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THE PATIALA FORT

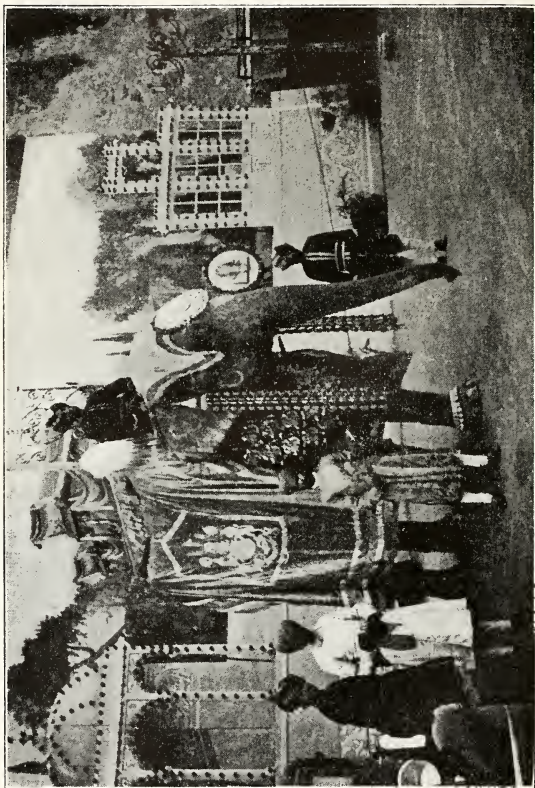
FROM MY INDIAN NOTEBOOK

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE MARRIAGE OF AN INDIAN PRINCE

BY DR. VERNON B. HERBST

NOT LONG AGO, when the attention of the world was focused upon the wedding of Prince George and Princess Marina, when newspaper, radio, and cinema described and pictured that brilliant event in the capital city of the British Empire, I was vividly reminded of another wedding. This wedding, which I witnessed in India, was not heralded by newspaper or radio, nor pictured on the screen, yet it rivaled in seriousness and grandeur the royal wedding in London.

In 1932, when the Yuvaraja of Mysore was a patient under my care in London, he graciously invited me to be his guest at the big elephant hunt, the *kedda*, which was to be held in Mysore in November. In anticipation of my prospective visit, the Yuvaraja gave a dinner for me that I might meet some of the Princes of India who were sojourning in London at that time. His Highness the Maharaja of Rajpipla, His Highness, the Maharaja of Kapurthala, and His Highness, the Maharaja of Patiala were among the guests. The party turned out to be an unusually congenial occasion, and when



ELEPHANT WITH HOWDAH
Ready for the State Procession

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parting, each one present urged me to visit him when I came to India.

Thus, January found me near Jullundur in the plain-land of the Sutlej River as guest of the Maharaja of Kapurthala. One day in the midst of our tranquil and idyllic existence, a delegation arrived bearing a message from the Maharaja of Patiala to the Maharaja of Kapurthala. We were summoned into the Ambassador's Salon of the palace to witness the ceremony. The delegates, refreshed after



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THE MAHARAJA OF PATIALA

their journey and clothed in achkans of gold and silver brocade over an undertone of delicate colors, with sashes of finely woven gold cloth, and swords hanging from their belts, were ushered into the presence of His Highness. Following them came fifty-one servants wearing white coats sashed with red, and red turbans tied Sikh fashion, each one carrying a tray of exotic and delectable-looking sweetmeats. Fifty-one trays of delicacies were placed upon the floor before the Maharaja. Whereupon the spokesman of the delegation extended greetings from the Maharaja of Patiala and invited His Highness, the Maharaja of Kapurthala, to be present at the coming celebration of the marriage of the Crown Prince of Patiala. The fine faces of the men, the colored and gold brocades, the trays of

fragrant sweetmeats arrayed on the floor, and the cluster of servants standing respectfully in the background in the spacious hall of colored marbles, made a rare picture.

Word of my arrival had been sent to Patiala, and I was thrilled shortly thereafter to receive a telegram inviting my party also to partake of the celebration.

Since His Highness, the Maharaja of Kapurthala, is well known as one of the outstanding hosts of India for the luxury of his sur-



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THE CROWN PRINCE (left) AND GROUP OF GUESTS

roundings and his elaborate entertaining, I felt honored and privileged to travel as his guest in his well-appointed private car. During the trip I learned that the coming celebration was to be a very special event for this was the first time in more than a hundred years when a ruling Maharaja of Patiala was to witness the marriage of his son. The old curse on the State of Patiala was broken, and no expense would be spared in the celebration. To heighten my anticipation, I learned that the Maharaja of Patiala was to be elected Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes at their next session in March.

