

TRAVANCORE

THE term "remote" has sometimes been applied to the State of Travancore because, when you reach its southern termination at Cape Comorin, all Asia is behind you and there is nothing between you and the South Pole but the vast oceans; also because the ranges and groups of hills from north-west to south-east that define the inland frontier of the State appeal to the imagination as a "barrier" between Travancore and the rest of India. The feeling of remoteness, however, disappears when, one sees the cheerful and energetic crowds in the capital city, Trivandrum, and comes in contact with a pulsing life that bears the stamp of venerable tradition intermingled with signs of modernity. Indeed, the feeling of something distinctive begins as soon as the visitor enters the Travancore terrain, whether by the South Indian Railway from the east, or by road, or water from the north. The train-climb across the Ghats, reaching a height of 1,300 feet, from Shencottah, the first station in Travancore, to Punalur goes through charming forested hill-scenery, and suggests a natural gradation between the plains of the east coastal region and some delectable land ahead. The feeling of something special in front is intensified as one crosses the thirty miles of gently sloping land westward towards the ancient coast-town of Quilon, passing innumerable lines of cocoanut palms waving their fans along the margins of paddy fields that sometimes, in narrow valleys, appear to be vivid green rivers. Humanity attracts the eye with a distinctive carriage and dress. And an appealing feature appears in the landscape in the roofs of the buildings finished with tilted and curved dormer

gables that, though completely at home in their natural setting, remind one of the roof-style of eastern Asia. Whether this feature of Travancore architecture arose spontaneously or was a reaction to continental influences may be a debatable point.

History tells of brisk trade in olden times between Quilon and other points on the south-west coast, and Greece, Arabia and China. We do not see the ocean highway from the train: but we get passing glimpses of its ramifications in the "back waters" or lagoons which from time immemorial have been (to mix a metaphor) "highways" of transport for the country people. Forty miles south-east of Quilon we reach our destination, Trivandrum. Efficiency and up-to-dateness here greet us in a trim and commodious station, and offer us the latest thing in transport and residence. Tidiness and briskness are apparent; also a certain expectancy in the lined-up crowd at the station exit, which makes one feel important—for is not this the metropolis of an Indian State in which hospitality is proverbial, which eminent visitors frequent and in which the personalities of Royalty and Government may at any moment cross the general life?

History—Past and in the Making

A glimpse, necessarily brief and without detail, of the historical background and forefront of Travancore will aid us in understanding the forces that are now at work in a new era which has already registered epoch-making events.

Prior to the reign of Maharaja Martanda Varma (1729 to 1758) in a line of rulers whose succession is traced back into hoary antiquity, the State of Travancore covered a smaller area than it does at present and was bounded on the north-west by small principalities that resented its growing power. This resentment, with its threat to cultural and material progress, ultimately roused to drastic action the genius of Maharaja Martanda Varma for expansion and organisation. By 1750 he had brought the formerly independent chieftains into the common sovereignty of Travancore and established a single State from the Cochin frontier to Cape Comorin, almost two hundred miles in length and seventy-five miles at its widest part and with an area of 7,661.75 square miles. The consolidation of the State being duly accomplished, the Maharaja, emerging from the sterner duties of a KSHATRIYA (ruler and protector), became the religious devotee not only as an individual but as a King and consecrated his State to God in the form of Sri Padmanabha, the creative aspect of Vishnu, with himself and his successors in rulership as DASA (devotee) of God administering the State in the spirit of religious devotion, free from sectarian exclusiveness.

The general history of the State has been characterised by a rapid growth of population, (6,070,018—in the census of 1941), including people from outside the State to whose ancestors the broad-mindedness and hospitality of the Rulers gave refuge in their time of distress, and who are now self-conscious groups making their distinctive contribution to the working out of the problems of human organisation. In the year 1888, during the reign of His late Highness Maharaja Rama Varma, a

Legislative Council was established, and in 1904 a Representative Assembly.

The Ruling Family

The present Maharaja whose personal name is Bala Rama Varma and who is known by his star name, Sri Chitra Tirunal, was born in 1912, his mother being Her Highness Maharani Setu Parvati Bayi. He succeeded to the *Musnad* in 1924 on the death of Maharaja Rama Varma (Sri Mulam Tirunal). As the succeeding Maharaja was then only twelve years old the rulership of the State was vested in the Senior Maharani Setu Lakshmi Bayi, who acted as Regent until the assumption of power by His Highness the Maharaja in 1931. The first year of the new reign was signalised by the re-organisation of the two legislative bodies working as a bi-cameral institution, women having the same franchise and opportunities of State service as men. In 1935 His Highness marked the opening of a new cultural era in Travancore by authorising the founding of a State Gallery of Asian Painting and by opening it in person. In 1937 His Highness, at the age of twenty-five, became world-famous and took his place in history as one of the great religious reformers, by breaking the restrictions of many centuries in opening the State-controlled temples to all Hindus "by birth or religion" without any social or caste distinction. His Highness was the first of the Travancore Dynasty to travel in the West (1934). His tour of Java and Bali in 1937, accompanied by Their Highnesses, Maharani Setu Parvati Bayi and the Elaya Raja, younger brother of the Maharaja and Heir apparent, to study the ancient relationships between India and the Far East, and modern ways and means of improving village life, specially in art-crafts, was given world-wide attention in the Press, mainly because of the general feeling of expectancy of notable

