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The Indian Empire as I Know It

BY MR. WALTER T. BISCOE.

PRESIDENT JAMES:—It is my pleasure today to present Mr. Walter Biscoe. The subject of his address will be, "The Indian Empire As I Know It." India has, on several occasions, been the subject of addresses to this club. These addresses usually dealt with political or constitutional problems. Today I assure you it will be very different. Today it may be said that we are to get a new deal—a real new deal. Mr. Biscoe will present colored slides showing many of the beauties of India and many of its strategic places. Mr. Biscoe is well qualified to deal with this subject—just like his father and grandfather before him. The greater part of twenty-one years he has spent in the far East and the major portion of that time in India. I have very much pleasure in calling upon Mr. Biscoe to address you.

MR. BISCOE:—Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club. It is a very great pleasure to me to be permitted the privilege of addressing you today. I am going to begin by asking you to forget that you are here in Toronto and want you to imagine yourselves part of a world tour. World tours normally start from New York and continue travelling eastward. The right time to visit eastern countries, such as India, Burma and Ceylon, is between the 15th of November and the 15th of March. It has often been said to me by members of my audience that it is difficult to estimate the size of the country visited, and this is partly true of India. Accordingly, I had a slide prepared on which is shown a map of the United States of America and superimposed on this map of the United States is a map of India about the same scale.

Actually India, Burma and Ceylon are approximately two thirds the size of the United States. They however, contain a population of 354,000,000 as against 123,000,000 of the latter country and now, gentlemen, if we may have the lights, we will start on our journey.

For this particular tour I have selected a world famous liner, and since we are in Canada, I have chosen the Empress of Britain as a suitable cruise ship. She is forty-two thousand tons and a most modern and up-to-date vessel of her kind. When we go on board we find ourselves in one of the most beautiful saloons to be found on any ship. In fact, the Empress of Britain is indeed a hotel *de luxe* afloat. Everything that it is possible to think of, to add to the comfort and amusement of the passengers, has been provided. There is a beautiful ballroom and down below a magnificent swimming pool and gymnasium whilst on the top deck tennis can be played on a full size court.

It would be a great pleasure to show you all the views between New York and Bombay, but in one lecture it is not possible to do more than specialize on the countries we are most interested in today. Turning once more to the map in front of you, you will see on it a black line, indicating the itinerary to be allowed on this tour.

Commencing at Bombay the journey carries us first through the cave temple area of Ellora, then touching the white city of India, Udaipur, and the desert fortress of Jodhpur, we move forward to the pink city of India, Jaipur, finally reaching the most northerly point of our journey, the Khyber Pass. Level with it and a little to the east is the beautiful valley of Kashmir. Then continuing eastward through Amritsar, Delhi, Agra and Benares, we come to Calcutta. From this city we turn again to the Himalayas. In Darjeeling we get a view of the highest mountains in the world. Then across into Burma and down the Irrawaddy River to Rangoon, back once again to India, pausing this time in the cathedral city of India, Madura, then across the Palk Straits to Ceylon, finally sailing from Colombo.

Our first view shows us an air view of the city of

Bombay In the foreground is what is called a gateway of India because through it Maharajahs, princes and viceroys land, whereas the rest of us land through a custom house. Just above it is a famous old building, the Taj Mahal Hotel. Not very long ago one of my audience complained to me that the British had done a terrible thing in India in "turning the Taj Mahal into an eating house." (*Laughter*) Probably we will take a sightseeing motor car and drive around the Salsette and visit Malabar Hill, from which a good view over the residential portion of the city is obtained. Bombay suffers from the same trouble as New York. It stands on an island and today there is practically no space left available for expansion.

Had we started our journey in 1857, when the British troops landed in Calcutta to the assistance of the hard-pressed garrisons of Lucknow and Delhi, we should have had a nine hundred and twenty mile march in front of us, and the mode of transport would have been an ox-wagon, the speed of which is approximately two and one quarter miles per hour. There are, of course, other modes of transport, such as camel carts. These are an early type of omnibus. In the top portion the people sit, down below there is room for the pigs and the goats. However, our party will leave Bombay by a more orthodox way, *i.e.*, by special train from Victoria Terminus Station.

