

17

Bombay.

7.5.45

Hiya Bala,

Had a day out in town last yesterday, & it's very surprising what a difference a day ashore makes after being encased in bamboo fencing for ~~weeks~~ week - now since writing those last few words I've had another day out, viz, Sunday. Am I a naughty boy for punning out on you, darling, & am I forgiven? - good. Tonight, Monday, she's going to sit right down for a couple of hours til bed time & really give you the low-down on the doings of your ever-loving husband since I wrote to you last.

George, Jim, Harold & Bob & me of course, all went into Bombay for two reasons (a) to shop (b) to swim - I'll start with (a). This camp being 5 miles from Sim - the nearest railway station, we get there by lorry which, in itself, is a very distasteful experience, (I've told you of the

Shortcomings of native drivers). The villagers hereabouts follow a line of passive resistance to all vehicles & the accident rate is alarming.

In Bombay it was damned hot - 95° in the shade - the average for this time of the year. As we intended staying late in town we were wearing long whites & shirts, & that is most uncomfortable for walking in the heat of the town - I got soaking wet with sweat & all my clothes stuck to me. However, we had come out to shop & shop we did. I was looking round for something for my darling & the other lads had pretty much the same idea. So we started.

When you come out of Victoria Terminus you turn left & in front of you is a large circle with a small park in the middle & out of this circle run several main roads. The main road of 'em all is Hornby Rd. which leads to the Colaba district - the poor quarter of the town - down there we went. At the beginning of the road the shops are all

3

native & so we approached them with a very cautious air. It is a fact that as soon as these Indian merchants see a service man they grab him (literally, in most cases) - start the price twice as high as they would with their own folk. They know that us blacks are anxious to send stuff home & have usually enough money in ~~the~~ ^{our} pockets to splash out on occasions. Unluckily for the merchants on Saturday ~~we~~ ^{we} had only been paid 70 R. for a month's salary & their airy fairy prices sounded a little astronomical. Honestly, honey, apart from the greater variety & supply over here this shopping business is just as heart-breaking out here as it is in England - I'll be some time yet before I can afford to shop in any style. To give you an example, one of the boys in the camp bought a ~~new~~ set of underwear for his wife - brassiere, knicker & slip - for the equivalent of £3. & the quality was poor.

There are, however, a number of exceptions concerning which I will write in detail at a later date.

George & Harold, having children, bought a teddy bear each, a really well-made, fair-sized toy for 2R, & in the same shop I examined some marvellous hand-carved cigarette boxes ranging from 12R upwards. Further along we went into shop after shop chosen - whole with stuff, but in this part of the street it was mostly knock-off stuff, of no real interest to me.

Gradually the thoroughfare got wider & more "select" until we came to the part where all the big departmental stores are situated & here I hoped to do better. Unfortunately they close at 1 pm on Saturdays & so we were unlucky - we'll have to go to those places later. On the way down I by-passed to visit the Lloyd's Bank & ask if there were any instructional letters in the

5

inter-change of money from accounts in
England & India - they told me there
were no restrictions, so that's that.

Half way down there another
big circle & then Jim bought a handbag
for Muriel. It was a green leather
affair & cost 29R which was very cheap.
I was very tempted to get you one,
sweetly, but I wasn't sure what type
you wanted, as the others. They're
a marvellous bargain, re of the
exceptions I was talking about, & if
you'll let me have a little drawing
to give me an idea I'll nip in &
get you one. In this shop I
discovered that fully-fashioned silk
stockings are things of the past in
the open market - you'll guess where
they may be bought.

That finished the first part
of the shopping expedition & after the
other four gannets had eaten in
the nearest Chinese Restaurant, we took

a taxi to Beach Candy for a swim.
There were quite a number of other
lads in the pool + one of 'em had a
camera going - naturally we had our
picture took + that snap'll be
dispatched to you in due course. After
the swim another meal in another
Chinese joint - for my benefit this
time - & so by taxi to Crawford
Market for another look round the
shops.

