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## The Mission

From the calm, cloistered setting of St Joseph's College on the northern-most reaches of London, the Mill Hill missionaries sent young men across the world to spread Christ's message. In one of its echoing corridors, there was what a Mill Hill veteran Father Gerry Dunne cheerfully described to me as a rogues' gallery of photographs, hundreds of small, cropped, black-and-white mugshots of priests about to embark on their life's mission. He could name most of them and knew many of them. Among the crowded display boards were photos of George Shanks and Gerry Mallett, the two Catholic priests at Baramulla at the time the raiders struck. Mallett, the younger of the two men, bore a thoughtful, almost ascetic, countenance. Shanks had a more debonair demeanour, with a hint of a Presley-style quiff, and a well-set, muscular face. Father Dunne knew George Shanks's family in Tyneside in north-east England and their paths crossed when Shanks was newly ordained. 'He was a quiet kind of fellow. He wasn't boisterous, but very sharp and very witty. He wasn't a zealot in the sense that he got himself into a lather, but he worked hard. He had a good head on him.' He was a strong swimmer, a keen motorbiker and a pianist with a repertoire that was popular rather than ecclesiastical, stretching from Gilbert and Sullivan to the old Geordie anthem, the Blaydon Races.

Gerry Dunne and George Shanks headed in different directions from Mill Hill and its seminaries. Father Dunne spent most of his working life in Borneo, Uganda and Qatar. Father Shanks was posted initially to Punjab, perhaps not the best use of his degree in French—he wrote to the order's superior general to thank him 'very sincerely' for this first appointment 'which is all the more pleasing to me on account of its unexpectedness'—and then on to Kashmir. After walking me down Mill Hill's portrait gallery, Father Dunne took me outside, to a small cemetery lying in the shadow of the college. Monsignor Shanks (who climbed the clerical hierarchy to become, in 1952, the church's first prefect apostolic



of Jammu and Kashmir) is buried there. He died of lung disease in London in December 1962, a few months after returning from India, at the age of 53. He had been determined to return to India to die, but the London winter smog claimed him. Father Mallett died of heatstroke on a scouting trip in Pakistan in 1970.<sup>1</sup> They had both arrived in Baramulla to supplement the teaching staff of St Joseph's College in the late 1930s. George Shanks was the first graduate priest to join the college faculty, and oversaw the awarding of degree status to St Joseph's. In 1947, he was the college principal. The two priests would have known each other with the ease and intimacy that comes with almost a decade's joint endeavour, without the distraction of family, in a remote location.

As Father Dunne reminisced to me about the two men, and about the many ordeals Mill Hill missionaries had encountered in some of the world's most unpromising territories for their Christian message, he recounted a tale that had become part of Mill Hill's folklore. 'At the time of the siege [at Baramulla] when things were looking pretty bad, the two of them were together,' said Father Dunne, with the air of an accomplished storyteller. 'It was Gerry Mallett who said: we may not come through this, so what about going to confession. And George Shanks said: that's a very good idea. So George made his confession to Gerry Mallett, and Gerry Mallett gave him absolution. And then Gerry Mallett said: right, give me a little time. And eventually he confessed, and then George Shanks absolved him. And then when it was all over, or at least when the danger had receded, Gerry Mallett said: I'm glad nothing happened. And George Shanks said: why? Well, he said, when you gave me absolution, you said the grace after meals.' It's a story with an apocryphal air to it, but one which has echoed around Mill Hill common rooms and across far-flung clerical outposts for generations.

Through Mill Hill, I made contact with George Shanks's last surviving sibling, Maureen Corboy, aged almost ninety, living in Cornwall, and only too keen to honour the memory of a much loved brother. 'He was a nice laddie. He was very ordinary, but he was very well liked. He was kind. He was considerate.' In an act of enormous generosity, she parcelled up all her letters and photographs from her brother, and sent them to me. She was about to have a cataract operation. 'Keep all this for as long as you wish,' she wrote on the outside of the package, 'if I don't survive the anaesthetic dump them on Mill Hill.'

The remarkable cache of photographs, letters, prayer cards and newspaper cuttings Maureen posted to me fill out a picture of a missionary with a keen sense of fun, clouded by a somewhat anxious temperament.



