DUNCAN'S PASSAGE TO INDIA

T. E. Tausky

IN THE COURSE of the world tour recorded in *A Social Departure*, Sara Jeannette Duncan and her travelling companion, Lily Lewis, arrived in Calcutta in the early months of 1889. Miss Duncan was quick to notice the particular atmosphere created by the absolute separation of rulers and ruled. Even granting her powers as an observer, the character of British rule must have been readily apparent, since she claims to have felt it as soon as she left the boat:

> We had arrived at the dignity of *memsahibs*. We felt this dignity the moment we walked across the gangway and stepped upon India — an odd slight conscious uplifting of the head and decision of the foot — the first touch of Anglo-Indianism.

Sara Jeannette Duncan was indeed destined to be a *memsahib*. In Calcutta she met a museum official named Everard Cotes. Within a few months, she married him and returned to India, which was to be her home for more than two decades.

Both Sara Jeannette Duncan and India changed greatly during those two decades. India moved from relative passivity to passionate and at times violent agitation for self-government; in the final years of Miss Duncan's stay, the authorities finally responded to Indian pressure by granting a measure of reform and removing some of the official and social barriers between "sahib" and "native". Sara Jeannette Duncan herself naturally first responded to India with the emotions of a tourist, dazzled by the colour and variety of the country. Later, her capacity for ironic detachment found its expression in a series of novels which took the British imperial aim seriously, but recorded the failures and frustrations of an idealistic theory forced to depend on "human souls of the human average"[1] for the fulfillment of its aims. Finally, when the Indian movement for independence took a violent form, Miss Duncan became a furious defender of British rule, damning the Indian radicals in a tense melodrama about an assassination attempt.

Her first and last Indian books, especially, are a fascinating record of a society and conception of life that seemed immutable and immortal when Sara Jeannette Duncan stepped ashore in Calcutta in 1889, and was already in an irretrievable decline when she left it.

When she matured into a veteran and somewhat cynical *memsahib,* Sara Jeannette Duncan may have regretted the gushings of the Indian section of *A Social Departure.* In most of the book, a fresh and lively viewpoint compensates for the absence of profound knowledge of the country under discussion. But in India, the British flag and British friends seem to have produced a screened and conventional impression of Indian life, very much like the accounts of other contemporary travellers. Representative Indian figures seem to be part of an exotic tapestry, as in the following description of Calcutta:

> A British city, for the British coat-of-arms shone here and the Union Jack floated there, but a British city with few Britons abroad in it — the throngs in the streets were nearly all Mahommedans, bearded and wearing little white embroidered caps on the sides of their heads, or smooth-faced Hindoos in turbans; all flapping nether draperies, all sleek of countenance and soft of eye. *Chuprassis* [messengers] in long red coats that reached to the knee, and from that to their toes in their own brown skins, hurried hither and thither solemnly with leather bags slung across their shoulders, much burdened by their own importance. *Baboos* [clerks] in flowing white went ceaselessly in and out of the swinging doors and up and down the broad stone steps of the great shipping and merchants' offices; and the streets swarmed with lower creatures.

The condescension evident in the foregoing paragraph makes itself felt wherever Indians are described — in contrast to Sara Jeannette Duncan's admiring view of the Japanese, among whom she lived on terms of greater equality. Indians are to be respected to the degree that they approach the English ideal, as in this remarkable and unironic account of an enlightened barrister and his wife:

> This lady and gentleman, whom we found charming, were as favourable specimens as we could have met of pure natives on the very crest of the wave of progress that is lifting their race to the plane where men struggle and hope and pray as we do — specimens of the class that appreciates and lives up to the advantages of British rule, and is received and liked by the sahib and the membership accordingly.

British society is rarely analyzed, although it is always present as a constricting influence on the narrator. An overawed summary of its virtues is provided in the description of a Viceroy's Evening Party:

> As to the humanity gathered there . . . for actual brilliancy . . . nothing like it could be found out of the capital of the Indian Empire in the whole world. The body of it was, of course, Anglo-Indian, full of the fascinating oddities of Anglo-Indian speech and intercourse, with just a *nuance* of rich, tropical, easy unconventionality, full of gay talk and laughter with a spice of recklessness in it, full of uniforms and

> personalities and names. Very charmingly indeed do the Anglo-Indian ladies costume themselves, and neither in their clothes nor in their curtseys does one find the stiffness — now the saints give me courage! — that is occasionally laid to the charge of British femininity — but thou shalt not say I did it. Their pallor lends them shadows about the eyes, and an interesting look of ideality; and perhaps it is the climate and the ubiquitous verandah chair that gives them such graceful reposeful ways. In fact, you delightful English people who stay at home haven't a conception of how much more delightful you sometimes become when you leave your leaky little island and get thoroughly warmed and dried abroad.

