elaborate gate opening onto the pagoda platform, the visitor is confronted by a spectacle so overwhelming that language completely fails to express its magnificence. Although the platform is actually rectangular, the effect is that of a great circle. A broad promenade encircles the great central pagoda, and facing this promenade on either side are rows of shrines ornately carved. The center of the promenade is carpeted, and most Europeans are satisfied to remain upon this matting.

Picture, if you can, twenty-five hundred pagodas, each ranging twelve to a hundred feet in height, and each with its surface a mass of carvings, in the most instances gilded or lacquered. Hundreds of golden points sparkling in the sun, thousands of silver bells tinkling in the breeze, millions of dollars worth of diamonds, emeralds, and rubies scintillating in the noonday light—this is the Shwe Dagon!

Upon the platform of the Golden Dragon is gathered in lavish disorder the architecture of forty nations. Strange slated roofs from Siam; fluted points from Indo-China; curious *topes* from Cambodia; bell-like *dagobas* from Tibet; ornate gables from China and Korea; strangely carved towers and half-round domes from India and Ceylon; great *mendotes* from Java—all are gathered around the golden base of the Shwe Dagon.

Everywhere the images of Buddha peer out from the recesses of their shrines. There are great stone Buddhas which have sat in meditation for ages. There are teakwood Buddhas with their lacquered faces and dark shiny robes. There are marble Buddhas, their garments inlaid with gold; Buddhas of bronze and brass, with emeralds for eyes and rubies for lips; small golden Buddhas and silver saints seated in jeweled niches; Buddhas of jade, amethyst, rose quartz and crystal; Buddhas that sit in



The Shwe Dagon Pagoda

meditation, Buddhas that kneel in prayer, Buddhas that stand and preach, Buddhas that recline and with half-closed eyes await Nirvana. There are Buddhas so great that they stand fifty to sixty feet high; Buddhas so small that they can be held between the thumb and forefinger. In all, there are to seen upon the platform of the Shwe Dagon over twenty-five thousand images of the "Light of Asia."

Various Temples at the Shwe Dagon

Across the front of many of the smaller shrines are gilded bars. Behind this lattice-work can be seen images of the Buddha ornamented with priceless jewels—diamonds the size of a 25-cent piece sparkle upon the foreheads of the images, while their robes are inlaid with gems equal in value to the ransom of kings. Some of the shrines are many hundreds of years old; others are as yet unfinished. Here and there some modern devotee with an eye to the practical has constructed a concrete shrine, there by introducing a certain air of incongruity into the picture.

Upon the platform of the Golden Dragon there are not only schools for the Buddhist monks, but also houses in which to care for those who, stricken with such maladies as leprosy or tuberculosis, come here to be healed. The *Phongyees*, with their horse-hair-tailed scepters and shaven heads, wander unceasingly among the golden altars. They are the guardians of this world-famed sanctuary.

Those unable to appreciate the years of painstaking labor required to execute the intricate carvings upon the gilded shrines, are prone to regard such profuse ornamentation as simply a vulgar display of bric-a-brac. Regardless of the variety of individual reactions awakened by the host of the glistening altars, all agree, however, that the great pagoda which rises in the center of the platform is the ultimate in beauty, in simplicity, and in majesty. With its golden umbrella as its sole adornment, the great shaft of the Shwe Dagon ascends in graceful curves until it reaches a height of 370 feet above the platform level. In the severe simplicity of its lines is represented true aestheticism. Clustered around the base of the Golden Dragon, the pagodas appear like a range of foothills encircling a singly, lofty peak in their midst.

Of peculiar significance is the form of the Shwe Dagon. The base is an inverted begging bowl. Above the begging bowl are conventional folds of a turban from which springs a double lotus blossom. Above the lotus blossom the point of the pagoda rises to end in the form of a plantain bud. A touch of modernity is added by the numerous rows of electric lights now strung from the pagoda, which at night towers above the city like a huge Christmas tree. The perimeter of the central pagoda at the base is 1,365 feet. The entire structure is built of brick. The present *h'tee*, or umbrella, which forms the canopy of the pagoda, was placed in 1871. It is composed of iron rings, gold-plated and hung with gold and silver bells, whose tinkle can be heard from the platform below. The upper point of the *h'tee* is called the *sein-ba*, or gemmed crown. The *sein-ba* glistens with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies, for many wealthy Burmese Buddhists hung their personal jewelry on it before it was raised to the top of the pagoda. When the sun's rays strike one of the great jewels, a blinding flash of green, red, or white dazzles the beholder.