action by His Highness. The result of the tour was a large addition of knowledge concerning Greater India in the past and concerning practical expedients for improving the living conditions of his people. Incidentally it brought to Travancore an admirable collection of objects of art which will not only be entertaining to the general public but of special service in the cultural development now evident in the State. The collection, though not large, is now unique and priceless owing to war conditions. On the first anniversary of the Proclamation on Temple Entry, His Highness again signalled his birthday by a notable act, this time concerning education, a problem which His Highness is known to regard with very deep concern. On November 2, His Highness proclaimed the founding of the University of Travancore with a view to fostering the distinctive and notable culture of the State, while keeping it in touch with world culture and particularly with the intention of encouraging the young to develop their creative faculties through arts and crafts in order to put their skill and culture to use in serviceable vocations. Such education is induced by the necessity of the State's developing in industrial and craft resources; and the sending into general life of annual groups of well-informed and well-trained young men and women necessitates the development of opportunities for occupation. These matters the State has taken thoroughly in hand, with the inspiration and wisdom of His Highness and the experience and humanitarianism of the Dewan.

Her Highness Maharani Setu Parvati-Bayi, mother of the Maharaja, has been to His Highness one of his best counsellors and helpers in combining the idealistic concern of Indian motherhood with extraordinary intellectual gifts, wide knowledge

through travel, experience and study and a deep interest in every detail regarding the betterment of human conditions. In times of difficulty, Her Highness makes personal studies of conditions with a view to helping towards their amelioration. She is particularly interested in the uplift of women and children, and was President of the All-India Women's Conference in 1936, presiding over its session at Trivandrum in December 1935 and the Seventh Biennial Conference of the National Council of Women in India at New Delhi in November 1940. Her Highness is also an artist in music, skilled in playing the *veena* and keenly interested in the movement for bringing the arts into school education.

His Highness the Elayaraja, Prince Martanda Varma, is now in his twenty-third year, and charms all with whom he comes in contact by his eager cheerfulness mixed with a dignified reserve. He takes as much interest in his studies as in riding and games, and, in the 1943 examination of the University of Travancore, graduated, with a first class in Sanskrit. He shares the Maharaja's pleasure in photography. During Their Highnesses' tour in Java and Bali the Elaya Raja took many photographs of scenes and incidents. He combines engaging simplicity with a serious interest in affairs, and has an uncommonly keen appreciation of a joke.

Her Highness Princess Kartika Tirunal, sister to His Highness the Maharaja, shares her illustrious mother's interest in matters pertaining to social welfare and has a particular personal charm of her own. She has a special gift for music, and her interest in Indian dance has led to its revival in the State. Like His Highness the Maharaja, the First Princess enjoys a game of tennis. Her daughter Princess Pooyam

Tirunal was born to her in September 1942.

Trivandrum—The State Metropolis

The capital of Travancore State had for some centuries been situated at Padmanabhapuram, thirty-three miles south of Trivandrum. But the extension of the State by Maharaja Martanda Varma the Great caused the seat of Government to be moved by him some two centuries ago to Trivandrum, a prosperous town growing around a temple famous from classical times. Of the original style of the temple there is no record extant, but it became a typical Dravidian structure in the hands of restorers from the great temple centres of South India. The Maharaja himself took a personal interest in the construction and sculptural adornment of the temple. Formerly it contained mural paintings of a distinctive kind, but some of these were destroyed by fire a few years ago. Others have been faithfully copied, and are exhibited to public view in the Sri Chitralayam.

The temple of Sri Padmanabhaswami is the central point of the former fortified town of Trivandrum and still the life-centre of the Hindu population of the capital. A drive through the Fort gives the visitor glimpses of most of the phases of life in an Indian city in which modernity is trying to assimilate itself with a long and distinctive tradition. Men, women and children congregate around the temple tank, washing, gossiping, playing. Cheerful crowds fill the streets, buying and selling. Brahmins go by on the service of religion. Itinerant musicians pick up a slender livelihood. A bullock-cart blocks the way of a motor car or *vice-versa*.

Inside the Fort area are also the palaces of former Rulers, which were closed by custom on their demise. The oldest palaces

delight the artistic sense with their wood-carved doors, pillars, beams, ceilings and gables in exquisite designs and groupings. Time introduced various features and variations in the structure and adornment of other palaces. Time also led to the expansion of the small fortified town into a spacious city of 128,365 inhabitants. The home of the present Maharaja, an elegant adaptation of traditional architectural forms to modern requirements, stands in beautiful grounds on the northern edge of the capital and commands a wide view of richly wooded and cultivated country backed by the distinctive mountains that form the eastern boundary of the State. His Highness' daily visit to the temple, as Sri Padmanabha Dasa, takes him through the salutations of his people, from Kaudiar Palace across the main extent of the city and back.