The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib (1893), Sara Jeannette Duncan's second Indian book, is an account of one of these delightful, fascinating creatures. The novel relates the story of a young English bride's first year in India, as observed by a middle-aged veteran resident about to return to England. This is Mrs. Perth Macintyre's final summation of her protegée:

> Nevertheless, Mrs. Browne has become a memsahib, graduated, qualified, sophisticated. That was inevitable. I have watched it come to pass with a sense that it could not be prevented. She has lost her pretty colour, that always goes first, and has gained a shadowy ring under each eye, that always comes afterwards. She is thinner than she was, and has acquired nerves and some petulance.... Her world is the personal world of Anglo-India, and outside of it.... I believe she does not think at all. She is growing dull to India, too, which is about as sad a thing as any.... She has acquired for the Aryan inhabitant a certain irritation, and she believes him to be nasty in all his ways. This will sum up her impressions of India as completely years hence as it does today. She is a memsahib like another.

One could hardly ask for a more astonishing volte-face within three years. The latter description doubtless contains more truth, just as in every way *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* is a wiser, better balanced account of India than *A Social Departure*. One memsahib at least did not have her powers of observation dulled by the Indian experience.

In structural terms, *The Simple Adventures* is a simple book. Sara Jeannette Duncan herself said many of the incidents were suggested by her own experience:

> "It was certainly our own house," Mrs. Cotes replied, "and the neighbours, yes — you remember I talked no scandal about them! — and the garden was like ours as nearly as I could describe it."[2]

The domestic experiences "were just what happens to everybody, modified to suit Mr. and Mrs. Browne."[3] There is an elaborate account of housekeeping and of the servants; chapters are devoted to a honeymoon trip, to a Viceroy's party, to the young couple's first dinner invitation, and so on. Each of these common experiences could be added on like beads to a string. But the string in this case is a thoughtful consideration of the nature of Anglo-Indian life, as it affects two

very different but strongly imagined characters: the norm (Mrs. Browne) and the introspective exception (the narrator, Mrs. Macintyre).

If Helen Browne turns out to be "a memsahib like another", she also begins as a respectable, middle-class, provincial young girl like any other. Her suitor is an equally unremarkable and representative young man, a clerk for a tea firm. The Brownes meet and become engaged in England; their courtship is carried on "in the most natural, simple, and unimpeded manner," although, of course, within the bounds of what a Victorian reader and writer would assume those adjectives might mean. Then Browne returns to Calcutta, leaving Helen with a year to accept contradictory advice from friends, speculate in ignorance about India, and accumulate a trousseau.

When she finally lands in India, Helen undergoes all the ritual experiences of the new arrival. In order to please her husband's friends, she gets married in a more formal ceremony than she would have wished. The young couple go off on a brief and Spartan honeymoon, and then have to face the difficulties of setting up housekeeping, and of becoming involved in the social life appropriate to their station. The rigid hierarchical structure of Anglo-Indian society is revealed in these chapters, in theoretical terms by the comments of the narrator, and in practice by the characters' conversation and actions. Government officials have far more prestige socially than merchants: George Browne can only resort to sarcasm as a means of defence, as in his opinion of *aides-de-camp*, offered when someone else remarks that they have so much to do:

> "Do!" remarked young Browne, with the peculiar contempt mercantile pursuits so often inspire for the army and the civil service in Calcutta. "They order dinner, I believe."

Within government service, minute distinctions of rank are scrupulously observed. The narrator imagines a special government department in charge of measuring prestige:

> [Government] affixes a tag to each man's work and person describing him and all that he does. There is probably an office for the manufacture of these, and its head is doubtless known as the Distributor-General of Imperial Tags to the Government of India.