As the train drew into the city of Patiala—a city of about 50,000—the streets about the station were crowded. The Maharaja and his ministers of state were there to welcome us. A troop of lancers

stood at attention while courtesies of greeting were exchanged and guns were fired in honor of the visiting prince, His Highness the Maharaja of Kapurthala. We entered the waiting Rolls Royces and were driven through the eager crowd who were anxious to get a glimpse of their ruler and his guests on this auspicious occasion.

Upon our arrival at the Patiala Palace we were presented to the groom-to-be, the Crown Prince of Patiala, a young man in his early twenties of handsome appearance and courteous demeanor.

We were then escorted to our living quarters. Since the large palace was not ample to house the multitude of invited guests, three marriage camps had been constructed, and gardens newly laid out about them with all the appearance of permanence. Each of the camps was equipped with electric lights and fans, running water, and all modern conveniences for comfort. Our tent, for example, besides a large living room and bedroom, contained a dressing room, bathroom, and servant's quarters. It was luxuriously furnished with upholstered chairs, settees, and reading lamps. Hangings of many colored linens were draped upon the walls, and the floors were covered with rich oriental rugs. Each of the dwelling tents was situated conveniently near a larger tent which served as club room and dining room where one could enjoy His Highness's unstinted hospitality. Here the guests assembled, their every wish gratified even before it could be expressed. As they became acquainted with one another a spirit of communion was fostered among them, and a desire to make this a most successful occasion permeated them all.

New guests were arriving at all times by motor, by aeroplane, and by train. They were greeted with ceremonies varying in pomp according to their rank and position and accompanying them came smaller or larger retinues of servants bearing gifts.

In India a marriage ceremony is not a matter of a day or an hour, as it is often here, but there are many religious rituals which are performed in preparation for the event. Almost daily for a few weeks before the marriage, ceremonies were held in the Patiala Fort, and the formal, colorful processions back and forth between Palace and Fort gave impressiveness and a feeling of solemnity to the occasion. The most important of the religious ceremonies, *Dhol Rakhai*, was held at the Fort in the Quilla Mubarik, the spacious hall of carved brown sandstone with its windows of latticed marble and its raised dais with three throne-chairs in the center of one side of the hall.

No written records of marriages are kept in India, nor was any written announcement of the approaching marriage made by the Maharaja. But, in order to acquaint his subjects with the desire of his son to wed the Princess of Seraikella in such a way that they might bear witness to it by eye and ear, a magnificent spectacle, the State Procession was arranged. Following certain religious rituals at the Fort, the Prince garbed in glittering gold brocade started for



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THE GOLDEN THRONE

Motibag Palace in the golden throne-carriage drawn by two magnificently comparisoned elephants. Heavy gold brocaded trappings hung over their sides, chains of gold medalions encircled their necks, and jewel-studded bands were about their legs. Then followed the Maharaja and his relatives riding in exquisitely fashioned howdahs on equally exquisitely comparisoned elephants, the ministers of state, guests and friends, and soldiers both foot and cavalry. The visiting maharajas in ceremonial dress followed each with his court and retinue of servants, some rode on elephants, some on horseback; one brought a group of camels. The Procession went on and on accompanied by strains of Oriental music amidst the rows of happy interested subjects.

It was five miles to Motibag Palace. Since the days were short

(February 27), and the Procession did not get under way until after four o'clock, it was not long before darkness would have engulfed everything had it not been for the foresight of the Master of Ceremonies. He had provided hundreds of acetylene lamps carried upon the heads of servants like living chandeliers to light the way.

When the Procession approached the gates of Motibag Palace, the *mahouts* were given a signal to halt the elephants, and the bride-



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GRANDCHILDREN OF THE MAHARAJA OF PATIALA

groom descended from the golden throne which glistened in the light of the many lamps. A servant was awaiting him, holding by the bridle a magnificent white stallion. The Prince mounted into the pink velvet saddle, took the reins of the emerald-studded bridle in his own hands, and with gold medalions clanging as the restless animal pawed the ground, he rode off into the darkness to the foot of a huge magnolia tree where one could dimly see the forms of two priests awaiting him. From the distance came the sound of chanted mantrums, part of the rituals accompanying the avowal of marriage intentions.

The many people, the hushed excitement, the fragrance of burning incense, from the distance the dim, rhythmic sound of chanted

mantrums and beating drums—all combined to make a scene of unforgettable glory reflected by the light of the many lamps.