There are photographs of George swimming in the river Jhelum, astride a motorcycle, and trying out new clerical vestments.<sup>2</sup> Among the items is an airmail letter that George had written from Baramulla to another of his sisters a month before the tribesmen's invasion:

Whether this will ever reach you is problematic these days—Pakistan and India are too busy knocking one another's heads off to bother about postal services at the moment. My home mail came fairly regularly until about a week ago, but nothing since then. And mail from outside Kashmir seems to have stopped completely. The denizens of Pakistan are sitting down in armed mobs on the Rawalpindi road + stopping all supplies from entering Kashmir—nobody but a Mohammedan or a European can travel these days. Meanwhile, our Maharajah still goes on sitting on the fence, so we are peaceful enough up to now, but there is a certain amount of tension in the air, + we may have a spot of bother at any moment. However, if it comes, it will be purely a domestic row between the two parties, and there is no danger for us. So if you do see Kashmir mentioned in the news, there will be no cause for alarm.<sup>3</sup>

It was much more than a 'spot of bother' and there was every cause for alarm, as a black-and-white photograph in the same bundle demonstrated. It shows Father Shanks in his cassock alongside a bearded man in Pathan-style dress with an ammunition belt slung over his shoulder. The bearded man is standing awkwardly, arms by his side, looking down at the ground. It appears to have been taken at Baramulla, and a brief inscription on the back stated that the Pathan had initially intended shooting the priest. Maureen told me that George didn't talk about the raid on the mission—but she felt that he never quite escaped the sense of terror. She and her sister first heard about the attack from the newspapers. 'We knew nothing about it till we opened the *Express*, and there was our George all over the front page, with a photograph.'

The tribal lashkar provided Kashmir with the sort of catalyst to conversion which the church has relied on ever since its inception. By killing a nun, they gave the Valley a Christian martyr. It didn't greatly help the missionaries in finding an audience for the gospel. George Shanks, according to his sister, claimed just one conversion in Kashmir in more than two decades of missionary work. Mill Hill had been responsible for Catholic missionary endeavour in Kashmir ever since given the task of evangelising the area by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation



of the Faith in 1887. The church took steps to establish itself in Baramulla in 1891. It was never promising territory for missionaries. Mill Hill's superior general, visiting Kashmir in 1960, offered words of solace and appreciation to his missionaries. 'Your work is not easy,' he declared, 'your lives have an element of peculiar loneliness not found in other missions. You have not the consolation of seeing the Church thrive and expand as a result of your labours. You are not cheered and encouraged by a great influx of converts into the Church. You sow in hard, stony arid soil so that in God's own time, others may reap.'<sup>4</sup>

More than a century of endeavour by the Mill Hill Fathers, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, and assorted Protestant groups has done little to expand the number of churchgoers in Kashmir. The 1941 census revealed just over 3,000 Christians in the entire princely state of Jammu and Kashmir—fewer than one in a thousand of the total population. Many of the Sunday worshippers at the service I attended at Holy Family Church in Srinagar were south Indians who happened to be based in Kashmir, either as civil servants or with the Indian military. It's a similar story at the convent church at Baramulla. In and around Baramulla there are a dozen or so Christian families. Most came originally from outside the Valley and converted generations ago. Any recent converts are likely to keep a low profile. The sensitivities of attempting to win converts have always been immense, and with the rise of Islamic radicalism have become more so. Father Shanks once recorded that of all the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim students who attended St Joseph's College in Baramulla, 'in no cases have these young men . . . emerged from our care as Christians: we have made no attempt to push religion down their throats'. Several decades later, one of Father Shanks's successors, a south Indian priest based in Kashmir, told me that he refused to hand out copies of the New Testament, even on request, to escape any taint of seeking converts. 'The day we do that,' he remarked, 'is our last day here.'

The minuscule number of Catholics in the Kashmir Valley, and the modest congregations, does not mean that the Christian churches have been without influence and standing. Early missionaries, both Anglican and Catholic, put much of their emphasis on education. A mission school was established in Baramulla in 1891, and St Joseph's High School was inaugurated in 1909. St Joseph's, along with Burn Hall and Presentation Convent schools in Srinagar and the Protestant-foundation Tyndale-Biscoe boys and girls schools in Srinagar and Anantnag have educated much of the Kashmir Valley's elite. They still do. Sheikh Abdullah sent



his sons and daughters to the Tyndale-Biscoe schools. Maharaja Sir Hari Singh sent the crown prince to the Presentation Convent school for a while, where he occasionally came across Father Shanks. They remain the schools of choice for much of Kashmir's middle class.