Mr. Perth Macintyre, the narrator's husband, "has never had occasion to apply for a tag," and one feels in Mrs. Macintyre's remarks some of the resentment, more subtly phrased, that is displayed by George Browne. One of the Brownes' hosts at a dinner party is a senior civil servant with a most impressive tag. This manifests itself in apparent, but only apparent, humility:

> At first sight, Mr. Sayter was a little grey gentleman with a look of shrinking modesty and a pair of very bright eyes.... Custom, however, proved Mr. Sayter's

> modesty to be rather like that of the fretful porcupine, his humility to take amused superior standpoints of opinion, and his eyes to be cast down in search of clever jests that were just the least bit wicked. All of which, in Anglo-India, subtly denotes the tag.

Mr. Sayter takes delight in unnerving Mrs. Browne by hinting of British India's immoral past. In a later appearance, he is given a more important role, as an apologist for British rule. His opponent in this verbal dual is Mr. Jonas Batcham, M.P., a Utilitarian industrialist turned globetrotter. It is clear that Sara Jeannette Duncan shared the universal Anglo-Indian view that nothing but evil could come from uninformed Parliamentarians. Mr. Batcham comes to Calcutta determined to believe labourers are exploited and that Anglo-Indian society is indecent. He is not allowed to prove his assertions, and a whole chapter is inserted to show up his gullibility, and the pompousness and vanity of his character. In attacking Mr. Batcham's theories through his defective character, his inability to defend himself in verbal duels with wise Anglo-Indians, and through manipulation of the plot, Miss Duncan anticipates the methods she uses to assail the credibility of Vulcan Mills, a major character in *The Burnt Offering*, published seventeen years later.

As the novel proceeds, Mrs. Browne increasingly masters Anglo-Indian social customs, and the intricacies of dealing with servants. By the end, as we have already seen, she is a complete memsahib, with all the characteristics of that species:

> She has fallen into a way of crossing her knees in a low chair [the "reposeful ways" Miss Duncan so admired in *A Social Departure*] that would horrify her Aunt Plovtree, and a whole set of little feminine Anglo-Indian poses have come to her naturally. There is a shade of assertion about her chin that was not there in England.

Despite her ordinariness, Mrs. Browne has won the affections of the narrator, who remarks:

> If it is necessary to explain my interest in these young Brownes, which you, I regret to think, may find inexplicable, it lies, I dare say, as much in this departure of ours as in anything else. Their first chapter has been our last.

As *The Simple Adventures* unfolds, we come to see that it is as centrally concerned with the story of the Macintyres as it is with the Brownes. Not only is the reader's view of the Brownes constantly shaped by the amused, world-weary Mrs. Macintyre; the "last chapter" of the Macintyres, their disappearance into the oblivion of retirement and "the warmest south wall of Devonshire" becomes both a comment on the blithe and heedless contentment of the Brownes and a poignant event in its own right.

The importance of the narrator emerges only very gradually. For the first hun-

dred pages, we are aware of a distinctive narrative tone — concise, detached, inclined towards irony — but we know very little about the person behind the voice. Indeed, we do not even find out Mrs. Macintyre's name until p. 124. But then we do get to know her character and situation rather well. Her husband is a senior partner in a successful firm; nevertheless, he is not properly recognized by official society. She is thought to be "patronising and interfering" by some, but does go out of her way to help Helen Browne. Like her creator, she tends to see human character in terms of types, while maintaining a cool and partly sympathetic, partly ironic reserve. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that she is a projection of one aspect of her creator: her narration is nearly always crisp, laconic and amused, very rarely straying into the rhapsodic prose that marks Sara Jeannette Duncan's moments of emotional involvement with her characters.

The only emotion Mrs. Macintyre permits herself is an occasional tragic lament over the unnatural and unappreciated plight of the British in India.[4] Whole episodes are shaped to reflect this theme. The Browne's blundering effort to substitute a kerosene stove for the joys of a fireplace becomes, in the final paragraph of the chapter, a symbol for the alien nature of the British presence in India:

> The old kite that surveyed them always through the window from his perch in the sago palm beside the verandah said nothing, but if they had been intelligent they might have heard the jackals that nightly pillaged the city's rubbish heaps, howling derision at the foolishness of a sahib who tried to plant his hearth-stone in India.