Shortly after leaving Bombay we arrive in Ellora. Here, when those early Brahmins decided to build the world's most beautiful temple, they selected a spot on the earth's surface where the rock was very close to the surface indeed. Then they cut an enormous parallelogram two hundred and seventy-six feet long, one hundred and fifty-five feet wide and one hundred and six feet deep. In the center they left an immense mass of rock; this rock they carved downward into the temple in front of you. The temple stands ninety-six feet high, yet the topmost pinnacle is ten feet below the earth's surface. It is beautifully carved on the outside and the interior of the rock has been hollowed out into two great auditoriums. The temple was completed about 400 A.D.; and it is thought to have taken about one hundred years to construct.

Then continuing our journey northward, our next stop is at Udaipur, rightly described as the white city of India because every building is white. The city itself surrounds a great artificial lake called the Pichols. We will not waste much time visiting the white Palace of the Maharajah, because we will reserve this privilege for a more interesting and famous palace, later on. Nevertheless, from the roof of this building we get a fine view across the lake. Here and there dotted about on the surface of the water are a number of very beautiful little islands. Each island is capped with a little palace of white marble. There are, of course, other things to see besides palaces in this city. You can, if you like, watch an elephant fight. It is not the fierce old warfare that it was years ago. The wall between the two great beasts prevents them from charging and the tusks are blunted. It is, in fact, a pushing match between the two great animals. The one driven back from the wall so much as an inch or so is the one that is defeated.

Some years ago the whole history of India reached back only a matter of some 3,000 years to the arrival of the Aryans in India. Then Sir John Marshall, the great archaeologist of India, heard of a city called Mohenjo Dere, or the city of the dead; the point that interested him was that where a legend placed this city no trace of a city existed. However, he sent his investigators down to hunt through this desert area. There amongst the sanddunes they discovered a little Buddhist mound raised about two thousand years ago. Sir John Marshall ordered this mound to be opened to see whether there was any relic chamber still intact in its center. In opening this mound, a number of seals were discovered. As soon as the first of these appeared the history of India slipped back another two thousand years. The reason for this is that on each little seal is cuneiform writing similar to the writing found in Elam, Babylon and Nineveh. As soon as seals are discovered it is pretty sure that a city is somewhere close by. Sir John Marshall ordered the digging away of the great sand dunes and discovered a vast city; furthermore, one constructed on the most modern lines, streets parallel and

buildings of excellent burned brick. Most of them two storeys high. Evidently, when this city was inhabited there was a considerable rainfall, because we find elaborate arrangements made to carry away the rain water from the roofs of the houses through conduits made of earthenware leading down to small service drains which, in due course, emptied themselves into the great main underground drainage system of the city, the waterways of which were no less than seven feet in altitude.

Still continuing our journey northward, the great citadel of Jodhpur stands on the edge of the great Rajputana Desert. This area is inhabited by a warlike race of men, the Rajputs. With the aid of their great fortresses and desert they were able, to resist the onrush of the Mohammedan hordes for no less than five hundred years. This city is off the beaten track, but lately it was found that it was in a direct route of the Imperial Airways from London to Australia. So today when you step off your airplane you can drive up to the great citadel. If you do so you will probably pass through what is called the Suttee Gateway, so-called because in days gone by, when a Rajput prince died his body was burned on a pyre and with him his princess was burned alive. As each little princess went through this gateway to her funeral pyre, she pressed her hand on the prepared space on the right hand side of this gateway. Today there are 26 hand prints, all of which have been filled in with silver and each represents one of these princesses as she went through to her death.

Next in importance is the pink city of Jaipur. This city has been so named because every building in it is of pink sandstone. The one you are looking at is the great palace called the Palace of the Winds—so named because from whichever direction the wind blows it can enter this building. Now, when this building was erected there was no glass in India, so to replace it in window apertures, the architects placed perforated screens of pink sandstone. Later we will see beautiful samples of similar screens of white marble.