Crawford Market is the market
of Bombay. It's a typical native
bazaar quarter + is only in bounds
to troops before black out - it was
getting on for 7 p.m. by this time +
there wasn't much opportunity for seeing
it all. In any case you couldn't see
it all in a day - I've never seen so
many shops + stalls with so much stuff
in my life. It's mainly a cloth
market but there was one jeweller's
shop that we just had to visit -
he had a amazing display + the

thing that caught my eye was a silver
 tea set that you'd have been crazy
 about. I couldn't afford it of course
 but it was lovely to look at &
 maybe one of these days I'll grab it.
 Most of the cloth shops are Govt.
 controlled which makes it easier - I'll
 really will have a more leisurely look
 later with a definite view to buy.
 The ~~incident~~ incident that nearly
 spoiled the whole show is typical of
 shopping expeditions in Bombay, if not
 all India. When we got out of the taxi
 a native accosted us with an offer to
 guide us round & bargain for us - we
 didn't want him, feeling old hands
 at the game by now & told him so.
 But if you think that a mere "get to
 hell out of it" is sufficient to shake
 off these people you have no idea
 what tenacity really is. That
 bloke simply wouldn't leave us - do
 what we would, say what we
 would - raise our sticks threatenly, or

yell for the police, it didn't make any
difference - he still stuck. We tried
dodging in crowds & alley ways - he
was always there at the finish. When
finally we emerged from the market
& it became evident to him that we
weren't buying, he started the old, old
story - "Bucksheer Sahib?" Big White
Rajah very rich, you give two clips (Rupees)
It went on & on & on and on. But
we Navy people have initiative &
resource & there is an unyielding method
of getting rid of anybody - I won't
tell you what it is because it's not
done in the best circles & it was
only under the stress of dire necessity
that we did it in a public thorough-
fare. But it worked & that was the main
thing. We were free at last to proceed
on our tour of Bombay unmolested.

By now the lights were on &
Bombay by night is very lovely. Of
course they have no black-out ~~and~~
& the effect to my near-starved eyes
was startling. We had another

taxi (expensive, ain't we), to Green's Hotel which is the contemporary of Sheperd's of Cairo. The route to Green's goes passed the Gateway of India, concerning which you might be interested to hear that it is through this immense ~~gate~~ arch on the waterfront that all new Viceroy's are received in pomp & ceremony - so what? - well, maybe you're right. Green's has a service canteen which is why we went there, but the canteen was closed & so we searched the joint for a drink. In the main brasserie or cafe or whatever it is, a smashing band was beating it out & we thought Good-M, but the cover charge was 2R 5A. so we tried again. Finally we landed in the billiard room & cadged a drink there - 10k for a round - wow!

The clock came around to 9.30 & the train went at 10.20, so off we went to Victoria - walking this time, (10k a round - wow!). At the station a crowd

of the boys were entertaining the locals with a series of English war-whoops made for the benefit of a parrot that one of 'em had bought - the parrot hasn't spoken since. The night train-ride back to camp passed by some amazing sights including a few frank & open bedroom scenes, (these Indians just don't give a damn & their apartments are open to the four winds - if there was any wind), & a burial by oil-lamp complete with the cremation. There was a lorry to meet us at Sim to take us back to camp & that was that. Gee, were we tired & did we crash!!!

On Sunday we had divisions which means dressing up to kill for 10 minutes parading - most annoying. After that the hut had to be scrubbed out & sweetened & the week's accumulation of bugs, spiders & dead rats have to be cleared. After that there is the dishwashing & a few make-do & mend jobs, & after that we need & take a shower. All that brings us to dinner.

It was just after dinner that I decided to settle down to write to you, my angel, but the weather was so gloriously sunny, (the trouble is it's always gloriously sunny), that an offer of a trip to John Beach was gladly accepted else I would have melted in the deck-chairs. I've found out that the only time to write is in the cool of the evening. I've told you before about John Beach haven't I, so I won't go through a second description. Harold lost his false teeth in the sea but apart from that the proceedings ~~were~~ were very much the same as the week before. The afternoon was slightly spoiled by the sight of a crowd of Yanks quaffing ice beer that they'd brought with them, & to make it worse they lashed up all the women they could muster & even washed their hands in it! We couldn't stand that so after a few pointed remarks we shoved off.

In the evening there was a cinema show
in camp - "Miracle of Morgan's Creek" -
which had the usual diversions of
breakdowns & the knocking over of the
screen. It was 11.30 before we turned
in & we all thought that it was a very
nice week-end.

So we come to today - Monday.
It's the beginning of another week of
work - damned hard work too, something'll
have to be done about that - & it's
very unlikely that I'll go ashore before
next week-end which gives me a lot
of time to catch up with letter-writing.
I had a letter from you today, darling,
& it was a lovely letter. I do love you.
Seeing as 'ow you seemed to worry
a little about sunstroke & suchlike
I'll devote the next paragraph to
giving you the guff ^{on} the state of
the body beautiful as it reclines at
present.