At the moment of the Browne's greatest triumph (the night of their appearance at a Viceregal reception) Mrs. Macintyre draws a gloomy moral:

> How little more than illustrations the men and women have been, as one looks back, pictures in a magic lantern, shadows on the wall! . . . How gay they were and how luxurious, and how important in their little day! . . . And now — let me think! — some of them in Circular Road Cemetery — cholera, fever, heat — apoplexy; some of them under the Christian daisies of England — probably abscess of the liver; the rest grey-faced Cheltenham pensioners, dull and obscure, with uncertain tempers and an acquired detestation of the climate of Great Britain. And soon, very soon, long before the Brownes appear in print, the Perth Macintyres also will have gone over to the great majority who have forgotten their Hindustani and regret their khansamahs. Our brief day too will have died in a red sunset behind clustering palms, and all its little doings and graspings, and pushings, all its pretty scandals and surmises and sensations, will echo further and further back into the night.

If, as Mrs. Macintyre suggests in a passage I have already quoted, the Anglo-Indian experience can be metaphorically described as the pages of a book, the book itself makes no sense and has a tragic ending. The precariousness of life in a tropical climate and the futility of the British attempt to create a miniature parody

of their own civilization under unsuitable conditions has become an allegory of the unreality, purposelessness and tragic ending of human life itself. This theme emerges again in the moving final paragraphs of the novel, which link the fates of Mrs. Browne and Mrs. Macintyre in a lament for British life in India as an aspect of mutability:

> I hope she may not stay twenty-two years. Anglo-Indian tissues, material and spiritual, are apt to turn in twenty-two years to a substance somewhat resembling cork. And I hope she will not remember so many dead faces as I do when she goes away — dead faces and palm fronds grey with the powder of the wayside, and clamorous voices of the bazar crying, "Here iz! memsahib! Here iz!" . . .
>
> So let us go our several ways. This is a dusty world. We drop down the river with the tide to-night. We shall not see the red tulip blossoms of the silk cottons fall again.

MY DISCUSSION of *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* did not include any analysis of "native" characters simply because Indians do not exist in the world of the novel, except as picturesque or irritating underlings. In her next six books, Sara Jeannette Duncan remained content to cast Indians in minor roles, usually as loveably childish servants. Finally, in *Set in Authority* (1906), Miss Duncan created a major and relatively sympathetically presented Indian character: a Mahommedan magistrate placed in the difficult position of judging an interracial murder case. *The Burnt Offering* (1910), Sara Jeannette Duncan's final Indian novel, gives several Indian characters an unaccustomed place in the foreground of the novel. Sadly, a developing insight into Indian character is juxtaposed with Miss Duncan's most bitter and explicit repudiation of advanced Indian opinion.

The years separating the publication of Sara Jeannette Duncan's two final Indian novels have been described as "a watershed era":

> Constitutional reforms then fashioned and introduced mark the turning point between the frost of the old raj . . . and the gradual thaw of decentralization and devolution of British power toward the goal of parliamentary self-government for India. The era was one of revolutionary discontent as well as reform.[5]

The effect of these momentous changes on Sara Jeannette Duncan's work is startling. *The Burnt Offering*, like its predecessor, is based on actual events and uses historical figures for characters. But the moral balance and leisurely pace of the earlier novel is gone. *The Burnt Offering* is a quick-paced narrative whose main object seems to be to justify the conservative attitudes of the Anglo-Indian community in its encounter with strange new forces.

The novel is so closely tied to the mood and events of its period that some

understanding of the situation is necessary before any comments can be made on the novel itself. The two new elements in India at this time were the intensification of nationalist agitation (sometimes finding its outlet in violent incidents) and the presence in Whitehall of a Secretary of State for India, John Morley, who was far more sympathetic to the views of Indian leaders than any Viceroy or Secretary for decades. The rash of bombings and demonstrations in several parts of India led to an Anglo-Indian counter-reaction and to the imposition of press censorship and the arbitrary detention of prominent nationalists who were thought by the authorities to be dangerous agitators. A period of extreme tension between 1906 and 1909 was finally relieved by the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 which gave far greater powers to official and legislative bodies on which Indians were represented.