At the Indian end of the Khyber Pass stands an ancient fortress called Jamrud. Here the Kafila or Drome-

dary caravans gather before they start on their perilous journey through the Pass. This section is inhabited by one of the most warlike tribes to be found anywhere, the Afridis. Great care, therefore, has got to be taken to secure the safe passage of the caravans; in the front move the men on their hill ponies, behind them come the camels. The pass itself is 51 miles long; through it 3,000 years ago came the Aryans. Then in 326 B.C. Alexander the Great led his Grecian phalanx. Later in 1,000 A.D. came the first of the Mohammedan hordes and, in fact, every great invasion that has left a permanent mark in India entered that country through this ancient gateway. It is not difficult to understand why the inhabitants of this part of the world are robbers and raiders of the first quality when you see how difficult it is to raise a crop in a country like this. The Afridi believes in the principle of robbing his neighbor on every possible occasion, so it is necessary for him to have his village surrounded by a strong wall and to keep his watch towers always manned. The Afridi himself is a big man, standing six feet in his bare feet. He is a magnificent shot and uses a modern rifle.

Then leaving behind the ugly and barren Khyber Pass we next visit that beautiful Valley of Kashmir, as beautiful as the Khyber is ugly. The journey is two hundred miles by road, the greater part of which is along the Valley of the Khelum River. In its lower reaches it is a turbulent, fast-flowing stream. However, as we approach Baramula, the aspect of this river changes and we find a beautiful slow-flowing stream on which the house-boats can float.

Long before we reach the capital city, Srinagar, we see the little Takht-I-Suliman, or throne of Solomon. On the top of this hill still stands an ancient temple two thousand years old. The city lies on either side of the great river and is rightly described as the Venice of the East. In all directions run small canals. In fact, there are more miles of canalway in this part of the world than roadway, and it is possible to do your visiting by gondolas instead of motor car.

Kashmir is a veritable Garden of Eden. Here during

the Summer months it is possible to wander through acres of beautiful flowers growing wild. Furthermore, nature has planted a garden on the roof of every Kashmir house. At certain times of the year the roofs of the houses are covered with a mass of beautiful bright-colored flowers. The Kashmiris as a whole are not a dark race. The child in front of you happens to be a dark child, but here you may see Aryan types, fair skin, rosy cheeks and even blue eyes.

In the land where everything is water, we naturally tend to become amphibians, and here we see the great house-boats for which Kashmir is so famous. The larger ones contain from five to six rooms, the flat roof providing an extra dining room. We do not require quite so much accommodation, and for some of us a little dunga house-boat is more convenient. The house-boats of this type contain from four to five rooms. There are many advantages in living in a house-boat—you park your boat alongside one of the beautiful little canals amongst your friends. Then if you get tired of your neighbors, all that is necessary is to give the order over night, and you wake up again the next morning amongst a new lot of neighbors and nobody has been insulted.

As well as these beautiful canals there are a number of superb lakes, the most famous of all is the Dal Lake. These lakes lie at an altitude of 5250 feet above sea level. Along the Dal Lake are situated two of the most beautiful gardens to be found in India. The best known of these two gardens is the Shalimir. They were constructed in the reign of Jehangir, the great Mogul emperor, some three hundred years ago. This emperor was a warrior and spent most of his time at war, and whilst he fought, his famous queen, Noor Jahán, really ruled India. She, however, objected to the great heat of the plains and for the comfort of herself and her women folk she had the Shalimir gardens constructed in Kashmir, so as to avoid the hot months on the plains.

Most tourists visit India during the Winter, so that Kashmir is not usually visited, though, as a matter of fact, no one should ever omit a trip to the valley, no mat-

ter what time of the year they are in India. If you are interested in Winter sports, there is never any fear of a green Winter here. The Himalayan Ski Club meets twice annually in December and March in the hotel in Gul Marg at a height of 8,000 feet. For the beginner the baby slope commences at the hotel door and one of the quickest methods of learning to ski is to slide down to the polo ground where hill ponies will be found awaiting you to tow you along on your skis. This is one of the best methods of learning to keep your balance. However, the experts prefer to make up cheery parties and set out for the club huts at Kilenmarg. The huts are at an altitude, 11,000 feet. It is not necessary, however, to climb this distance. You can ride up on hill ponies. The view over the Valley of Kashmir is magnificent. However, experts are not content with beginning a run home at this height. They continue up to Golden Col at an altitude of 14,000 feet. The run down includes a thrilling passage through the great forests. The trees in these forests are sufficiently widely separated to make the run down thoroughly interesting. There are, of course, a number of magnificent glades that can be picked out on the run down. These glades may be covered with a blanket of snow as much as ten to fifteen feet thick as indicated by the height of the snow on the houses in front of us.