As well as the emphasis on education, the pioneering Catholic missionaries were keen to reach the women of Kashmir and to offer medical provision. They sought the help of Franciscan nuns, who were already established in Punjab. In 1916, two nuns made an exploratory journey to Baramulla, which they found to be a bustling and 'wonderfully beautiful' town. 'Your daughters are the first women religious who have ever set foot in Kashmir,' they reported back to the order's superior general. 'What a mission here in Kashmir—not a single indigenous Christian!' There were two Catholic missionaries, one in Baramulla and the other in Srinagar. In Baramulla, the nuns stated, there were five or six European families, and only four Catholics among them. The missionary there was 'counting on Sisters to approach the women and their daughters, and certainly without Sisters their conversion would be very difficult. We visited four villages, and in each of them the women asked us to stay . . . I pray that we can make this foundation, for this is utterly virgin soil which has never been evangelised nor even visited by missionaries until barely twelve to fifteen years ago.'<sup>5</sup>

It was another five years before the convent was founded, with an initial complement of four nuns. They ran a dispensary, visited the sick—sometimes travelling to villages on horseback, or by shikara, the local small boats—and founded an orphanage (which was later relocated to Rawalpindi). A purpose-built chapel was constructed in the mid-1920s, and a fifteen-bed hospital established by the end of that decade, serving particularly the women and children of the area. The nuns 'labour ceaselessly of the women of the district,' Father Shanks asserted. 'Their Dispensary copes with upwards of two hundred patients a day: their small hospital is full the year round: their creche for unwanted babies rarely has an empty cradle . . . more and more of the local women are coming to the Hospital, to have their babies in hygienic surroundings . . . Many a young child-mother owes her life + that of her child to these white-robed foreign women, + is shyly grateful.'

The convent's 1947 roll-call listed sixteen nuns—one Indian, and the others of ten European nationalities. Mother Teresalina, the nun who died in the attack, and another recently arrived Spanish nun, were the only sisters under thirty years of age. Most were in their forties or older.





Among them were several qualified by training or experience as nurses, pharmacists or dispensary workers, while others either tended the gardens, took responsibility for the linen and laundry or provided ministry and medical care for outlying villages.

The mission was located adjoining the more imposing edifice of St Joseph's College, and together the convent, hospital and college were the principal buildings of Baramulla. As the Kashmir crisis developed and the lashkar began to advance, it appears that the residents of this trio of Catholic institutions were resigned to being overrun by the Pathan fighters. Father Shanks's initial story of the attack, a contemporary account written as if intended for circulation within his religious order, was both complacent and self-deprecatory in tone:

We all knew that Baramulla would be enlisted by tribesmen that morning, Oct 27<sup>th</sup>. . . . There was no particular point in our decision to remain and face the music—we did not think there would be any bodily danger for us, so we decided that our best policy, would be to carry on as if nothing special was happening. The Sisters were going about their morning rounds in the Hospital; the College and School being closed, we had nothing to do. So we fell back on the Englishmens [sic] remedy for lack of work and ordered tea.

Firing started at 10.30 promptly. From a point of vantage on the terrace in front of the Presbytery we watched the progress of the party with detached interest.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Father Shanks's view was so detached he appears not to have been aware that the tribal army reached Baramulla, and took control of part of the town, on the previous evening—Sunday, 26 October. The mission buildings were on the Srinagar side of the town, and were not in the line of fire until the following morning.

A much fuller and richer account of the mission's fate at the hands of the lashkar also came from Father Shanks's hand—the account he set down several years after the event in a desk diary, locked away in the basement of St Joseph's College at Mill Hill.<sup>7</sup> The first time I read the diary was in the company, in the most macabre of senses, of one of the priest's neighbours. Mill Hill's archivist had warned me not to be alarmed to find a coffin resting in the ante-room of the archive. The remains of the order's founder, Cardinal Vaughan, had been disinterred from the grave in the college grounds, and were awaiting reburial at Westminster Cathedral. The college chapel had been deemed insufficiently secure, so



the coffin was being stored temporarily alongside the other remnants of Mill Hill's past in the basement.

As I leafed through the pages, and sought to make out Shanks' sometimes hurried hand, my unease at sharing the space with a long dead cardinal began to lift. I had alighted on an unpublished and hitherto unknown eyewitness account of a moment of great historical drama. It threw new light on the fate of St Joseph's mission, and also illuminated the story of the invasion of Kashmir, offering a contemporary commentary on the origins of the Kashmir crisis. Inside the dark green bindings of the page-a-day diary for 1952, sold by a stationery store in the Pakistani city of Lahore, George Shanks had sought to deliver his comprehensive account of the Baramulla attack. An inscription inside the diary, written by a missionary colleague, reads: 'Attempt at writing a book on the raids in Baramulla in Oct. 1947 by Mgr Shanks in 1953'. Early in that year, according to a clerical obituarist, Shanks had fallen ill with tuberculosis and was confined to bed for nine months, which is presumably what gave him the opportunity to write. It's not the sort of day-to-day narrative that you associate with a diary. Father Shanks appears to have chanced upon an unused diary to set down a first draft of his detailed (and unfinished) account of the raid and its aftermath. He wrote up several versions of the attack—private letters for clerical superiors and more polished accounts for religious publications—but this is a much more sustained and ambitious personal narrative, clearly intended for wider publication.