Following her method in *The Imperialist* and *Set in Authority*, Sara Jeannette Duncan selects and shapes current events for her moral purposes. There is no counterpart to Morley in her novel, and the reforms she rather hurriedly thrusts into her final pages are far less sweeping than the actual measures. Even more important is the absence of a moderate nationalist like G. K. Gokhale, a leader of the Indian Congress who exercised a considerable influence on Morley. *The Burnt Offering* therefore gives the impression that there is no middle way between the Indians who are totally integrated into the Anglo-Indian community, and the extreme nationalists.

The two characters in the novel modeled on historical figures represent viewpoints radical enough in Miss Duncan's opinion to deserve bitterly satiric handling. As a spokesman for British advanced thought, she chooses, instead of Morley, Keir Hardie, the pioneer Socialist politician who visited India in the fall of 1907. Her representative Indian nationalist is a character based on Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the advocate of extreme measures in the cause of Indian independence.

The plot shows the sinister influence of these two radicals. The central event is the attempted assassination of the Viceroy, an act strongly encouraged by Ganendra Thakore (Tilak). Just before the attempt is made, Thakore is jailed for sedition, and Vulcan Mills (Hardie) who attempts to speak at a protest meeting is whisked away and out of the country — thereby, in Miss Duncan's judgment, preventing a riot that would have ensued if Mills had been allowed to speak. Joan Mills, Vulcan's daughter, narrowly escapes marriage with Bepin Behari Dey, Thakore's disciple and the foiled assassin. Dey is shot by the police, but not before his bomb causes John Game, the Home Secretary and Joan's unsuccessful suitor, to be thrown out of the carriage carrying the Viceroy. Game, a stoical and heroic defender of the Anglo-Indian order, dies of his injuries within a week. Joan Mills takes a somewhat longer time to realize that her self-sacrifice to the cause of India is no longer welcomed by Dey's friends, who have been frightened into conservatism.

As my summary has indicated, the plot of *The Burnt Offering* is exceedingly melodramatic, more so than the events on which it is modeled. There was an attempt on the life of the Viceroy, Lord Minto, while he was on tour, though it did not result in any loss of life. There is no record, however, of any Viceroy crying out *"Bande Mataram"* (the Indian equivalent of *"Vive le Québec libre"*) and having his audience respond by singing "God Save the Queen". This is the touching sequel to the assassination attempt in *The Burnt Offering.*

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Sara Jeannette Duncan, in this novel, finally allows herself to accept, virtually completely, the attitudes and values of the Anglo-Indian official world. The mixture of sympathy and detachment that seems to characterize her view of the English community in her previous work is swept away by the fear of a fundamental and violent attack upon the principle of British rule.

In fairness, some qualifications need to be stated. Sara Jeannette Duncan was never capable of the hysteria some Anglo-Indians could attain; for example, the *Pioneer*, a prominent newspaper, suggested that "ten [terrorists] . . . be shot for every life sacrificed."[6] Within *The Burnt Offering*, one character, Mrs. Livingstone Hooper, represents the most unthinking reactionary Anglo-Indian position, and is consistently satirized. Also, Miss Duncan's manipulation of the plot is not always as absurd as it seems. By linking Bepin Dey with Thakore, she suggests that Tilak actively supported terrorism. Tilak did in fact recommend a young man named V. D. Savarkar for a scholarship to England, and Savarkar gratefully supplied Tilak with a manual on bomb production, paralleling Bepin Dey's foreign education and relationship with Thakore.[7]

If, however, Miss Duncan's depiction of Tilak is less fanciful than it may at first appear to be, she is certainly unfair to Keir Hardie, her chief satiric target. Tilak is at least treated with respect, as an inspiring and charming, if dangerous and unscrupulous, leader of men. Keir Hardie is shown to be a vain and officious gull. A comparison of *The Burnt Offering* with Hardie's own book, *India: Impressions and Suggestions* (1909) tends to dispel this view of him and reveals much about Sara Jeannette Duncan's own political views.

Hardie's book seems moderate, restrained, and, as far as one can tell, well informed. He seems to look forward to Dominion status for India, but in the short run calls for increasing participation by Indians in their own government, and pleads for "a very little statesmanship, inspired by a very little sympathetic appreciation of the situation" which could "easily set things to rights."