The first pagoda, which occupied the little knoll to the north of Rangoon, was twenty-seven feet high, and was built in 500 B.C. Many centuries passed, and the holy place was forgotten until 1446 A.D., when it was restored at the instigation of a pious ruler. From that time on, the building was enlarged and kept in repair, until in 1776 it attained its present height. The great tope has been re-gilded several times, and as new layers of brick were added and the gold thus covered up, it is impossible to estimate the amount of precious metal actually contained in the pagoda. As the gilding process proved unsatisfactory, a new method was substituted. The pagoda is now being covered with solid gold plates one-eighth of an inch thick, and the work is completed up to the point where the spire emerges from the bowl. It is difficult for the Occidental to visualize an enterprise involving the gold-plating of a structure 1,365 feet in circumference. But faith is a spiritual quality more vivid in Burma than in the Western world, and so the dazzling brightness of the Golden Dragon has no rival other than the splendor of the sun itself.

As ever, the question is asked, "Why was this mighty shrine erected; what holy spot does it mark?" If you ask the *Phongyee*, he will replay that it marks the spot where the sacred relics of four Buddhas are deposited and, consequently, of all the sacred places it is the most holy. Somewhere beneath the Golden Dragon are preserved the drinking cup of Krakuchandra, the robe of Gawnagong, the staff of Kathapa, and eight hairs from the head of Gautama. Were the holy relics ever so enshrined? Thus it is that Asia pays homage to her emancipators.

Despite its overwhelming splendor, the Shwe Dagon is strangely inconsistent with the spirit of the great teacher for whose relics it is the repository. Buddha preached the nothingness of worldliness; that to discover Reality man must liberate himself from the illusion of physical existence and retire into

the inner fastness of himself. To the Lord Gautama, neither pagoda nor shrine meant anything. They, too, were part of the illusion that must be left behind. To him there was nothing real but the Self, nothing absolute but the Self, no true attainment but perfect unification with the Self. So, as he sat in *Samadhi*, his consciousness was reunited with that of the universe. His mission was to teach men how to release themselves from the slavery of illusion which comes from the recognition of parts, and thereby attain to that perfect liberty which is the realization of wholeness. The message of the Golden Dragon is: "Asia loves and pays homage to her Buddhas, but Asia does not understand."

THE MYSTERIES OF ASIA

THE ASTRONOMER'S CITY

Jaipur, the Astronomer's City, was founded in 1728 by the Astronomer-Prince, Sawai Jai Singh II. It is the chief city of Rajputana, and the capital of the principality of Amber. Like many other Indian cities, Jaipur is protected by an imposing wall with parapets and towers. The name *Jaipur*, when translated into English, signifies "the city of victory," and is an enduring monument to the illustrious Maharaja who embodied in its specifications the fruitage of his scientific research.

Three things impress the traveler upon entering Jaipur. The first is the width of the streets. All the main thoroughfares are over one hundred feet wide and are a startling contrast to the narrow, tortuous streets of the average Eastern city. It is supposed that there are no streets in Jaipur less than twenty-eight feet wide. When the reader considers the absence of sidewalks, and the huddled character of Oriental architecture, even a twenty-eight foot street impresses one as being an actual boulevard.

The second noteworthy feature is the color scheme. The entire city is a monotonous mass of buildings all colored the same shade of pink. During the life of its founder, Jaipur was white. A later Maharaja, with an eye to color, decided to vary the landscape by ordering buildings upon each street to be painted a different color. Thus one district became green, another yellow, and a particularly squalid area bloomed forth with a lilac hue. During this period Jaipur was well named "the rainbow city."

This conglomeration, however, rapidly became an eyesore, and Jaipur eventually sobered down to its present "raspberry" hue.

The third never-to-be-forgotten novelty (and more outstanding even than the hennaed whiskers of the Rajput gentry) are the tin roofs which serve as awnings over the stalls and bazaars fronting the main thoroughfares. To call these roofs "tin" might be considered a slur by the locals, for in reality they are composed of very thin rusty, corrugated galvanized iron laid in sheets, with no effort to match the edges or fasten them together. The monkeys from the nearby jungle show a marked partiality for these remarkable roofs. Trooping into the city just at sunset by the hundreds, these dignified simians disport themselves on the rattling sheets of iron. Having discovered an exceptionally noisy spot, a number of monkeys will gather there and jump up and down in unison, causing an indescribable din that can be heard over all the city.

Driving through the city streets toward the great central square, where countless birds congregate and Indian carriages always stand awaiting hire, the visitor is forcefully impressed with the picturesqueness of the scene. Turbans of a thousand hues, folded in a score of ways, form a sea of bobbing color. Perfume bazaars and fish markets vie with each other to scent the atmosphere. Every so often is to be found a native dyer stretching vast lengths of varicolored cheese cloth on sticks in the air to dry. In the bazaars everything can be bought, from handmade cigarettes to antique furniture. Of peculiar interest are the little shops where religious pictures are sold; also the book stalls where, for a few annas, choice religious and philosophical works in Hindustani may be purchased. On the streets, the Brahmin, the Moslem, and the Jain brush elbows, and hardly an hour passes but that some procession winds its way along the busy thoroughfare, heralded with much commotion.