Father Shanks mapped out in note form the structure of his book, the chapter headings, and a brief outline of the plot. He sought to write the body of his story from the front of the diary, while working on a prologue from other end. The one hundred or so handwritten pages, replete with insertions and crossings out, are not only incomplete but also inconsistent. In some places, participants in the drama are named. In others, the same people are disguised by assumed identities. There is at times a hint of dialogue and incident embellished to attract an audience, and perhaps to compete with H.E. Bates's Baramulla bestseller *The Scarlet Sword*. Whatever prompted George Shanks to set down his story six years after the event, the unfinished draft of his intended book is by far the fullest surviving account of the attack on the Baramulla mission.

Shanks began his detailed story on the 26 October 1947, with the raiders expected imminently. 'An unnatural silence hung over the town of Baramulla. Traffic had stopped completely. Little knots of people stood on the main Srinagar road which passed the Mission. The atmosphere was palpably charged with hushed suspense.'



Certainly the main road had presented a different appearance the day before, with the mass exodus of Sikh and Hindu families in full spate. Every available lorry had been pressed into service: Sikh husbands + fathers, knowing that whatever happened, they at least could expect no mercy at the hands of the Pathans, had bundled wives, children + old folk into every possible inch of space. The fare for the 34-mile journey to S[rina]gar, normally a matter of a rupee or so, had risen to fifty + more—a twenty-five seater bus fetched at least fifteen-hundred. He had seen rich Sikh landlords, caught unawares, frantically begging lorry-drivers for places, offering fantastic prices for the impossible, and finally being forced to send of[f] their families by bullock-cart. All of which afforded ill-concealed delight to the local Muslims, who did not improve matters by regaling them with lurid accounts of the treatment meted out to Sikhs at Muzaffarabad + other places down the road.<sup>8</sup>

The sense of impending danger had prompted St Joseph's College to send its boarding students out of harm's way. The mission's patients too had dispersed:

. . . the Hospital had practically emptied en masse that morning. He had watched some of them go: girls within a few days of their confinement, women half-dead with T.B. or cancer, young mothers with their few days' old babies, children with stomachs burnt by their 'kangris', the little wicker-covered fire pots which they hold under their shirt + invariably spilt on themselves in bed: hurried off their sick-beds by fearful husbands + taken away by tonga, on beds, in litters, or painfully dragging themselves of[f] on foot: Hindu, Sikh, Mussulman [Muslim] women fleeing the advancing shadow of the bogey-man from Waziristan, the menacing spectre of rape at their heels. A bare handful of patients remained now—a Hindu girl whose people had abandoned her; the Sikh wife of one of Fr. X's College staff, Punam Singh, far advanced in T.B., and in the ninth month of her pregnancy, whose husband, warned of the practical certainty of a miscarriage if she were subjected to the discomforts of a packed lorry into Srinagar, had reluctantly agreed to leave her to the protection of the Mission. Then there was Mrs Dykes with her new baby, her two little boys + her husband: Their sea-passages booked for England, they were only waiting for their plane booking out of Srinagar. Colonel Dykes had been very plainly pleased at the





exodus of Sikhs + Hindus; and now, safe in the thought of the prestige of the British Army ('saw a couple of British Tommies empty a street of these beggars in Bannu, Padre') awaited events with bored equanimity. The remaining patient in the hospital, Mrs Lal, was in a state of nervousness bordering on tears. Poor soul, thought Fr. X. she at least had some reason for apprehension. The English wife of a Hindu ex-employee of the Kashmir Govt, it was quite possible that her husband was a marked man.<sup>9</sup>

Mrs Lal was actually Celia Pasricha, a London woman whose husband, Brij Lal Pasricha, a Punjabi Hindu, had been trained in Britain as an electrical engineer and had been the chief engineer at the maharaja's power plant at Mahura. The Pasrichas and several of their children took refuge at the mission as the tribesmen advanced. Their eldest daughter Leela—then in her early thirties—had headed to Srinagar by bus to try to arrange the evacuation of her son and her sister's two children. I met Leela almost sixty years after the attack, a petite, elegant and fiercely proud woman living in a retirement village on the coast of Maine in the north-east of the United States. She had no photographs or mementos of her life in Kashmir. They were all looted, along with her fur coats (she still talked longingly of her snow leopard fur), her saris and other possessions. The only remnant of her years in Baramulla was a small, delicate side table—which she reclaimed years later, when she chanced upon this looted relic from her old home in the house of the family's Kashmiri lawyer.