Back again to Srinagar. In the background lie the mountain ranges from which we have descended and as the sun sets the spire of the little Hindu temple is illuminated for a few minutes. Then once more back to the plains of India. Here we see a villager harrowing his field. Attached to the primitive harrow by three cords are three hollow bamboos, which are supported in upright position by one of his womenfolk. As these are dragged through the loosened soil the seeds are dropped one by one down the hollow tubes. This primitive method of sowing the seeds is, however extremely effective. The inhabitants of this part of India are known as Sikhs. These men have always been great fighters and in 1845 they fought the British to a standstill in two great wars. Subsequently, however, they decided to fight for us and have done so

ever since. That means something when we keep in mind the fact that there have been seventy minor wars in the last seventy-five years on our turbulent northwestern frontier.

The heart of their religion is their great golden temple situated in Amritsar. This temple has been built in the center of an artificial lake. The upper portion of the building is covered with copper gilt sheet and the lower portion of pure white marble. When the sun shines on this building it appears to be of burnished gold. In it besides the holy Bible is housed their treasury. Here you can see jewels the value of which is almost beyond computation.

I wonder how many of you know how the Indian mongoose kills a cobra. The method is this—the mongoose approaches the snake, who immediately coils himself up, erects his head and blows out his hood. Directly the mongoose is within range the snake strikes. The mongoose does not jump backwards, he jumps sideways and the snake misses his strike. It however, instantly recoils ready to strike again. In time, through weariness it slows up, then the mongoose seizes his opportunity, jumps in again before the recoil can take place and pins the snake by the neck between the head and the hood and severs the vertebrae with a single bite.

When we come to Delhi we have arrived at the heart of the Mogul Empire. Here Shah Jehan, the greatest Mohammedan builder of all times, built his great palace in the heart of what is known as the Red Fortress. He built it almost entirely of white marble. Now, it is not easy to get photographs of palaces in India, because most of them are surrounded by great fortress walls. However, in this instance, where the procession is moving past, once the mighty Jumna River flowed, so it was not necessary to fortify this side of the palace. We can, therefore, catch a glimpse of a corner of it. On the little verandah overhanging the fort wall once the Mogul Emperor sat to take the cool air of an evening. Then when we go inside the fortress itself, the first place we visit is the great hall of Public Audiences. This building is open on all sides.

In a hot country a closed auditorium would not be possible. It is entirely of white marble, but to a builder like Shah Jehan a mere marble hall would have been insignificant and inadequate to his genius. So he gathered around himself skilled workmen in Petra Dura work—that is to say the art of reproducing in semi-precious stones an exact reproduction of all the beautiful flowers that are to be found in that part of India. These are then inlaid in the white marble surface of the building and in this building we see the superb results of this art. In the background on the marble dais once stood the great peacock throne of the Mogul Emperor—so-called because the arms of the throne were the bodies of two peacocks in gold. The back of the throne consisted of their spread tails and every color in the peacock's tail was reproduced in jewels. This throne was carried away by Nadir Shan the Persian. Today it can still be seen in Persia, but many of its superb jewels have long ago been looted.

In order to do all that was possible to make life bearable in this palace, a cooling system was included. Up through the great fountain bubbled the water from the river. It then flowed down a series of open runways, passing through every chamber of the palace to keep them cool. The pillars supporting the roof and the great arches of white marble are of pale pink sandstone and the various sections of the palace are separated one from another by a series of beautiful marble screens. At a short distance one of these screens looks almost like lacework. Yet it is fully two and one-half inches thick. They are set in white marble, the entire surface of which is beautified by superb inlay work. The water flows underneath the screen.

It would never do to leave Mohammendan Delhi without first paying a visit to the great Mosque, and Jumna Masjid. Here ten thousand of the faithful can worship at one and the same time. In a Mohammendan country it is never a case of ladies first. In the foreground of the Mosque we see all the men—in the background behind the screen are their women folk. When you enter a Mohammendan Mosque you realize that no decoration is

permissible other than geometric, furthermore, the worshippers must be facing toward Mecca whilst in prayer.