The Astronomical Observatory at Jaipur

Almost in the heart of Jaipur stands a most remarkable building called the "Palace of the *Hawa Mahal*, or Wind." It rises nine stories of beautifully carved pierced stone screen work. It is the guest palace of the Maharaja and is of an Islamic type of architecture. Concealed by its ornate front, stands a solid and unattractive building which, however, is peculiarly suitable for the housing of important visitors. The Hawa Mahal reminds one of the Hollywood motion picture set—such a massive front and so little behind! It is further interesting that the exotic disorder of native architecture throughout the city is marred by contrast with the prosaic modern iron street lamps.

To the southeast of the Maharajah's palace is a great walled courtyard containing one of the finest astronomical observatories in Asia. It was here that Sawai Jai Singh II, with immense stone instruments, carried on those studies in celestial dynamics that elevated him to chief place among the astronomers of his time. In writing of this accomplishment, Major H. A. Newell, of the Indian Army, says: "From early times the study of the

stars had appealed to the princes of his line. None, however, have displayed anything approaching the mathematical genius and passion for research possessed by Jai Singh II. This gifted ruler not only exposed the errors of existing Oriental and European systems but he issued a revised star catalogue, produced a set of tables of the sun, moon, and planets, and corrected the calendar of the Mogul Emperor Mohammed Shah."

The observatory, which has been justly termed "the last survival of the stone age in astronomy," is under the patronage of the present Maharajah, who has preserved its original splendor and restored those parts that fell into decay after the death of the astronomy-loving prince. At the time we visited the observatory, we discussed the subject of astronomical calculations with the Hindu scientist who was apparently appointed by the government as caretaker and astronomer-extraordinary of the observatory. He called my attention to the fact that he had detected with his strange instrument several minor errors in a famous European nautical almanac. It must be admitted that he was highly pleased with his ability to discredit his European confreres. When the average Hindu can prove that something is wrong with any form of British calculation, his exuberance breaks all bounds.

In the midst of the observatory stands a great sun dial, ninety feet high and apparently constructed of brick. It is called "the prince of dials." To the right of this dial, as you face it, are twelve other small dials, each bearing one of the signs of the zodiac. There are also instruments for the determination of right ascension, declination, and hour angles. There are curious contrivances for measuring altitudes and azimuths. There is no telescope in the observatory, and many of the devices used are similar to those employed by the ancient Egyptians, who, without the aid of lenses, laid down all the fundamentals of

astronomy. In addition to the stone instruments, the Jaipur observatory boasts several contrivances of brass, resembling huge clocks, or more exactly watches, hung from movable columns. These brass discs with movable pointers are from six to eight feet in diameter, their surfaces covered by intricate mathematical calculations. Taken altogether, the observatory is very imposing, far more remarkable than the great Chinese observatory on the wall of Peking. The Chinese instruments are all of bronze and comparatively small, but at Jaipur the dials run a wild riot of form and size, and altogether leave a very scientific impression.

The old capital of the Province of Amber was the city of Amber, which was deserted at the time of the founding of Jaipur. Amber is located on the top of some rambling hills of the Kah-Kho mountains and resembles more than anything else a great fort. It is customary to visit Amber on elephant-back, and to reach the city, one must pass the tombs of the Maharanis of Jaipur and also the elaborate mausoleum of one of the prince's favorite elephants. There is a legend of vast fortunes that lie buried in the ancient city of Amber as offerings to the gods. It is declared, however, that all the wrath of heaven will be visited upon any one who seeks to steal the treasure.

The Maharajahs of Jaipur are the descendants of a most illustrious line. They trace their origin to the great Hindu hero, Rama, the central figure of the immortal Indian classic of the Ramayana. Rama, being an incarnation of Vishnu, was the very person of this god himself, and his descendants—the princes of Rajputana—therefore feel themselves to be most god-like men, direct descendants of the sun. There is no question that princes of the blood have ruled in Rajputana for nearly five thousand years. Each year there are great festivals in honor of the descendants of Rama, and the Maharaja himself appears in processional.