Art Galleries

With the succession of the present Maharaja and the building of Kaudiar Palace during his minority, the Fort Palaces became less personal and some of them assumed an archaeological interest. The Ranga Vilasom Palace was transformed under His Highness' command into a gallery and museum of State portraits, paintings, carvings, Chinese ceramics, court costumes, jewellery, weapons and effigies in wood of the chief characters of the world-famed indigenous dance, Kathakali. Recently the Ranga Vilasom Palace Museum acquired a remarkable collection of old South Indian bronzes.

Simultaneously with the founding of the Ranga Vilasom Palace gallery and museum, His Highness, in September 1935, opened the Sri Chitralayam (Temple of Painting) in the lovely Museum Gardens. The Gallery presents a survey of the history of painting in India, together with

examples of Tibetan, Balinese, Chinese and Japanese painting. The gallery also houses some of the best western-style paintings of Raja Ravi Varma. It is also unique in presenting examples of the mural art of India from prehistoric times, down through the Buddhist era of Ajanta, to recent times in Travancore and Cochin States. To these have been added in a small building near-by, formerly known as the Museum Library, now the Museum Annexe, as a result of His Highness' tour of the Netherlands East Indies in 1937, a collection of figures used in the Javanese shadow-play and of masks used in the Balinese dance-drama. Through the kindness of the Government of the Netherlands East Indies plaster casts from ninth century Buddhist panels of the Borobudur and tenth century Hindu sculptures from the Prambanan temple, both in Central Java, were added. There are also examples of Javanese, Sumatran and Chinese wood and metal work and porcelain. The entrance hall contains a superb set of paintings by the famous Russian artist, poet and philosopher, Nicholas Roerich and his gifted son Svetoslav Roerich.

The Museum

Near the Chitralayam, and conspicuous in terraced gardens on an eminence, is the State Museum, one of the first institutions of the kind in India. The nucleus of the future museum was formed in 1853, but the present building was opened in 1880. With much artistic taste and respect for tradition the architect combined the characteristic gabled roofs of Travancore, in various grouping and angles, with bold but never vulgar colourfulness both outside and inside the building. It is true that there is less floor-space in relation to height inside than modern museums demand; but it is probable that most visitors, if they noticed such a matter, would regard the loftiness

and beauty of the central hall as ample compensation. The Museum contains examples of the art-crafts of the State, and its popularity as a resort for entertainment and instruction is shown by the fact that, roughly averaged about 400,000 visitors visit it annually. In a city of 128,365 inhabitants, this means that, even if each inhabitant paid the Museum one visit a year, there would still be about three lakhs of people from outside the city who enjoyed it.

From its foundation until November 1942, the Museum was an omnibus (all-inclusive) institution, housing examples of various arts, crafts, industries, toys, implements, instruments, arms, stuffed and skeletal animals, birds and fish and models of human beings. But the growth of the exhibits led to overcrowding and necessitated reorganisation. Gracious permission to use the commodious Palace Hall at Shankumukham Beach as a repository for the specimens of natural history, pending the building of a museum for them, led to the setting free of much wall and floor space in the Government Museum, and its transformation in stages during 1943 into a most attractive centre of Indian art-crafts. The acquisition, during the year, of a large collection of South Indian bronzes put the Museum in all but the first place in India in this respect. A notable feature of the Museum is a wing devoted to Travancore wood-carving, including an entire temple car (*ratha*) of over 200 years ago, artistically designed and richly ornamented. A number of plaster casts of stone sculptures in various temples give an opportunity to non-Hindu visitors to see something of the masterpieces of Travancore craftsmanship. Local jewellery, music instruments, ivory-work, kufftari and metal-work are also exhibited.

Admittedly the Museum occupies a favourable position in being located in the Public Gardens, where in the luxuriousness induced by the generous warmth and moisture of a tropical location between high hills and the ocean, shady trees, lovely flowers, and refreshing waters are a perpetual temptation to enter. But perhaps the chief draw is the 'Zoo, so picturesquely located in the Public Gardens, with commodious cages and runs for the animals, and a special open-air compound for the tigers. From the small private collection of the Maharaja in 1859 the Zoo has grown to a population of 493.

The Observatory

Just outside the Public Gardens two buildings attract attention on eminences between which one of the main roads of the city runs. One is the Kanakakunnu Palace which is used mainly for recreation and entertainment. Here large scale functions, such as the State Banquet during the Birthday celebrations are held. The other building is the State Observatory, which arose in 1886 out of the interesting fact that the magnetic equator crosses Travancore. The Observatory is both astronomical and meteorological, and the former department looks after the preparation of the Malayalam Almanac.

