

PART OF PUNJAB IN A STRANGE LAND

BY M. S. GILL

Thirty-five miles north of Cambridge lies Elveden Hall Estate, 20,000 acres of rich Suffolk country land, around a stately country house. It is the seat of the owners of the Guinness Breweries. Elveden is also a model farm. And that is how I happened to see it. By an odd coincidence the University Agriculture Department arranged a visit to show us modern agricultural methods. Odd coincidence indeed? For Elveden was also the house of Daleep Singh sometime Maharaja of the Punjab.

Suffolk is reputed to be the richest agricultural land in all England. It is also as flat as the Punjab plains — the only bit that is so in the rolling English countryside. Perhaps these factors weighed with Victoria when she was choosing a home in exile for the child king of Lahore.

The house is set well back from the road in a vast stretch of lawn and stately trees. The dome and the general appearance reminded

me of the Kapurthala palace. The dome is not a common feature of English country houses. It is of Eastern palaces. I wonder if this one was built specially for Daleep Singh. The ceiling has his coat of arms embossed on it. One wing of the house, now locked up, is said to contain furniture and other belongings of the Maharaja.

Daleep Singh was a child of five or six when he was torn from the Punjab. In his early years he had no Indian companion. Surrounded by English tutors, a favourite of Victoria herself, he was brought up as an English country gentleman! He was taught to imitate the English aristocracy but was not allowed to be a part of it. He had to marry outside England. There were certain lines he could not cross, in spite of all his conformity.

Web Of History

Years later Rani Jindan who had escaped to Nepal in 1846 was allowed to join her son in exile. In the house even today the keepers point out her room. In London the Sikhs talk of the oldest known Gurdwara, which she had visited. As we trudged about the wet fields of Elveden in the December sleet and snow, I thought of their owner of many decades ago. On many a day such as this, mother and son must have sat before a log fire, while the sleet pattered on the panes and the fog "licked around the corners of the house!"

She must have spun out to him the web of their history with all the turns and twists of fortune. And then a white, liveried, footman may have brought in cakes and tea to rub in the irony of their present situation! Gilded cage, indeed! When Daleep Singh was exiled he was old enough to have carried away a child's golden memories of childhood in the Punjab. Memories of a more varied nature were burnt into every fibre of Rani Jindan's mind and memory. How often in those long winter evenings the two exiles must have been lost in their private world while

"Vacant shuttles weave the wind".
Daleep Singh was an unfortu-

nate and an unhappy man. His only son died at a young age. His mother found a cremation on Indian soil, but not in the Punjab as Daleep wished. In 1887 his wife died and was carried to the side of her son. The last years were Daleep's unhappiest. Deprived of all he loved, unable to reach the Punjab, he was overtaken at last by the loneliness that had always been his. The last Maharaja of the Punjab died in Paris on 22nd October, 1893 at the age of 55.

Easy Walk

The private church, a beautiful Gothic building surrounded by stately pines and elms is an easy walk from the house. When on a Sunday the noble Guinness lords and ladies sit at prayer they see above the altar the beautiful stained glass window erected by Daleep Singh. Outside on the lawn mingled with their own dead they see this stranger from a distant land. The three white marble gravestones stand slightly apart. The grass has grown on the graves and there is no one to lay fresh flowers, but what of that?

Elveden has become a bit of a pilgrimage centre for Punjabis in Britain. I suppose it is something familiar to hold on to in a strange land. A petition to the British Government is displayed in the main Gurdwara in London, requesting the return of the Maharaja's remains to the Punjab. Such cases are not unknown. Napoleon came back from St. Helena. Who can say if this exile will ever come home?

mands no formal academic qualifications of its students; only to three or four million pounds a year.