Bathing in the River at Benares

The question is often asked why the princes of India display such fabulous wealth when their people as a mass are in a state of abject poverty. This seeming extravagance is necessary, however, because of the peculiar attitude of veneration common to the Hindu mind. In order to hold the respect of his people, it is necessary for the Raja of Benares to drive forth in a carriage constructed entirely of ivory. It is also necessary for the Maharaja of Jaipur to keep his enormous stables filled with the most expensive horses. The Rajputs are great judges of horse-flesh, and if the prince did not have better steeds than his subjects, he would speedily lose his ability to control them. When it comes to a matter of finery, the Gaekwar of Baroda is a man of distinction to the uttermost degree. After seeing his golden elepant houdah, it is in order to visit the royal treasury where are gathered pearls and diamonds unsurpassed even by the crown jewels in the Tower of London. In addition to his nine ropes

of matched pearls, each pearl the size of a dime, the Gaekwar possesses the "Star of the South," the largest diamond in India, which is set in a broad collar containing over one hundred other large diamonds. Even his pearl and diamond-clustered carpets, however, do not produce the general effect that results from a visit to his palace, where the tired and dusty traveler is permitted to gaze—and no more—upon French plate-glass enclosed bathtubs. But, lest he be judged guilty of extravagance, let us say for the Gaekwar that he is the most progressive and humane ruler of India, and equestrian statues have been erected on nearly every corner of the city of Baroda in his honor. A great part of his annual income, which has been estimated at sixty million dollars, is directed to the improvement of his people. Under the Gaekwar's patronage, public schools, universities, and medical and dental colleges have appeared; also universities for women. Baroda has a public library and children's play-grounds, and many of the streets are excellently paved. The result is that nearly ninety percent of the people of Baroda can read and write, a percentage of which any country might be proud.

THE MYSTERIES OF ASIA

THE TOWERS OF SILENCE

The Parsees are Persians who migrated into India when the Arabians overran the Persian Empire in the 8th century A.D. From that time to the present, the Parsees have preserved intact their national integrity, and though numerically they are insignificant, their effect upon the entire structure of East Indian civilization has been most marked. In religion they are followers of Zarathustra (Zoroaster), the Fire Prophet. Their sacred book is the Zend Avesta. The largest Parsee community is to be found at Bombay, although there are small groups in nearly every large city of the Indian Empire. While the number of Parsees probably does not exceed one hundred thousand altogether, they represent one of the most devout, yet at the same time most progressive, elements in Oriental life.

The Parsees are noted particularly for their honesty, their integrity in all business relations being a proverb in the Orient. Crime is virtually unknown among them and their community life is ideal. In matters of religion they are also exceptionally tolerant, gladly fraternizing with all just men irrespective of caste or creed. In India, the Parsees are distinguished by their contributions to charity and public institutions, and in late years their superior intellectual qualities have been manifested in their rapid rise to positions of authority in law, medicine, banking, commerce, and brokerage. For bankers and brokers to be honest to a fault is an anomaly to the Western mind. In Asia, however, the unusual is not only possible but also to

Tower of Silence, Bombay from *"True Stories of the Reign of Queen Victoria"* by Cornelius Brown, 1886

be expected. The Parsees are most generous with their possessions, and the existence of a single beggar in their midst would disgrace the entire community. The tendency of this group of people to support civic movements and encourage education has done much toward the betterment of East Indian living conditions. It is not uncommon for rich Parsees to bequeath their to public institutions, or direct that it be expended in the erection of public buildings or in the purchase of land for parks and recreation centers. Neither militant nor aggressive, the Parsees live in simple humility and gentleness, seeking but to serve the needy and improve the lot of all.

The practicality of Parsee ethics is an excellent demonstration of the fact that adherence to an ancient religion does not result necessarily in its followers being stragglers in the march of human progress; for the Parsee is abreast of the most progressive spirit of the age. Several Parsees have been knighted by the British government for their distinguished services in the interests of the Indian Empire, and the only two East Indians to sit in the House of Commons were Parsees. Not only have Parsees been knighted, but in two instances, at least, have been elevated to the British Peerage.

In personal appearance the Parsees are remarkable for the natural dignity of their bearing. They are often tall in stature and inclined to be slender, and, if not of a decidedly ascetic or Uranian type, are at least benign and Jupiterian. Their skin is rather olive hue, the features regular and well chiseled, and the men are addicted to the wearing of mustaches. The women are rather small size. They are also very graceful and, in common with most Asiatics, have large and expressive eyes. In every Parsee community the status of women is a very unusual one. She has never been subjected to the inhibitions of the purdah and has always traveled about unveiled. She is the mistress in her own home, and in all matters is accorded fair treatment.

The domestic life of the Parsee is marked by concord, and in every avenue of life there is a definite disinclination to contention or controversy.

Zarathustrianism (Zoroastrianism), the religion of the Parsees, was revealed to Zoroaster, who lived between three and four thousand years ago. Like Jesus, Zoroaster began his public ministry in his thirtieth year. By first converting the King of Persia, Zoroaster accomplished, in a comparatively short time, the conversion of an entire nation. Zoroaster spent twenty years in the Persian deserts in fasting and meditation, subsisting upon a sacred cheese that never grew moldy, it is said. At one time he also lived upon a holy mountain which was always surrounded by a ring of fire. There are two descriptions of the death of the Magus. According to the first, he was carried to heaven by his fiery father, the king of the salamanders, who descended in a sheet of flame from the constellation of Orion. According to the second version, he was killed while at prayer by a weapon hurled at him by an envious noble. This particular allegory further relates that the mortally wounded Magus threw his rosary at the noble, who was killed by the string of beads as though by a thunderbolt from heaven.

Being Zoroastrians, the Parsees are consequently fire-worshippers; or, more correctly, they revere the Deity under the symbol of fire. They also esteem the elements to be sacred, a viewpoint which might consequently be the source of much embarrassment in the disposition of their dead. They will not bury the dead in the earth, lest the earth be polluted; they cannot cast the body into the water, lest the water be contaminated; they cannot leave the body exposed to the air, lest the air be rendered foul thereby; and finally, they cannot consume the body with fire; for, being the most sacred of all elements, fire must not be profaned.

As a solution to this predicament, the Towers of Silence were erected. At Bombay these towers—the world's most unique method of burial—are located in the midst of a beautiful park on Malabar Hill. A strange atmosphere, however, is lent to the scene by the hundreds of vultures whose weight bends down the branches of the trees, and who sit with beady eyes ever fixed upon the squatty towers where lie the Parsee dead. When the physician gives up his patient as incurable, then the priest is called who performs for the dying man the last rites of his faith. When death is presumed to have taken place, a dog is then brought into the presence of the corpse as additional verification of death and also to frighten away evil spirits. Among the Parsees, there is a curious belief which decrees that children must be born on the ground floor of the house, for the upper stories are regarded as a more lofty or exalted state, and hence man must be born in the lowest place to emphasize his humility. To indicate its return again to this humble state, the body after death is taken back to the lower floor where it was born. The body is then placed upon an iron bier and covered with cloths. When the time for the funeral arrives, a procession of priests and friends accompanies the corpse to the Towers of Silence, where the remains are hidden from view by the parapet of the tower, the tower being fashioned to simplify as much as possible the role played by the vultures. Since the deceased person no longer requires his body, the Parsee, consistent with this philosophy of utter charity, considers it proper that what he ceases to need shall become the food of that which must still live. In a brief space of time, the bones falling through specially prepared gratings, are later disposed of, probably ultimately buried.

It is extremely difficult to secure photographs of the Towers of Silence, for no one is permitted to enter them except the attendants who serve them. For the edification of visitors,

however, there is a small model tower which reveals the workings of this unusual mortuary procedure. Repeated efforts have been made to photograph these towers; also to enter them. In every instance, however, serious complications have followed, and tourists are put upon their honor not to violate the code of this sacred place.

In the 20th century, it is impossible to form any adequate concept of the original doctrines of Zarathustrianism, nor can any authentic description of even the founder of the cult be discovered. The only likeness of Zoroaster which has been preserved is from an ancient bas-relief carved into the surface of the living rock. In the carving, the features are mutilated beyond recognition, but the solar nimbus would suggest that it was originally intended to depict Ahura-Mazda, the Persian Principle of Good. The mutilation of the features may have been the act either of some zealous Zoroastrian (for the faith definitely condemns idolatry) or the conquering Muslims. The figure, however, is generally regarded as the only likeness of the ancient Magus.

Zoroaster was said to have been born of an immaculate conception, and escaped death in infancy by the intercession of divine beings. Many startling parallelism abound between Zarathustrianism and primitive Christianity, and no longer is there any doubt that the Christians borrowed many of their philosophic concepts from the Zarathustrian theology, which is a dualism in monotheism, apparently established to counteract the primitive pantheism of the Persian people. Zoroaster taught the existence of a supreme nature within which existed two eternal beings—or, rather, one eternal being, and a second who was ultimately to be absorbed into the nature of the first. The first of these beings, the Spirit of Good, was termed *Ahura-Mazda*; the second, the Spirit of Evil, was designated *Ahriman*. In their original state, both Ahura-Mazda and Ahriman were

good and beautiful spirits, but Ahriman—in whose nature existed pride—rebelled against his brother and, hurling himself downward from the abode of light, created darkness, in which he dwelt with his fallen angels, who thus became the spirits of darkness. In the inferior universe which he had thus created, this spirit (the Adversary) brooded moodily for many ages. In the meantime, Ahura-Mazda established a great and beautiful universe according to the will of the All-Pervading one. Ahriman opposed this creation, and thus was inaugurated the ceaseless warfare of good and evil, destined to continue until at last Ahriman should admit his fault and submit to the will of his radian Brother. In later Persian mysticism appears a third character—Mithras—who acts as the mediator between these two irreconcilable forces. Mithras is a prototype of the Christ. He ultimately achieves the reunion of the warring brothers, and evil ceases in the world.