On a lower level, on the same road, directly opposite the Government Museum, a long range of public offices, recently built, preserves the distinctive "Malabar gable" type of roofing. The towers, seen from the various points of view, especially from the Observatory Hill, fall into pleasing groups. Between the Public Offices and Observatory a piece of formerly waste ground has become a garden surrounding a marble statue of Her Highness Maharani Setu Parvati Bayi by the late Rao Bahadur M. S. Nagappa. In another garden, in the

Fort, a statue of His Highness the Maharaja, in "heroic" dimensions, by Sri D. P. Roy Choudhuri, makes a notable object in celebration of the Temple Entry Proclamation.

Fort Palaces

But the most notable group of buildings mainly, though not wholly, in the Kerala roof style with wood carved gables, is the succession of Palaces in the Fort. These give fascinating juxtapositions of shapes and sizes, not the least interesting of which is the curious optical illusion of a roof whose end gables, seen from one point of view appear both to slope in one direction, and from another point of view, both in the opposite direction, whereas in fact they are artistically balanced one against the other. The most imposing facade in the group is that of the great palace of Sri Swati Tirunal Maharaja (1829—1847). This masterpiece of architectural purity and decoration in wood-carving can now be seen by all and sundry through the recent removal of an old wall that had survived its purpose, and the transforming of an ugly drain into a crystal running water course. The interior of the palace is richly decorated with beautiful wood-work.

Other buildings having a certain architectural distinctiveness will attract the eye of the visitor; some, like the Golf Pavilion maintaining the Kerala tradition in roofing; others like the University College, the Public Library and the School of Arts, the new University Buildings, indicating various degrees of influence from outside, the most pronounced of which is the Graeco-Roman Huzur Cutcherry (Secretariat). A recently created 'stadium' vies in size with those in other great cities. But no matter where one goes in the city, nature, in the form of paddy fields and palm groves, intermingles with human habitations with delightful

freshness ; for Trivandrum has been happily set on hills and dales that give an attractive variety to the city's lay-out ; and it has the additional advantage of being only five miles away from the coast and the perpetual energizing rhythm and ozone of the Arabian Sea.

Excursions—Local and Southwards

For those who can spare time there are attractive excursions of varied length. A couple of hours can be most pleasantly spent in a visit to the reservoir at Aruvikara, the head-works of the city's water supply system, twelve miles from the city, with its gleaming and chanting waters backed by picturesque elevations and its shoal of 'sacred fish' that dart and leap and swirl after pieces of cocoanut thrown from the bridge.

Kovalam, about ten miles from the city is a fine bathing beach. A high rocky promontory jutting out to the sea makes bathing in the sheltered bight perfectly safe. There is a campshed at Kovalam where visitors can stay.

An hour and a half by car takes one to Ponmudi through rich agricultural and forest scenery to a hill-top 3,000 feet up, from which there is a vast panorama of wooded mountains.

Processions

Every year Trivandrum witnesses a number of colourful processions in which His Highness the Maharaja takes part. There is the Dasarha procession in October when His Highness drives in the golden royal chariot drawn by six horses, the Birthday procession when His Highness in the simple loin cloth of a devotee is borne in a centuries-old ivory palanquin to worship at various shrines in the Fort area and the biannual *Arat* procession when His Highness, in temple costume and bearing the Sword of State, escorts the images of Sri Padmanabha, Sri Krishna

and Sri Narasimha for ceremonial bath in the sea. The *Arat* procession is the culmination of a ten-day festival in the Sri Padmanabhaswami Temple, held twice a year, once in October-November and again in March-April. The Vettai procession conducted on the ninth night commemorates the occasion of Sri Padmanabha going out for a hunt. The procession goes in absolute silence to the appointed place, where His Highness shoots one or two arrows to hit some cocoanuts, and returns accompanied with music and pipes, signifying a successful hunt. Another procession is in November when His Highness drives in State to the house of a Malayala Brahmin Jenmi (landlord) one of whose ancestors rendered signal service to the then Ruler of Travancore and asked as reward the honour of an annual visit to his abode by the Maharaja and his successors. In all these processions the State Forces—infantry, cavalry and artillery—in their glittering ceremonial uniforms, and high officers of State take part.

Cape Comorin

Few would care to miss a visit to "the Cape" fifty-four miles south-east from the capital by a direct, broad, well-laid, concrete road, the longest of its kind in India that passes from the greens of palm and paddy to the grey grandeur of the mountain range on the left, and ultimately the vast spectacle of the Indian Ocean seen from the most southerly point of the mainland of Asia. Humanity is with the traveller all the way not only in the busy towns passed through, but without intermission along the trunk road ; for in Travancore the north-south roads carry the daily life of the coastal strip with its thick population whose homes are spaced out, singly or in small groups, with no lonely intervals between.

Cape Comorin is one of the ancient places of religious pilgrimage of all India.