Many of you have heard of the Purdah system of India. Under this system a Mohammendan girl after the age of eleven should never again be seen by the eye of any male other than her nearest relatives. As a result if she goes out of doors at all she must do so in a closely closed vehicle or covered by a white shroud called a Burka.

There are no less than eight Delhis—six ancient—one modern and one ultra modern. Kutb-ud-Din reigned over one of these ancient Delhis in 1200 A.D. He was a great warrior and made many conquests over the Hindus of the South. To commemorate these victories he built the Kuth-Minar or Minarette. This great building stands two hundred and forty feet high. During the last seven and one-half centuries it has been rocked by many an earthquake and struck by lightning, yet today it stands a superb monument to those early Mohammendan builders.

On arrival in Agra we are in the city best known to dwellers outside India because of the great mausoleum, the Taj Mahal. The building which forms the great gateway to the Taj is itself a magnificent piece of architecture, but it has been dwarfed by the magnificence of the building behind it. It is of pink sandstone beautified by wonderful marble inlay work. However, as we pass through the central gateway, we get the finest view of the great mausoleum itself. It was completed by Shah Jehan, that greatest of all Mohammendan builders, in the year 1652. It stands no less than two hundred and thirty feet high. It is completely constructed of white marble and reflects all the colors of the sky from a mauve to an apricot. On entering the mausoleum itself we are stopped in admiration by the beauty of the perforated marble screen, the excellence of which has been further enhanced by a mass of superb inlay work.

Through the central archway can be seen one of the cenotaphs. On entering this doorway we find that the mausoleum contains actually not one but two cenotaphs. The one in the foreground is that of the famous little lady of the Taj, Mumtaz Mahal. It is always easy to tell

a Mohammendan woman's tomb from a man's tomb, because the woman's tomb is flat on the top, the man's tomb has on it what is known as a pencil case. Both tombs are of white marble, literally encrusted with inlay work of the finest quality. The story of Mumtaz is this. She was married to Shah Jehan, the great builder, for fourteen years at the time when Mogul Emperors were entitled to as many wives as they cared to have. During her lifetime there was no other woman within the palace. Later she died and Shah Jehan continued to rule over the Mogul Empire for thirty-six years more. During the whole of this period he never married again. Shah Jehan spent the last seven years of his life a prisoner in the palace at Agra deposed by his son, Aurangzeb.

The lady of the Taj is said to have been extremely beautiful. She was of Persian descent and, therefore, extremely fair.

After leaving Agra, we enter an area famous for its connection with the Indian Mutiny. At Lucknow, Henry Lawrence saw the mutiny approaching and gathered together some three thousand souls of whom one thousand three hundred were women and children. In the lull before the approaching storm he fortified his residency and the ground surrounding it. This residency was an ancient Mohammendan palace and contained vast underground chambers. Here the garrison defended themselves for no less than eighty-five days against an army ten times their number and a hostile city. At the end of that time, just one thousand of the original three thousand were still alive. Then Henry Havelock succeeded in fighting his way in to the assistance of the hard-pressed garrison, but he was so badly knocked about in the street fighting that preceeded his entry that he was unable to relieve the residency, and the siege continued for another two months until finally relieved by Sir Colin Campbell.

On crossing the Ganges, our next halting place is Allahabad. This city stands at the junction of the Ganges and the Jumna River, and this junction point is considered extremely sacred amongst the Hindus. Here the pilgrims come down in thousands and hundreds of thous-

ands to carry out the bathing ceremonies. In amongst these crowds will be seen the strange ascetics of India. For example, we see one of them lying naked in the midst of a great bed of thorns. Yet another hanging head downward from a tripod. His head is tied up in a cloth, whilst a friend keeps him gently swinging backward and forward over a slow fire.

Amongst the Hindus there is one absorbing desire. At some time in their lives they hope to bathe in the Ganges in front of Benares. Here if a Hindu does so he washes away every sin that a Hindu can commit. Further, there are other advantages in visiting Benares. For example, should a Hindu die there, his body is burned on a pyre and the ashes are cast on the holy river and he goes direct to the heaven of all Hindus. This is important if you keep in mind the fact that according to their mythology, the Hindu may have to come back to this earth time and time again and live out his life. So, if he manages to die in Benares, he short-circuits a whole peck of trouble for himself.

The capital of India for many years under British rule was Calcutta, a great modern city. We won't pause there very long—just long enough to see the one outstandingly beautiful temple built by the Jains. These people are sectarians from Hinduism and are probably the world's strictest vegetarians. They must not kill anything, not even the most minute insect.

Once again we wend our way up into the mountains and stay in the Mount Everest Hotel in Darjeeling, because from the windows of this hotel we have a superb view of the second highest mountain range in the world, Kinchinjunga. It is twenty-eight thousand feet high and more. The beauty of a mountain, however, is never dependent upon its great mass. Actually the palm has been given to a comparatively small mountain, Siniolchu, a mere twenty-two thousand feet high. The reason for this is that this mountain has an almost perfect cone.

It is not possible to view Everest from Darjeeling. In other words, to see the highest mountain in the world it is necessary to climb up to Tiger Hill. From there if one

is fortunate, it is possible to see the sun rise over this mountain. Everest is twenty-nine thousand feet high. It has been flown over but as yet no one has ever succeeded in climbing it. The Bruce Expedition reached within a few hundred feet of the peak when an accident occurred which cost the lives of the last two climbers, Malloy and Irving.

To cross from Darjeeling into Burma one requires an airplane, as there is no road or rail. When we land at Myitkina on the upper reaches of the Irrawady River, we see a typical Burmese with his bifurcated mast and the hut that runs down through the middle of it.

About half way down to Rangoon we pass the Inle Lakes. Here may be seen those strange leg rowers who stand on one leg and twist the other leg around the oar and use this method to propel their boat along through the water at an astounding speed.

Everything that is strange or bizarre in a Buddhist country is always taken advantage of. For example, we find perched on the top of a great rocking stone a small pagoda.

The great pagodas of Burma sometimes contain a relic but the smaller ones contain nothing and are merely built to the Glory of God. On the top of every pagoda is what is known as the umbrella, on which are hung these little bells which tinkle in the wind and make that pretty sound for which Burma is so famous.

When we arrive in Rangoon, the capital city of Burma, we are again in a great modern city. Nevertheless, this city also contains the world's most famous pagoda, known as the Shwe Dagon or Golden Pagoda. Around it cluster the little shrines in which the worship is actually carried out. These are decorated with superb wood carving. The Burman is famous the world over for wood carving. The great pagoda itself stands not less than four hundred feet high. Every inch of it from the bottommost brick to the topmost spire is gilded, and in the heart of it are said to lie relics of several Buddhas, including eleven hairs of the original Buddha. The umbrella at the top of this pagoda is literally encrusted with jewels presented by King Mindon, the last of the great Burmese kings.

Back once again to South India. Here a halt of one day is made in Madura, the great cathedral city of the South. This city contains the most accessible temple in all India, to the foreigner, the temple of the Fish-eyed Goddess. Strange as it may seem the smallest building in this great mass of buildings is actually the temple itself. All the others are Gopurams or gateways, each one getting larger as it recedes further from the Central Temple until finally we come to the greatest of them all, the fore-runner of all the world's skyscrapers. This building completed in 1500 A.D. is one hundred and fifty-three feet high and contains eleven storeys. The entire surface of this wonderful building is literally encrusted with carving. Every kind of being, imaginery and otherwise, has been sculptured and placed on its surface.

After crossing the Palk Straits, we come into a land famous for the beauty of its gardens. In the Hak Gala gardens, we are held first by their wonderful beauty, secondly by the fact that these gardens are filled, not with palm trees, but with superb samples of mighty tree ferns.

On arrival in Colombo, we find a great liner awaiting us. Probably if our journey includes a visit to the Dutch East Indies, we will step on board one of their Dutch liners. If we have selected the time of year rightly to visit India, it would be a joy to lounge about on the decks of the liner during the beautiful warm days that follow. Of an evening we would be waited on by those excellent little Dutch waiters, and if we are wise we will see one of those superb sunsets, the like of which can only be seen in Southern and Eastern waters, and so, gentlemen, we bid you adieu.

THE CHAIRMAN:—May I, on behalf of the Canadian Club, thank you for your most interesting lecture.