THE MYSTERIES OF ASIA

MAGIC AND SORCERY IN THE FAR EAST

The Orient has long been considered a land of mystery because the Western type of mind has never been able to understand the mental outlook of its people. We hear it frequently said that the Hindu or the Chinese is uncanny. This is the natural result of ignorance concerning the life and ideals of the Oriental. From the dawn of time, Asiatics have been suspected of possessing some subtle and unknown power beyond the comprehension of other races. India is still commonly referred to as the land of the living saints, and the gods are still supposed to wander the earth among the hills and valleys of Hindustan.

Magic, in general, is divided into two classes—transcendental magic and legerdemain. The first depends upon the knowledge and manipulation of certain intangible powers and processes in Nature by which seeming "miracles" can be produced. Transcendental magic itself is subdivided into many forms, the two most important of which are (1) *black* magic, which is sorcery as performed by the Dugpas; and (2) *white* magic, which is the true wonder-working as performed by the Gurus, Mahatmas, and Arhats.

Legerdemain—the second and far more common form of magic—is otherwise known as conjuration, jugglery, and sleight of hand. This form of magic attempts, by purely mechanical means, to reproduce the miracles of true transcendentalism. Legerdemain has been raised to the dignity of a fine art by Eastern magicians and wandering fakirs, and while its

effects are achieved through the medium of trickery, they never fail to mystify those unacquainted with their *modus operandi*. The true miracle-workers of India are now seldom met with, for ridicule and persecution have driven them into the mountain fastnesses and secluded temples, far from the sight of the white man. Those who have traveled extensively in India realize that the Indian people as a mass firmly believe in the existence of certain venerable and illuminated sages, possessing the power of performing miracles and able to directionalize the invisible laws of Nature at will. Despite the efforts of missionaries and educators, this belief in miracle-working is so strongly imbedded in the Hindu nature that nothing can uproot it.

We first contacted Oriental legerdemain while stopping at the Grand Hotel des Wagon Lits, in Peking. One evening a Chinese juggler presented a program of sleight of hand tricks to a small group of guests who had found it too cold to wander on the streets outside. The conjuror erected a small tend in one of the hotel parlors and, using the tent as a store-room for his apparatus, presented a series of remarkably clever illusions to the consternation of his audience. The magician was an elderly and venerable Chinese, robed from head to foot in a magnificently brocaded Mandarin coat. He was a small man, his back bent with age, but his dexterity and agility were bewildering.

Walking to the center of the polished parquet floor, the old man spread a beautifully embroidered foulard over his arms and suddenly, without a moment's warning, turned a complete somersault, landing on his feet and carrying in his arms a bowl of varicolored Chinese fish. The bowl was at least four feet in circumference and a foot high, containing about five gallons of water. He did not spill one drop of water and permitted the audience to convince themselves of its reality. The unusual degree of skill displayed by the magician is apparent from the fact that he had no stage equipped with special accessories, nor

the benefit of distance to assist in the illusion, but produced his mystifying feats upon a hardwood floor bare of carpet, and entirely surrounded by his audience.

When the consternation had subsided, the Chinese brought from his little tent a large ornate bowl filled with clear water. This he placed in the center of the floor and, sitting down beside it, produced from somewhere amidst the voluminous folds of his robe a Chinese basket containing several pounds of gray sand. Picking the sand up in handfuls, he poured it into the water, stirring it until the water was the constancy of thin mud. He then washed his hands and carefully dried them. Then, reaching into the bowl, he scooped up the mud from the bottom, and after muttering a few words, permitted it to pour from between his fingers back into the basket absolutely dry! This he continued to do until he had practically cleared the water. The moment he scooped up the sand it became as dry as when first taken from the basket.

Removing the bowl to the tent, the conjuror returned with a wax chrysanthemum, several small strips of tissue paper, and a lovely silk fan. Twisting the bits of paper, he formed out of each a beautiful butterfly with outspread wings. When he had thus fashioned four of these dainty creations, he laid them together on the open side of his fan. Then with a flick of the fan he tossed the paper butterflies into the air and began fanning them. So skillfully did he manipulate the pieces of paper that they never separated, but, remaining within about a foot of each other, they seemingly came to life. They rose in the air above his head and, maintained by the motion of the fan, circled about the room and came to rest upon the heads and shoulders of various members of the audience. At last after the artificial butterflies had performed several remarkable feats of this nature, the magician called to them and, under the direction of his fan, the four butterflies finally came to rest together upon the open blossom of the chrysanthemum which he held out.