The venerable temple of the Virgin Goddess, Kanya Kumari, stands on the edge of the ocean. Its image is judged, by those who know, as one of the most beautiful in India. The Cape is also noted among Christians for the work of St. Francis Xavier, and the rock to which Swami Vivekananda swam for meditation is pointed out. The beautiful little temple of Guhanathaswami is worth a walk from the hotel to see. Students of archaeology will be interested in its inscriptions. Buses ply between Trivandrum and the Cape. Day refreshments and stop-over accommodation can be arranged, either in the Rest House or the Cape Hotel which is run by the State.

A short diversion northwards brings the tourist to the seaside fort of Vattakotta, built about the middle of the 18th century during the time of Maharaja Martanda Varma. The view from the walls of Vattakotta fort along the coast is very impressive. Valuable mineral substances are retrieved from the sand at the foot of the fort.

Suchindram

To members of the Hindu community Suchindram temple is one of the great achievements of religion and art, and a visit to it esteemed as a high spiritual experience. Though built in the Dravidian manner its original centre goes back into antiquity. The largeness and the balanced proportions of its great halls and corridors are made doubly impressive by the enormous monolithic pillars sculptured into a number of accessory pillars with richly carved bases and capitals. For years these marvellous achievements had been obscured by white wash; but a command of His Highness Sri Padmanabha Dasa, through the Devaswom Department, has recently put an end to this inartistic and unnecessary practice in all the temples of the State except those under private control. The result is a revelation not only of the beauty

of the original shown but of the genius of the craftsmen in composition, idea, and workmanship. There are also in Suchindram temple, besides the deific figures of Hindu Iconography, stone portraits and metal images of high distinction. A scheme of renovation of this noble fane is proceeding.

Padmanabhapuram the former Capital

Either on the way to the Cape or on the return trip a call must be made at the Palace of Padmanabhapuram. Here was the centre of Government for some centuries prior to the rise of Trivandrum, when the frontier of Travancore State was moved northwards from Quilon to Cochin by Maharaja Martanda Varma in the eighteenth century. The stout walls of the fort testify to former strength. But the place itself is a monument of kindly Keralan architectural beauty, with its generous lay-out, its carved pillars, its gables and roof beams, its commodious passages, spacious gardens, and its central assemblage of gabled roofs surmounted by the four-storeyed, pagoda-like structure which was the home of a succession of history-making rulers.

The Murals

In the upper storey of this building is a treasure of mural art which for two hundred years was shut away from general sight, and only recently began to attract its true share of attention. Now it is spoken of by visitors who know its value as 'the Ajanta of the South', not, of course, in size but in its almost perfectly preserved disclosure of the mural art of an era—probably the fifteenth or sixteenth century—with its implications to the student concerning manners and customs, religious ideas and artistic technique and values. Every inch of the walls of the room bears its pictorial record of the Hindu religious imagination in notable figuration, eloquent line, pleasing colour, expressing profound ideas. Within

the palace precinct is also a choice Navaratri mandapam and shrine, a fine example of Vijayanagar architecture and sculpture with valuable aesthetical and historical suggestions.

Adjacent to the palace is a group of three small houses, built in wood, but roofed in modern tiles that probably displays, in the course of its existence, the original small "Dutch" types of two centuries ago. Careful restoration has brought to light a masterpiece of delicate wood-carving in lintels and door-posts, pillars, ceilings and cornices.

Padmanabhapuram palace is, therefore, a remarkable assemblage of indigenous examples of the major arts of architecture (Kerala and Vijayanagar,) stone sculpture, wood carving and wall painting. These are freely accessible to the students of the inherent artistic and craft genius of Travancore as it was two centuries and more ago. (Their development was a matter of centuries previously as the work stood complete when Government moved from the place to Trivandrum in 1750). They are also potent inspirations and instructions to artists and artificers of to-day in the characteristics, qualities and details of art creation that are fundamental to the true art expression of Travancore. With high consideration, notwithstanding the former use of certain parts of buildings at Padmanabhapuram palace for religious purposes, the whole congeries of buildings and their contents have been made available for public inspection without any distinction, even to the point of refined thoughtfulness of restoring the old shrine of Saraswati Devi to its original state, with an image of the Goddess but without conservation so that followers of all faiths may have the opportunity of seeing the interior of a Hindu shrine to the deific patroness of culture. The Cutcherry attached to the Palace had

recently been transformed into what may be a unique museum of inscription stones. from all parts of the State, some of great historic importance. The preservation and publication of those are in the hands of the State Department of Archaeology.