'There were rumours that something was going to happen,' Leela reminisced. 'So I managed to get into a bus. I had my servants out. I said you get me a seat on a bus, and I went to Nedou's [hotel in Srinagar]. I got a room.' She was from one of the Valley's best connected families, and used her charm and influence to try to secure a passage out of Kashmir for the three children. She managed that. 'So I had to call my sister [in Baramulla] and say: get a tonga, get any blessed thing you can, but come.' Inder Cheema, Leela's son, was then ten years old. He shared memories of a day-long journey into the Kashmiri capital. And vague recollections of army trucks, apparently containing the maharaja's troops, streaming through Baramulla away from the fighting back to Srinagar. The big problem was finding any means of transport:

It was extremely difficult, as I guess a lot of people were trying to get away from that area. Eventually a tonga was found—a tonga is



a two-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with limited capacity for carrying passengers. It managed to take us—that is my aunt Pam, her two children and myself. So anyway, we set off for Srinagar in this tonga—took us all day to get there. It was late in the evening when we did. I believe I remember several stops so that the tonga man could feed the horse. And then I just have that recollection of getting in late at night. It was dark and cold. And it was wonderful to get to Nedou's hotel, where my mother had this lovely fire going in this room, and food and so forth.

Inder and his cousins managed to fly out of Srinagar to safety. Most Kashmiris, even middle-class professionals, were not so fortunate.

Many Kashmiri Muslims had no wish to flee in the face of the tribal army. The level of disaffection with the maharaja was high, and a lashkar entering the Kashmir Valley in the name of Islam, and promising liberation from the Hindu monarchy, was bound to attract a groundswell of support. Sheikh Ghulam Mohammed, a retired teacher, had been about ten at the time of the invasion—the same age as Leela Pasricha's son. I called on him at his well-appointed home in Baramulla. He greeted me with a warm smile, and a cup of kahwa, the spiced Kashmiri tea. In October 1947, he was living with his uncle in the small town of Uri, which the raiders passed through on their way to Baramulla. 'They were not in uniform,' he recalled. 'They were common people having guns with them, and they came telling us we will free you from [the] maharaja's regime. This much I remember. Even I saw local people who joined these people. And they were telling: we are going to liberate you from the clutches of Maharaja Hari Singh. This was the slogan. People were not happy with the maharaja at that time, especially people living in the rural areas.' The lashkar appears to have attracted relatively few Kashmiri recruits as it advanced into the Valley, though there are indications that at least some of the looting, for which Kashmiris hold the tribesmen entirely to blame, was a local settling of scores and grabbing of refugees' goods.

The account Father Shanks set down in his desk diary caught both the apprehension of non-Muslims as the lashkar approached, and the initial enthusiasm for the raiders among many local Muslims. He tellingly recorded a conversation on the eve of the raiders' entry into Baramulla:

Mohammed Yusuf, one of the [college's] B.A. students, had come to warn the Fathers.

‘You have heard, Father, that the Pathans may enter Baramulla this evening?’ he said gravely.

‘I do seem to have heard such rumour, Yusuf. What about it? I hope you are not losing your nerve. Aren’t you glad that they are coming to liberate you from the Hindus? And haven’t you got a big feast ready for them in the Wazir’s [a municipal official] compound? I believe you yourself are a member of the Students section of the Committee of Welcome’.

‘That is true, Father, but all the same these are wild people. It may be that some of them might get out of hand + do some mischief’.

Mischief! With every public building in Muzaffarabad, just inside the border, burnt to the ground; with Uri, a prosperous market centre 27 miles away, completely destroyed, they call i[t] mischief! Smiling grimly to himself, Fr. X wondered what kind of liberation was this, that started by burning the villages of the liberated + rendering them homeless.

‘We have heard’ continued Yusuf, ‘that there has been some trouble in Uri—’

‘Oh, that! For the Pathans that was just a bit of good, clean fun. Sheer exuberance, you might say. A bit overdone, perhaps, but—’

‘Suppose it happens the same way here?’

‘I don’t see why it should. Your Pathan friends are coming to liberate Kashmir, aren’t they? Which is just what the Mission has been trying to do for the last 40 years—to liberate you from ignorance by our school + hospital work. There is no earthly reason why they should molest us. A bit of looting, perhaps, if they have time before they push on to Srinagar, but you don’t imagine they are going to stick knives in us or burn the Mission down, do you?’

‘All the same, Father, I think you + