

was placed on an open cart and drawn by stately camels in the same direction that we were going. My first impressions of the picturesque red sandstone gates hewn out of the hillsides at the entrance to the city were delightful. A ship cut out of the same red sandstone, and inhabited, came to be one of the landmarks on our daily drives. Our way lay up a winding road (without any trees to protect us from the brilliant sun, which was already getting hot, though it was barely ten o'clock in the morning), and climbed a fairly steep hill, leaving the whitewashed city behind us. Grand old carved wooden gates opened on our arrival at the palace, where we had to alight from our carriage and enter pretty sedan chairs borne on the shoulders of men wearing the palace livery.

Once within the precincts, there was much to admire, but our enthusiasm was checked when we inquired as to the red impressions of several hands on the inside walls of the palace gates, and were told that they were made in olden times, when suttee was in vogue, by the wives of the dead Maharajah, then on his way to his burial. The wives followed the funeral cortege on elephants, and as they passed out of the gates for the last time they dipped their hands in blood and left their impressions on the walls in token of farewell.

We had to pass through six smaller gates before we were admitted to the courtyard off which the Maharani's apartments opened. Here the Prime Minister of State, a very handsome and courtly gentleman, received us, and assured us of the honour we were conferring by coming to their assistance. After seeing that we were accommodated with chairs, he left us to inform the Maharani of our arrival, and we were at leisure to admire our picturesque surroundings and the pigeons sunning themselves in the freshness of the morning. The Maharani was a bright, black-eyed little woman, with beautifully braided hair, lips scarlet with the pan-sopari she was constantly chewing, and typical Eastern dress of lovely bright-coloured silks, with the daintiest velvet heelless slippers embroidered with gold thread. Her fingernails and toe-nails were pink with henna, and her eyes dark with *bhol*, but her teeth, which were blackened in token of royalty, spoilt what might have been a charming picturesque whole.

She greeted us stiffly and had us conducted almost immediately to our young patient.

Our patient had been removed from the Zenana to the Audience Chamber, opening off an upper court, tessellated with marble, and it had beautiful marble pillars supporting a ceiling painted in gorgeous relief. The walls of this Audience Chamber were also painted in designs of fruit, flowers, and birds of every hue. Seeing some of the panels unfinished, we inquired the reason, and were horrified when we were told that it was well before completing his task. If he had lived to finish the work his eyes would have been put out with hot irons and his hands been cut off, so that he would never again be able to paint anything. It was to be his one *pièce de résistance*.

The Audience Chamber proved a lofty and gorgeous ward for our little patient, who looked rather frightened when she saw us; but we soon made friends with her and her elder sister, who was allowed to pay daily visits and play with the invalid.

We found elaborate arrangements had been made for our accommodation, and as there were no actual rooms, portions of the courtyard were partitioned off with heavy khus-khus screens, and enormous double bedsteads with mosquito-nets (for which we were very thankful later) took up most of the room in these impromptu apartments.

The old palace, though hundreds of years old, was in a state of beautiful preservation, and we were the first English (or, as they called us, white) women to sleep within its walls. Of course, everyone thought us very brave, but we were ignorant of our danger, if there was any, and the novelty of our surroundings did away with any qualms on the subject. The Prince of this State was loyal to the British Government, and though the English residents in Z— rather pitied us, we found much to interest and amuse within the precincts of the Pearl Palace. Bats in thousands had made their generations among the quaint and beautiful architecture, and they could not understand the innovation of Khus-khus screens, against which they came in contact, as they skimmed, as of old, along the passages and came to grief. Many a morning we issued from our chambers to find heaps of dead bats piled a foot or two high outside the screens. Often a bat came to anchor on the mosquito-net, and it was then we were thankful for the protection they afforded us from bats and the inevitable mosquito, with its monotonous song of "Brother, I come; brother, I come."

Pigeons cooed us to distraction, and a queer kind of weasel, with a beautiful brown fur coat, used to pay us visits at night and create a great commotion among the inhabitants of the palace, all the men turning out with rifles to shoot poor little brownie, who had a reputation for pouncing on sleeping natives.

Our little princess was six years old, and proved a charming patient. With the most serious face she used to tell us of the games she loved to play with her brothers, especially the eldest, who was evidently her favourite. At one time we thought she never would laugh, but when we got used to her own particular patois we understood her better, and she was as merry as a cricket when she forgot that she was a little princess. Her ladies-in-waiting (she had four, but only two continued their duties during her illness) took a vow when her illness first set in that they would neither wash themselves nor change their garments until her recovery was assured, but as the infectious fever from which the princess was suffering lasted six weeks, we had to represent the necessity for ablutions and change of raiment as essential to the welfare of the patient as well as themselves, if they wished to continue in attendance.

In addition to the daily visits of the lady doctor, who lived at some distance in the English colony, there were two native doctors resident in the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)