Thiruvattar and Thirunandikkara

A detour of four miles from near the twenty-fifth milestone from Trivandrum on the Cape Road will reward the visitor with a sight of the high frontage and picturesque natural surroundings of the temple of Thiruvattar that was famous in the South Indian song twelve centuries ago. Formerly it was a centre not only of religious devotion but of art. Stone pillars and sculptures of great impressiveness have withstood time and climate; but sensitive wood-carving of almost minute delicacy, and fine external wall paintings have suffered from heat and moisture and dirt. It is hoped, however, that some of these may be brought back to their original condition through intelligent restoration which has recently been undertaken. For those who cannot see the works of art in the temple itself, a glimpse is provided by four wooden images of remarkable vividness, posture and craftsmanship, that had been discarded in the temple many years ago, and, discovered in recent investigation, now stand in the wood-craft wing of Trivandrum Museum, though in some cases as armless as the immortal Venus de Milo, as indications of a craft that had along its own lines reached mastery.

A further five mile extension of the detour takes us to the cave-temple of Thirunandikkara, which, though small, was obviously a centre of superb wall painting in or shortly after the ninth century after Christ. Fragments had been found and copied by the Department of Archaeology in 1933; but a careful scrutiny of the seven

panels of the mandapam leading to the Shiva shrine disclosed other traces; and expert knowledge and skill ultimately rescued from oblivion sections of five panels showing an art in all respects equivalent to that of Ajanta just about the termination of that classical era. Copies of the traces still on the walls of the mandapam are hung in the mural section of the Sri Chitra-layam, Trivandrum.

Land-ways and Water-ways

The coast road northwards from Trivandrum through Alleppey to the frontier at Arur is sandy and palm-shaded with little temples at intervals that preserve the Kerala touch in building and roofing. At Arur the traveller transfers across a narrow strip of water to another conveyance in Cochin territory. An alternative is a motor boat that proceeds along the quiet backwaters on the shores of which great "chinese fishing nets" are set at intervals, and groups of people prepare coir from cocoanuts for the local mat and carpet-weaving industries. Broad-gauge trains now run from Ernakulam to Madras.

The Main Central Road through Kottayam is more agricultural than the coast road. Churches at intervals call up historical suggestions as to the migrations and intermingling of peoples. And everywhere in Travancore there are commodious and busy schools for boys and girls, for the State stands first in education in India. There are two pleasing incidents on this route in the crossing of rivers on a ferry consisting of a platform carried on two country boats and poled across. All the way there are delightful glimpses of water-ways and broad lagoons with their picturesque *Vallams* (country boats) and people engaged in all kinds of rural pursuits for a livelihood.

A journey by the backwaters in an ordinary ferry steamer, if not luxurious, is a delight to the eye in its vistas of exquisite natural scenery. It can be done either slowly by *Vallam* or rapidly by motor boat and is a joy all time either way.

To visit Travancore and not explore the beauty of her backwaters is to miss a wonderful experience. The visitor may board a steam launch at Cochin and do the journey up to Quilon. Luxuriant tropical scenery and groves of cocoanut palms greet one everywhere as the boat steams through lakes, lagoons and narrow canals.

En route are interesting places like Vaikom and Alleppey. The former is famous for its temple of Mahadeva and the annual *Ashtami* festival in November-December.

Alleppey is the principal sea-port and commercial metropolis of Travancore. The number of beautiful canals which run through it, and the presence of the sea and the Vambanad Lake in the neighbourhood have earned for it the appellation of the Venice of the East.

The boat journey from Alleppey to Quilon is even more fascinating than the one between Cochin and Alleppey. The way lies through palm-fringed canals, and rivers and narrow lakes, and one can watch the activities of the people on either bank.

Quilon stands on the Ashtamudi Lake (the lake with eight creeks), the Loch Lomond of Travancore, with its belt of palm trees and beautiful promontories of red laterite and china clay, breaking the monotony of green. Prominent on the shores of the lagoon are the Thevally Palace and the Government House.

Quilon is a very ancient port. The Phoenicians, Arabs, Persians, Greeks and Chinese have traded with it in their day.

The Chinese established a colony here and manufactured exquisite porcelainware.

About 9 miles north-east of Quilon is Kundara where large deposits of china clay occur, and where a Clay Refining and Porcelain Factory has been established by the Government of Travancore.

The Factory is one of the largest of its kind in the East and ranks among the most profitable industrial undertakings in Travancore.

Kundara

Situated on a white cliff overlooking the palm-fringed Ashtamudi lake, Kundara, the centre of the new industry has ideal surroundings, having in the neighbourhood almost inexhaustible deposits of excellent china clay, and possessing very good transport facilities by road, rail and water. Natural springs provide a plentiful supply of fresh water for washing the clay.

The Factory is equipped with the latest machinery and washing plant and has a capacity of 500 tons of clay per month.

The journey from Quilon to Trivandrum can be done by train as has already been described. It can be done also by road or in a country boat on the canal.

Half way between Quilon and Trivandrum is Warkalai or Janardhanam, famous as a place of Hindu pilgrimage and for the mineral waters gushing out of the towering cliffs on the beach. Famous, too, are its tunnels which have been bored through high hills to complete the line of water communication between Quilon and Trivandrum.