One clue suggests that Sara Jeannette Duncan read Hardie's book. *The Burnt Offering* begins with a striking scene in which Bepin Dey is denied admission to a first-class railway carriage by two abusive white planters, and is rescued by Joan and Vulcan Mills. Hardie describes three such incidents at some length in his book.[8]

If Sara Jeannette Duncan did read Hardie's book, she distorted his opinion and weakened his credibility in her portrait of Vulcan Mills. On pp. 92-94 of the novel, Joan Mills and John Game discuss a visit to the famine district Joan and her father had undertaken with Ganendra Thakore as their guide. It turns out that Ganendra, in his wily fashion, had assembled villagers from all over the countryside to exaggerate pathos and arouse Mills's misguided anger. Hardie was in fact taken to a famine district by Tikal.[9] He does not mention the identity of his guide, but his account is far more restrained than that of Joan Mills. Joan says:

> "One skeleton — I shall see him always! — tried to dig in the sand for the withered rice underneath. He found a little. And he was too weak to eat it, and died with it in his hand — I saw him die. Oh, what a witness!"
>
> "I hope to God you didn't photograph him," said Game, almost roughly.
>
> "I myself couldn't — couldn't. But Mr. Thakore had brought a photographer and told him to do it. And father approved."

Hardie says:

> They brought out for my inspection handfuls of boiled rice, which was being prepared for their one and only meal, and pieces of bread, some made thick like Scotch oatmeal bannocks, and others thin, like ordinary oatmeal cake.

Game patiently explains that the famine has been caused by crop failure. Joan does not know how to refute this argument, but Hardie does:

> If it be urged that I saw them at their worst, owing to the failure of last year's crop, then the reply is that it is only a question of degree, that in normal times they are starved, and that when scarcity comes they have no resources to fall back on.

The only good thing Sara Jeannette Duncan has to say for Mills is that he does not advocate violence. Mills's moderation is the subject of a conversation between Joan and Bepin Dey:

> "He believes there is no sedition" [Bepin says].
>
> "And there is," said Joan steadily. "Of course there is. How could it be otherwise?"
>
> Bepin gave her a look of reverence.
>
> "You are, I truly believe, the more advanced of the two," said he.

As this conversation indicates, Joan, with her greater extremism, is even more villainous than her father in Sara Jeannette Duncan's estimation. Her enthusiasm for all things Indian is seen as a grave defect, leading to the inevitable and unhappy fate of racial inter-marriage.

If Vulcan Mills, Joan, Ganendra Thakore and Bepin Dey are clearly villains,

there is no less certainty about the identity of Sara Jeannette Duncan's heroes: John Game and two other administrators, Michael Foley and Fred Beauchamp, among the Anglo-Indians, and Sir Kristodas Mukerji, a conservative magistrate, his daughter Janaki and his spiritual guide Swami Yadava among the Indians.

Game is a conscientious, idealistic official. It is his misfortune that his romantic feelings are aroused for the first time by Joan Mills, who is too blinded by her passion for Indian nationalism to recognize his human qualities. His vision of their future together contains, unconsciously, all the paternalism of the British administrator:

> "I will explain everything — you will understand everything. You will find a new focus for the affairs of this perplexing country — after all, we are doing our best. You will soon feel that it is your race and your husband who is, who are, doing their best."

As well as refusing Game, Joan twists the knife by informing him that she intends to marry Bepin Behari Dey — a Bengali:

> "You are going to marry a Bengali?" he said. "Which Bengali are you going to marry?"
>
> "Mr. Bepin Behari Dey," she answered.
>
> His mouth took the line with which it was accustomed to confront a new set of circumstances. He looked not so much aghast as alert and inflexible.
>
> "No," he said, "you must not do that."
>
> "Really?"
>
> "I must speak to your father. It is impossible."

The scene as a whole leaves no doubt that Sara Jeannette Duncan's sympathies are with Game, not Joan. Events prove him right, of course: Bepin turns out to have been previously married, to intend using the marriage for propaganda purposes, and finally, to be an assassin.

In one important respect, *The Burnt Offering* is much more daring than any of Sara Jeannette Duncan's previous novels: racial inter-marriage, never so much as whispered about before, here becomes central to the plot. It also appears in another context, Janaki Mukerji's unrequited love for John Game. Game regards Janaki as a valued friend but no more, partly because of his temperamental insusceptibility to love before Joan Mills's arrival, but partly also, one suspects, because of his horror of intermarriage. Joan's engagement does bring about a painful liberalization of his attitudes. Although he spurs on the police to stop the marriage ceremony between Joan and Dey, he also indulges in meditation:

> "If she wanted to marry an Indian," he reflected, "she might at least have chosen a decent fellow. There are plenty of them."