The performance lasted for over an hour, each trick seemingly more difficult than the preceding one. Having at last exhausted the contents of his little tent, the Chinese juggler packed his equipment and, after passing around a Chinese bowl, which returned to him containing a goodly assortment of coins, he hobbled away.

In the grounds of the Raffles Hotel in Singapore we saw one of the finest demonstrations of Oriental magic. We made a desperate effort to photograph various tricks, but the failing light—for magicians prefer to work in the evening—to a certain degree thwarted our purpose. We did, however, secure a few snapshots of the famous boy-in-the-basket trick. This well-known example of Eastern legerdemain has been presented many times upon the American stage, but it has never been done in America as well as in India, with the single exception of the troupe of Hindu conjurors who were brought to the World's Fair.

The equipment for the exhibition consists of a large basket, somewhat square and with a circular opening in the top; a cover containing a round hole fits closely over the opening of the basket; a pointed stake, which passes through the hole in the cover; a square of canvas or cloth; a long, sharp sword; and a scantily-clothed boy, generally about fourteen years old. In the particular instance herein described, a net was added to the general equipment. The trick was performed on the open ground, with the audience entirely surrounding the conjuror.

The fakir first seated himself cross-legged upon the ground and played several notes upon a strange flute-like instrument. After a few moments, the boy appeared, clothed only in a loin-cloth. The lad was securely tied up in a net, which was apparently drawn so tightly about him that he could not move in any direction, and then forced into a basket barely large enough to contain his body; in fact, his head and shoulders extended

The Boy in the Basket Trick

considerably above the top of the opening. The magician then spread the cloth over the basket, the cloth not reaching entirely to the ground, but hanging over the rounded sides of the basket. The lid was next placed in position, but would not entirely go down because of the protruding head and shoulders of the boy, which could be seen through the folds of the cloth.

Leaving the basket sitting in the midst of the audience, the conjuror again seated himself, playing a weird and pathetic melody upon the flute. After a few seconds the lid of the basket slowly dropped into position. Allowing a short interval to pass, the magician then rose and, going over to the basket, inserted the stake in the opening of the lid and, with a quick movement, drove it straight through to the bottom of the basket. Withdrawing the stake, the juggler then took his sword and thrust it through every part of the basket and, stamping around inside

the basket, demonstrated its emptiness. The boy had apparently vanished. Finally he reached under the cloth and drew forth the net which had enclosed the boy. Allowing a few moments to pass, he replaced the net, returned the cover to its proper position and, sitting down, again played upon his flute.

As soon as the first note was sounded, the basket began to heave and move, and the lid rose again. Upon removing the cover and the canvas, the boy was again found tied up in the net, and it required the assistance of two men to extricate him from the basket. Observing the enthusiasm created by the trick, the magician thereupon sent the boy around with a half coconut shell to take the customary collection before the interest of the audience had time to cool! All through the evening, the magician continued his exhibition, until at last, finding that he had exhausted the financial resources of his audience, he departed, followed by the members of his troupe.

The Victoria Memorial building in Calcutta is surrounded by a quiet park, where one or more snake-charmers can nearly always be found entertaining crowds of locals and tourists. Many people believe that the snakes used by these charmers are not really poisonous. This conclusion is erroneous, for the reptiles represent some of the most poisonous forms known, and the power which the Indians exercise over them is uncanny. Though it is undoubtedly true that imposters are to be found, those who are representative members of the snake-charmer calling have attained an almost inconceivable degree of control over the snakes they handle. For example, upon one occasion, we saw one turn a white rat loose among several snakes. One of the reptiles immediately coiled itself around the body of the animal and prepared to devour it. When the life of the rodent was on the verge of being extinguished, the magician, who was watching closely, ordered the snake to release the rat. The snake obediently uncoiled itself and retired to its basket and, picking

up the rat, the magician demonstrated that the animal was not injured in any way. Watching a snake-charmer once, and noting the impunity with which they were handled, a young army officer suddenly exclaimed: "Why, those snakes won't hurt anybody," and leaning over, picked up one of them. He was dead in fifteen minutes, despite every effort to save his life.