Generally speaking I'm as fit as
ever I've been - probably fitter. My only

13

trouble is an outbreak of spots around the
cheek area - the ordinary kind of pocks -
which seem to be spreading down my
leg. I attribute that to the heat &
I've started to take fruit salts to cool
& purify the blood, but I don't think
they'll get much better until the weather
gets a little cooler or I get more used
to the heat & sweat less. However, they
don't bother me & I'm careful to dab
antiseptic on them. (I bought an
excellent first aid kit on the ship
& it's proved very useful). One of the
cardinal rules of health out here is
the frequent use of talcum powder under
the crotch & arms & in between the
toes - your old man follows that one
very assiduously & very beneficial it
is too. I'm not troubled with constipation
& that's also a great help. Last
Saturday we had the second dose of
Cholera injections but that didn't bother
me. Let me tell you of something of

the ailment we have to fight + contend with. The first + most frequent trouble is dysentery in varying degrees of intensity - some forms last a day or two some last for two weeks, but in any case it's very painful + unpleasant. The preventative is to watch what you eat or drink very carefully - never, repeat never, buy any food etc., from native vendors, + keep the heads free of flies as much as possible - having done all that all you can do is cross your fingers, but there's very little of it in this camp. The other troubles are malaria (not very prevalent in Bombay), yellow fever, (unheard of in this camp), cholera + prickly heat, (you're almost bound to get this to some degree or other - it's an irritating skin rash). Cholera has started over the other side of India as it usually does - the papers blame the poor administration in that part of the country + at the same time praise the excellent Health Authorities.

in Bombay, so I suppose we don't get epidemics over here. But epidemic or not if we take due precautions, such as keeping away from native quarters & vendors (as I easily & willingly do), keep clean (two showers & numerous minor washes per day), take the ~~usual~~ inoculations (see above), then there's very little danger. Regarding sunstroke honey, I'm pretty used to the sun by now, & a whole afternoon under a blazing sun at Juhu just puts another layer of brown on the old torso - but I'm no fool, & if I feel the least bit hot on the old napper I clap on the old tit-far-tat very quickly. Nothing to worry about sugar - it's possible that I might get an attack of dysentery or something mild like that because that sort of thing can't be guarded against apart from the precautions I mentioned above, but the more serious maladies can

be guarded against & you can trust
your old man to guard with all his
might, so that I get the same chance
as I would in England. So much
for my health.

My well-being? Well I'm now
Vice-President of the mess, (not President,
I bowed to an older & more experienced
man) & so I have a say in the welfare
of our part of the camp. Up to date it's
been one fight after another with
Officers, Nauphi managers & the like with
very little result, but we're gradually
making ourselves felt as well as
unpopular, & maybe the future will bring
better conditions. The food has improved
but the mail position has worsened. I'm
lucky in having one letter in four days
but George has had only one letter
since he's been out-here & other men
have had none - not so good.

Poor Old Jim - he had a letter
^{from Mum} today, which he showed me, telling him

of pregnancy trouble & family quarrels -
 he's feeling pretty low. If you see Muriel
 perhaps you can cheer her up & tell her
 that he's well & fit & anxious to have
 as many letters as possible - tell her,
 too, that he often complains of his
 own inability to express himself well
 in letters home but we're all pretty
 certain that he's as much in love with
 his wife as anybody with their's & his
 main concern is with her. It's rotten
 for these blokes with troubles at home -
 one of our pals heard the other day of
 his baby's serious illness, but before
 the Navy could decide whether to send
 him home or not the kid died & now
 they won't let him home in any case
 It's enough to break the toughest man
 into pieces.

Tonight there's general jollification
 in the camp on account of this year
 victory business. After this letter shall
 go around the huts listening to all

the views on demobilisation which is the
topic of conversation right now. Humane!
the opinions we hear - the British
Government is going to be awfully
unpopular if it doesn't do something
pretty nappy about the lads out East,
especially those who've been out for a
number of years. The papers are printing
all sorts of reports of this Great-Man's speech
& that G. M.'s views on the matter but
what the boys want is Action. Still,
me, I say nothing, I just wait &
see what's going to happen.

So I'll be off now sweetheart,
with a song in my heart because, as
I've mentioned before, I will undoubtedly
mention again, I love you so much
that there's no room for anything in
my heart but happiness, no matter what.

Goodnight, darling.

Lez

11

Recd.
17.5.55

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