As a lover, Game is a figure of pathos, but after his death he is elevated to the

status of a tragic martyr. Sara Jeannette Duncan delivers what amounts to a funeral elegy, which also serves as a defence of British rule:

> To this official was accorded a funeral which was almost a demonstration of loyalty to the Raj whose servant he was. A thousand students accompanied it, with every sign of sorrow; and it was an extremist politician who called the meeting to discuss how most fittingly and feelingly the memory of his services should be perpetuated by the educated classes of the land which had now no other way of thanking him . . . I find myself lending an ear to the observation of Michael Foley, who said to his wife —
>
> "If it was expedient that one man should die for the people, I fancy, as things have turned out, old John was pleased enough that it should be he."

Michael Foley, the author of the clever comparison of Game to Christ, also serves a symbolic function. He and his wife Lucy represent the kind of bright, pleasant, affectionate, normal young couple who stand for sanity and the continued British presence in India, as opposed to the fanaticism and disloyal Anglophobia of a Joan Mills.

The remaining Anglo-Saxon character of any importance is Fred Beauchamp, the Commissioner of Police for Calcutta. If John Game and Michael Foley represent the wisdom and good will of British rule, Beauchamp stands for the force upon which British authority depends. He is acutely aware of the threat to Anglo-India posed by terrorism, even if the rest of Calcutta basks in complacency. His solution to the terrorist problem seems to be to suspend all civil liberties. He has "a policeman's view [sceptical] of Courts of Justice" and his first act in the novel is to urge, successfully, the suppression of Thakore's newspaper. He calls Vulcan Mills a "damned explosive gas-bag" and says "the Criminal Code isn't big enough to cover our friend." Beauchamp plays a key role in the detention of Mills, as well as in the thrilling cops-and-robbers chase that results in the prevention of the marriage of Joan and Bepin Dey. The tone of these episodes is sadly displayed in a description of Beauchamp's state of mind following his heroic arrest of a middle-aged British Member of Parliament:

> Nor was Beauchamp late for dinner at Government House. He bragged of that a little later, as was natural. . . . As they sat down to their soup the Private Secretary leaned a little forward and looked at Beauchamp across the lady who separated them.
>
> "Got him?" he asked, with just a point of anxiety.
>
> "Got him," replied Beauchamp, with joyous calm.

It is a relief to turn from Fred Beauchamp to a consideration of the three Indian loyalist characters, who reveal Sara Jeannette Duncan's widening human sympathies, rather than her increasing militancy. Sir Kristodas Mukerji is an Indian lawyer in government service whom circumstances place in an ethical quandary.

He is a former schoolmate of Ganendra Thakore, and, beneath his ultra-loyal surface, even has slight and secret sympathy with some of Thakore's views. Yet he has to try Thakore. He finds him guilty, and gives him a harsh sentence — ten years transportation (Tilak, in exactly identical circumstances, was given only six years). His internal conflict results in feelings of guilt after the trial, which manifest themselves as sickness and lassitude.

Sir Kristodas's address to Thakore before passing sentence perhaps admits more about the merits of the independence movement than Sara Jeannette Duncan knew she was conceding. He says that the British authorities have been insensitive to Indians and Indian religion. He admits that, divorced from politics, Thakore's religious emotion might appeal to himself, as well as to others. He can only save himself by insisting upon the ethical responsibility of submitting to authority, even if that authority is alien and contrary to the religious instincts of the people over which it rules.

But if Sir Kristodas appears unsatisfactory as a philosopher, he is, nevertheless, a touching and convincing human figure. His love for his daughter, his contrary impulses toward traditional Indian religion and Western ways, his sad dignity are all sympathetically revealed. His relations with John Game, his closest British friend, are based on mutual respect and affection.

Janaki, Sir Kristodas's daughter, is even more complex in her motivations than her father. When Sir Kristodas was more of a traditionalist, he arranged her marriage in the orthodox fashion. Her "husband" died before the marriage was consummated, and her adolescence was devoted to the mourning ceremonies of a Hindu widow. When Sir Kristodas came to change his views, she was shipped off to Oxford and educated by ultra-liberal friends to be an enlightened Western woman. She returned to India, to fall in love with John Game, and also to contribute financially to the independence movement both Game and her father so bitterly oppose. Finally, when her childhood mentor, Swami Yadava, returns to the Mukerji household after several years abroad, she reverts to traditional ways and also, under Yadava's influence, becomes a spy for the authorities.