While strolling the grounds of the Victoria Memorial building, we met a most interesting personage. When first seen, he was sitting down, surrounded by his snakes and a group of small boys, the latter as irrepressible in India as in America. Noting the approach of a white man, which meant money, the Hindu prepared for his coming. Motioning the boys to keep back, he stood up, his skin gleaming like copper in the humid Indian sunlight. His clothing consisted of a varicolored turban and a rag about his loins. He motioned to a young Mohammedan who stood nearby to lend him his slipper, and the youth with a laugh kicked off his *scuffer* which the juggler then picked up. The slipper consisted of a flat sole and a toe-cap—nothing more. With a quick move, the snake-charmer threw the slipper on the ground at my feet, and as I watched, there crawled from the toe of it an East Indian cobra at least five feet long. The snake then coiled itself around the magician's neck. There was no possible means by which the snake could have been concealed in the toe of the slipper, and the scanty clothing worn by the conjuror renders the trick still more unsolvable.

It was in Benares that we witnessed the most famous of all Oriental illusions—the growing of the mango tree. While there is hardly a country in the world where the story of this trick has not been told, yet, strange to say, the intimate details of it have seldom been described. After placing a number of eggs in a basket, and causing them to hatch, instantly, the magician next turned to the preparation of the mango tree trick. Selecting a place where the ground was smooth and

hard, he invited his audience to draw their chairs up closer and detect—if they could—the method by which the illusion was produced. The preliminary preparation for the trick consisted in securing three sticks about four feet long, which he arranged in the form of a Native American tepee, covering them to the ground with a large white cloth. He then lifted up one side of the cloth, so that it was possible to watch the proceedings within the tent-like structure.

Then, from his little "bag of tricks," the conjuror produced a large oblong mango seed, which he passed around for careful examination, afterwards requesting one of the audience to carve his initials on the seed pod. The magician next produced an empty flower-pot, which he filled with earth and in which he planted the seed. He then thoroughly watered the earth with a sprinkling can, placed the flower pot with its contents within the tent and, dropping the flap, sat down beside the tent and played on his flute. After an interval of about five minutes, he lifted the flap of the tent, and there, protruding from the earth, was a tiny green shoot. Closing the flap, he continued to play. After a few moments, he once more lifted the flap, showing a mango bush about a foot in height growing in the pot. Again he closed the tent, and after a few seconds re-opened it, revealing a full grown mango bush in blossom. He dropped the flap still another time, and when he finally removed the tent entirely, the mango bush was covered with ripe mangoes, which he picked and tossed to his audience. Then suddenly he tore the plant up by the roots and, shaking off the dirt, showed the open pod still clinging to the roots and still bearing the initials inscribed thereon at the beginning of the exhibition.

The foregoing illusions are representative of the marvelous ingenuity acquired by the Oriental juggler. None of the illusions described involve any use of supernatural power, however. They are explainable to those familiar with the artifices

Indian Conjurer Growing the Mango Tree

of legerdemain, but to the uninitiated they are a never-ending source of wonder. I have discussed with these conjurors the methods by which they attain these remarkable results, and it is interesting to note that, while admitting themselves to be only tricksters, they all realize that it is possible to accomplish these illusions without recourse to legerdemain. These very magicians are aware that among their own people there are certain illuminated Masters and Holy Men capable of growing a tree in fifteen minutes by process quite unknown to the Western world. The conjuror admits that his illusions are copied from the sacred magic of the East Indian Wise Men. But while these holy ones perform their experiments only in the seclusion of the temple, for the purpose of demonstrating to disciples the cosmic principles underlying biology and physics, and, consequently, are inaccessible to the public, the trickster with his

legerdemain produces the same effects for the amusement of the populace.

I once discussed the problem of miracles with a very learned Brahmin Pundit, whose conclusions on the subject may be summarized as follows: "You Christians believe that He turned water into wine; that He raised the dead, healed the sick, passed through closed doors, and multiplied the loaves and fishes. Do you believe that the day of miracles ended two thousand years ago? Your Jesus told His disciples that greater things than He did they should do. Why, then, do you declare the miracle-working of India to be false? There are no such things as miracles, if you consider the word in its last analysis. A miracle is, in reality, only the effect of an unknown cause. For thousands of years our people have devoted themselves to the study of the invisible worlds—those forces and powers in Nature beyond the comprehension of any save those who dedicate their lives to service, asceticism, and virtuous living. We are specialists in matters pertaining to the invisible and the intangible, as you are specialists in those things pertaining to the visible and the tangible. We do not understand each other because our work is in different worlds; we only understand one another when we are engaged in similar labors. India is a land which in your estimation may seem very backward because it is concerned with things which do not interest you and which your people do not understand. Do not doubt or deny the knowledge possessed by Asia. But if you would pass judgment upon that knowledge, come and investigate it, and we will show you the proof that you desire. Live as we tell you to live, think as we tell you think, study with our wise men, and you will then realize that there are among our people certain ones who possess a knowledge which makes them capable of working miracles."

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