

Dawn

3/1/05

The city as it was Lahore

WRITTEN by J.L. Kipling, Principal, the Mayo School of Arts, and T.H. Thornton, a civil servant, *Handbook of Lahore* was meant as a guide to the city. The NCA, as its series of historical reprints, has republished the book under the title *Lahore As it was*. The last part of the book deals with the ancient city and whatever little is known of it. Kipling and Thornton write:

That Lahore formerly covered a far larger area than it does at present is at once apparent from the extent of the ruins described in Part I. Some local authorities, however, are of the opinion that different regions were popular at different periods, and that at no one time was the vast extent which the remains indicate covered by an inhabited city.

But that the inhabited area has greatly shrunk is evident from the fact that of 36 *guzars* or quarters into which Lahore is known to have been divided, only nine are included within the area of the modern city. Others have supposed that the actual city, that is, the inhabited portion of Lahore, never extended beyond its present limits, and that the mass of debris which everywhere meets the eye is composed entirely of the remains of tombs and garden walls.

The supposition may be proved to be erroneous, not only by the evidence of eye-witnesses, native and European, such as Bernier, Tavernier, and Thevenot, but also from the existence, among the debris, of numerous small wells, such as are constructed in the private dwelling houses of a closely-packed city and from the position of the large ruined mosque on the right-hand side of the Amritsar Road, known as the *Idgah*, or place of assembly upon Muhammadan feast days.

These buildings are almost always erected in the immediate outskirts of a town; it may be inferred, therefore, that when this mosque was built the city extended as far as its immediate vicinity; but the city is now nearly three miles off, and the building has long ceased to be the

rendezvous of the faithful on their holy days. Again, we have a casual notice in a Muhammadan writer of Akbar's time, of a certain *guzar* or quarter, which is now desolate and upwards of a mile from the city, as being the most populous quarter of Lahore; and lastly, we have the analogy of other Eastern cities, such as Kabul, Tabriz or Ispahan, where the suburbs, that is the portion of the city beyond the walls, are by far the most extensive and important parts of the town.

Upon the whole it may be considered probable that in its best days, that is during the reign of Shahjehan, the city must have had a circuit of some 16 or 17 miles. The portion of the city outside the walls probably consisted of numerous thickly inhabited spots connected with the city gates by long bazaars.

The intervals between these different quarters were filled up with tombs, gardens and mosques, whose remains now form a conspicuous feature in the aspect of the environs of Lahore. The *Moti Mahal* or 'Regent-Street' of old Lahore is said to have been in the vicinity of the present civil station, and to this day coins and remains of jewellery are occasionally picked up in that locality after heavy rains.

It is easier to form an idea of the size and extent of the old city of Lahore than of its magnificence. Few cities have suffered more from desolating hordes and from anarchy than Lahore during the last 120 years previous to the inaugurations of English rule. Eight times did the troops of Ahmad Shah Durani pass through Lahore: Mahratas and Sikhs have done their work of destruction, and the buildings being, for the most part,

built of brick, have perished and are perishing rapidly from mere exposure.

But it is pretty certain, from the accounts we possess and from the absence of any but insignificant specimens of Hindu and Pathan remains, that, until the period of the Mughal dynasty, the city had no architectural pretension; on the other hand, in the number and importance of its tombs, the pro-

fuse use of glazed tiles and enamelled frescoes as an architectural decoration, the recurrence of the bulb-like dome and semi-doomed gateway, we have all the characteristics of the Mughals or what may be termed the florid style of Indo-Muhammadan architecture, standing perhaps in a similar relation to the Pathan to

that which the decorated style of English architecture bears to that termed semi-Norman.

As far as can be judged from existing remains, Lahore can ever have equalled Delhi in its public buildings, though the superior size of its private edifices would indicate the existence of more private wealth. Still, the Tomb of Jehangir, the Palace of that prince and of his successor Shahjehan, the Mosque of Wazir Khan, the Pearl Mosque, the gardens of Shalimar, and the Badshahi, or Imperial Mosque of Aurangzeb, are no mean specimens of architecture, and if we could imagine the front of the palace, undisfigured by Sikh and English additions, with its coloured frescoes fresh and vivid, the river flowing at its base, and eastward, as far as the eye could reach, a massive quay of masonry, with flights of steps at intervals and gardens extending to the water's edge, the now deserted

suburbs filled with a thriving population and interspersed with tombs and pavilions rising amid luxuriant gardens, whose gates glittered with many-coloured porcelain-we should form a conception of what we have reason to believe Lahore really was in the period of its prime.

LAHORE OF THE HINDU PERIOD—There are no architectural remains of the old Hindu city of Lahore, a circumstance which might well be explained by the absence of stone material, and the numerous destructive invasions to which the city has been subjected; but it is not necessary to resort to this explanation, for the fact is in accordance with what all Indian architectural researchers tend to show namely, that the northern Hindu race was not, until a comparatively late period, in the habit of building temples, or durable edifices of any kind. Even at Delhi, the seat of Hindu dynasties from upwards of a thousand years before Christ to more than a thousand years after the Christian era, and there, where is abundance of stone, no specimens of Hindu architecture exist dating earlier than the tenth or eleventh century. There are some grounds for supposing that the old Hindu city of Lahore did not occupy exactly the site of the modern city. Tradition points to the vicinity of *Ichra*, a village about three miles to the west, as the site of old Lahore.

The name of the village was formerly *Ichra* Lahore, a name still to be found, it is said, upon old documents and occasionally adopted in *bundis*, or native bills of exchange; drawn upon Lahore. Moreover, some of the oldest and most sacred Hindu shrines are to be met with in this locality. Should such be the case, it is not improbable that the gateway of the present city, known as the *Lahori* or *Lohari* gateway, was so called as being the gateway looking in the direction of *Lohawar*, or old Lahore, just as the *Kashmiri* Gate looks towards Kashmir, and the *Delhi* Gate of modern Delhi to the ancient city of that name.