With such a variety of cultural influences at war within her, Janaki is, naturally enough, described as being in a state of continual self-doubt and torment. Yet we are also given clear indications that she possesses charm, wit and courage. Her emotions are appropriate to the situations she finds herself in, not hysterical or inexplicable. In short, Sara Jeannette Duncan has given to an Indian character the moral uncertainties and sensitive if not always successful responses to difficult situations that in previous works she had reserved for her most cherished English ladies. The distance from the concept of Indian character in *A Social Departure* is immense.

The final direction Janaki takes, along with her father and Yadava, the decision to abandon the world altogether in favour of wandering religious meditation, has

to its credit that it finally resolves the cultural confusion Janaki and Sir Kristodas both feel. But if the ending satisfies them, it does not satisfy the reader, because of the peculiar role played by Swami Yadava.

Yadava is forced to serve two totally incompatible functions in the novel. On the one hand, he is a seer who brings comfort to his disciples. On the other, he is a spy for the Government, a sort of Oriental Fred Beauchamp, who reports Mills's plans to the police and also keeps a close eye on Bepin Dey and his plots. The absurdity of this role needs no further explanation.

In his more serious aspect, Yadava is used to counter the ideological threat posed by Thakore's self-justification at his trial. Thakore provides a religious basis for Indian nationalism. Sir Kristodas attempts to reply by separating religion and politics. But this is not very convincing, and so Yadava is enlisted to make a religious argument *for* British rule:

> "England is the husband of India. We talk of the Mother as if we had but one parent." He smiled whimsically. "But we are the children of England also. Can we deny it?"

This is indeed whimsy, but Yadava is not through. It turns out that a "free fighting, kingly England" was responsible for taking India. Englishmen are the "white Kshattriyas [warrior caste] and under them the Brahmins could sit and rule and tell their tale of God." England has, however, degenerated under democracy:

> "But from a democraticized England what can we expect?" went on the priest scornfully. "Ideals of the pantry. A husband, I fear, grown indifferent."

It is, presumably, under the patronage of a revitalized and firm British government that the three mystics are able to "tell their tale of God" in the final pages.

Assassination plots, suppression of civil liberties, increasingly violent rhetoric emanating from both radicals and conservatives: it seems that Sara Jeannette Duncan did not have to live in Canada to undergo a Canadian experience. *The Burnt Offering* is interesting enough in itself as a vivid contemporary account of a crucial moment in Indian history; to a Canadian reader it is even more interesting in its anticipation of the emotions aroused by the FLQ crisis.

NOTES

[1] *Set in Authority* (1906), p. 116.

[2] G. B. Burgin, "A Chat with Sara Jeannette Duncan," *The Idler* VIII (August 1895), p. 117.

[3] Burgin, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[4] This seems to have been a common theme in Anglo-Indian fiction. *Cf.* Susanne Howe, *Novels of Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949): "Novels about India . . . are among the unhappiest books in the language. . . . As in no other novels in the world, homesickness becomes a speciality. Nowhere in literature, one is tempted to believe, is Home spelt with a larger capital letter" (pp. 32, 34).

[5] Stanley A. Wolpert, *Morley and India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 1.

[6] Stanley A. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 219.

[7] *Tilak and Gokhale*, pp. 168-69.

[8] This similarity is also noticed by S. Nagarajan, in an article published by *Journal of Canadian Fiction* (Vol. III, No. 4) after the present article had been accepted for publication.

[9] *Tilak and Gokhale*, p. 228.

THE TWITTERING MACHINE

John Ditsky

The clockwork of dawn is the toy
of God. Time when illusion's

last bats are flitting, are all
that maintains the dead day's dream

to the sleepless eye and brain.
Already cats creep homeward,

footsore furry windup playthings;
and soon the sun will pop up

bubble-swift (the skirted lady
instead of the umbrellaed man).

Gadgets and toys: watch the key
winding (*you see the machinery work*),

the gears a-whirl. At times, the ill-
oiled system squeaks: is birds.