Further south is Anjengo, the first English settlement on the Travancore coast. The fortress built by the English in 1690 may still be seen at Anjengo as also the inscribed tombstones over the graves of the

early settlers. Robert Orme, the historian, was born here in 1728. Mrs. Daniel Draper, the Eliza of Sterne's well-known poem of that name also was born at Anjengo.

Mountains and Forests

While travelling along the populous and luxuriant coastal strip which carries the main life of Travancore State, there is a constant invitation, or perhaps challenge, in the range of high mountains that runs from north-west to south-east. This range is an obvious natural boundary that could not help both making and modifying human history; not an absolute barrier, but a line of definition. Hence it has come about that Travancore has preserved a special distinctiveness in human organisation, character and culture, to which reference will be made later.

Practically half the State area is mountainous, and a third of the State area is reserved forest. Owing to the combination of warmth and moisture during the major part of the year, growth on the mountains is extremely rich and varied. All kinds of valuable timber are plentiful; and in the commodious shelter thus provided numerous species of animals flourish. At Periyar Lake, 2,900 feet above sea level, a large game reserve gives the visitor intimate glimpses of the natural life of such creatures as the elephant, bison, various kinds of deer, boar, bear, panther, leopard and perhaps a tiger.

In the mountain region human beings also live, little influenced by civilisation. They pass their days in simple but arduous labour to keep body and soul together, clearing jungle, sowing and harvesting, sometimes for themselves, sometimes for others; observing tribal and clan manners and customs, blending primitive tradition

with later developed religious observance ; and offering attractive material for the study of the anthropologist.

Culture and Education

The distinctive climatic and geological features of Travancore, and its relative separation from the rest of India by the range of high and thickly forested mountains that form its eastern frontier, enabled the genius of the Kerala coast to develop its own forms and qualities of expression and its own social polity, with a minimum of extraneous influence. Socially it developed the matriarchal system in which succession of position and property descended in the female line. Religiously, Travancore is predominantly Hindu, though the proportion of non-Hindu elements has grown to be one-third of the population. Buddhism and Jainism, which, like Hinduism, used Indian images and designs in their religious culture, have left a few fragments to attest their artistic skill in the remote past. Christianity and Islam in later times brought their contributions to the general culture of the State, but have not as yet made any notable Travancorean contribution to the arts as history records of the Mughal Empire in Northern India and its miniature painting, or of the marvellous output of Christian sculpture and painting in mediaeval Europe. It may, therefore, be said, without disparagement to other cultures, that the main contribution to Kerala art has come from the extraordinary prolificacy and variety of indigenous Hindu creative expression.

The temples of Travancore are not places of worship only ; they are the main treasures of the art-production of the State ; they are also themselves works of art, and present a fascinating study in the contrast between the simple Kerala and elaborate Dravidian styles of architecture.

It is natural that, in a richly forested country, wood carving should have attained

special popularity and excellence. Such carving is not, however, confined to temples and palaces. Where modern utilitarianism and commonplaceness have not ousted artistic beauty, excellent carving can still be seen—for example, in the pillars and walls of Nair houses ; in the dormer gables that are so prominent and attractive a feature of Kerala roofs ; even in so modest a location as on the cross beams under the humble country-cart, and more dramatically on the bows and sterns of "snake boats." Stone and metal have been worked into impressive and beautiful forms in superbly sculptured pillars and images, lamps and implements. Ivory carving is a flourishing industry ; kufthari (silver-wire) inlay on metal is practised ; so is lacquer-work. These crafts are carried out in the University School of Arts and in the many workshops of private individuals.

The ancient mural art in Travancore temples and palaces remained unknown to the world until eight years ago, while the western-style painting of a single Travancorean, Raja Ravi Varma, carried the name of himself and the State into every cottage in India in colour reproductions of his paintings of Puranic lore. With the opening of the Sri Chitralayam a more balanced view of Travancore painting has been made possible. The talents of the Kilimanoor family, of which Raja Ravi Varma was the most widely known figure, in western oil and water-colour painting are given a fitting place in the history of art in India ; and the growing collection of copies of murals from Padmanabbapuram palace, long shut away from sight, and from the temples of the State, offer rich material for future research in the continuity of Indian mural painting from the Ajantan era, and its transformation from the Buddhist to the Hindu genius down to a century ago in Travancore.

The most widely known contribution of Travancore to the drama and dance is the

Kathakali, but various forms of folk dance-drama are also practised. A school of Indian dance, the Sri Chitrodaya Nartakalayam, has been created under Government auspices. Music has been adorned by the genius of Maharaja Swati Thirunal who is said to be not inferior to the great Thiagaraja. In his name an Academy of Music has been founded. And in thinking of cultural achievement it must not be forgotten that it was in Travancore that the immortal Sri Sankaracharya took birth.