The State Procession ended the celebration of wedding festivities at Patiala, and now all set out by private train to Seraikella, the bridegroom, his family, ministers of state, and all the guests. A magnificent welcome awaited them at the Sini Railway station. The representatives of the Prince were escorted to the Seraikella Fort where the formal request for the hand of the Princess was made and granted. The Prince waiting in an antechamber was notified of



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A GROUP OF DANCING GIRLS

this, and he was then received by His Highness, the Maharaja of Seraikella, his future father-in-law.

Now the sacred ceremonies and merrymaking began in earnest. Religious rituals, colorful processions, gift ceremonies, and banquets filled the next three days. One especially impressive ceremony—on account of the beauty and rarity of the jewels—was the presentation of gifts to the Princess by the royal family of Patiala.

The actual marriage ceremony took place at the home of the bride, at which none but the members of the immediate families were present. According to the old Hindu custom, the bride was in *Purdah*. This meant that she must keep her face veiled from all men

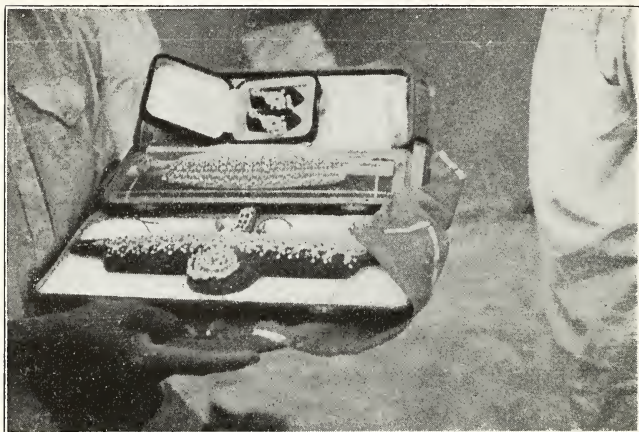


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SERVANTS BEARING GIFTS

not of her immediate family. This custom is traced by non-Moslem Indians to the time of the Mohammedan Conquest of India when the bold conquerors would carry off any beautiful woman who might please their fancy. The necessity of the veil is no longer urgent, but the custom of wearing it has become so much a part of the way of life that the women still cling to it, with the exception of some of the progressive women leaders or those who have had contacts with the ways and customs of the West.

The dinner following the wedding and marriage procession was



WEDDING GIFTS

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held at Janwasa Camp, for the banquet hall in the palace was not large enough to accommodate the seven hundred guests. Only men were present. On a wide expanse of lawn, surrounded on all sides by black trees and lighted by acetylene lamps, many rows of long tables were spread, tables just the right height for comfort if one was accustomed to sitting cross-legged. In the moonlit garden the silver and gold vessels glistened on the white tables as the Maharajas and other guests in their brocaded achkans and their high turbans and many jewels, sought their places. Barefooted servants in white tunics and red sashes silently brought dishes of the choicest foods,

fragrant with Oriental spices and served only as the hosts of India can serve.

Dancing girls from various parts of India seemed to appear from nowhere out of the blackness, and danced in the exotic rhythms of the Orient. An orchestra of native instruments played on and on, unformed, unframed, seemingly endless strains.

The following morning everyone returned by special train to Patiala. There a tremendous crowd was gathered at the railway station to witness the homecoming of the youthful prince and his bride. It seemed as though all the loyal subjects of Patiala were there in holiday mood—townspeople in colored brocaded achkans and their Sikh turbans, turbaned peasants in their tunics, their women gay in colored saris of red, blue, yellow, or green, and mingling with them police in their blue uniforms, and soldiers in their dress uniforms of blue and white. A troop of soldiers cleared a way for the golden throne to pass with its precious burden, but this time upon the windows of the throne-carriage there were curtains of fine-spun gold, so thin that the little princess could not be seen but she herself could look out at the many faces glowing with love and devotion, at the eyes alight with admiration and loyalty to the young prince who had now taken unto himself a bride whom they could respectfully worship.

That night we feasted again, eating the fragrant foods, drinking the delectable wines; exotic dances delighted the eye, and eerie strains of music filled the air.

But before we left, as if to blazon on our minds a memory that we could never forget, we were taken to see the diamonds, the jewels, and other gifts which were displayed in Durbar Hall at the Fort. Table upon table filled the huge hall. Upon a velvet cloth were displayed diamonds of all sizes, blood-red rubies and soft shimmering pearls of all colors, creamy white, pink, and even black pearls. Here were emeralds of deep, rich green, and sapphires of deep, dark blue. Spread out on tables were the finest brocades and softest silks. There were hand-wrought vessels, bowls, and goblets of the most beautiful designs. A veritable treasure house!

And, when the young prince had brought his bride to a palace of their own not far from that of his father and when it was time for the rest of us to return to a simple and humdrum life, we regretfully took our leave.