In general education Travancore State occupies a relatively high position, indeed the highest, in India. According to the latest departmental report (1943-44) 821,840 pupils or 13.5 per cent. of a total population of 6,07,00,18 millions, were attending school. Of these 471,698 were boys and 350,142 girls, an eloquent indication of the attention given to the education of the latter though this would naturally be expected in a country in which matriarchy prevailed from time immemorial. Another striking feature of education in Travancore is shown in the social stratification of the students. Of the 821,840 pupils in schools, about six-sevenths were of the working classes, and the rest were children of the professional classes. Of the working class pupils, half came from agricultural families, a fourth were children of casual labourers, and the remaining fourth were children of parents engaged in trades, crafts, domestic service, and a number of non-descript occupations. The nation-wide provision of mass education is shown by the fact that 708,140 out of the total of 821,840 pupils were in Malayalam and Tamil schools. The remainder were in English and special schools. In the Colleges of which there are ten in the State, there were 4,392 students, the largest number 1,349 being in the University College, Trivandrum. Women students in Colleges numbered 884 of whom 420 were

in the Women's College, and the remainder in other Colleges. Women graduates are attaining high positions in the State services, the appointment of a lady to the office of Senior District Munsiff having been the first of its kind in India. She is now promoted as Judge.

Formerly Travancoreans desiring higher education had to submit to the curricula and examinations of the University of Madras. But the development of political and economic circumstances, and the increasingly felt necessity of conserving and fostering the distinctive culture of the Kerala region, led to the Proclamation by His Highness the Maharaja on November 2, 1937, of the University of Travancore, to seek to meet the necessities of the people of the State both in regard to general culture and the urgent matter of the employment of its large body of educated citizens of both sexes. Technological Institutions were created, and a Labour Corps.

The total expenditure on education in 1943-44 was Rs. 63.47 lakhs.

Matters Material

While it is true that the things which the future treasures as mementos of a nation's life and achievement are not the things of daily necessity but the expressions of its creative imagination, it is also true that if matters material are neglected, matters cultural will suffer. In matters material Travancore State is blessed by natural abundance, and also by high desire and capacity for turning such abundance to human use to the fullest extent possible.

Owing to plentiful moisture and a high average temperature, growth in Travancore is rapid and generous. But nature is not perfectly uniform in the distribution of her gifts. Occasionally she sends more rain than is required, occasionally less; war elsewhere has also created problems of food-sufficiency and equable distribution.

These contingencies are matters of solicitude to the Government. For the conservation and equable distribution of water over a cultivable area of 56,000 acres by 327 miles of irrigation channels, a net sum of Rs. 81.26 lakhs had been spent. Another sum of Rs. 57 lakhs had been spent on the securing of a supply of 372 million gallons a year of water to the capital.

Other adventures in nation-building include the Pallivasal Hydro-Electric Scheme for the distribution of electric light and power over a wide area. This is not only bringing clean and cheap lighting to numerous homes and institutions, and reducing dependence on oil supplies that are subject to price fluctuation and to possible stoppage in times of war abroad, but is making available electric power for the development of both cottage crafts and organized industries. In furtherance of this scheme a public loan of fifty lakhs at $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. was floated in 1935. The fact that the applications from all parts of India amounted to 280 lakhs, almost six times the required amount, is an indication of the high financial reputation that the State then enjoyed. It still enjoys it, as was shown by the oversubscription within a few minutes of opening the list of the Rs. 3-crore loan that Government has recently raised as an anti-inflationary measure and to finance post-war reconstruction schemes.

Other schemes for the increase of employment and the decrease of unnecessary external expenditure are the manufacture of rubber and of ceramics, plywood, glass, aluminium, sulphuric acid, potassic chemicals, fertilizers, rayon, etc. Agricultural and forest improvements are subjects of constant research and will be given special attention in the chemistry and technology

departments of the new University. Road transport by Government motor-bus services has been established.

Agriculture is the chief activity of the State. Out of an area of 49,03,520 acres nearly half is under cultivation. Of this cultivated area 6,45,400 acres are under paddy which is the staple food-grain of the people; and 5,89,000 acres under the product that constitutes one-third of the export trade of the State, namely, cocoanuts. These two products are indigenous to the coastal region, and are the most familiar feature of the landscape. On the hillsides rubber covers almost 1,04,400 acres, and tea plant almost 77,000. The vast and rich forest area has already been referred to.

Out of this natural productivity and human industry, Travancore has built up an import and export trade of Rs. 25.25 crores a year.

The Census of 1941 showed a total population of 60,70,018 (males 30,45,102 and females 30,23,916) an increase of 9,74,045 in ten years, with the serious implication of housing, feeding, educating and employing so large an additional number of individuals on a piece of earth whose area remains fixed. To meet the problems involved in this increase the Government is giving its attention to the only available means, namely, the increasing of the productivity of the State in order that there may be a greater amount of things material to deal with, and the increasing of capacity and opportunity of employment of the people in order that the means of purchase may be more widely distributed. This calls for great wisdom and foresight on the part of the Government and patriotic responsiveness on the part of the people.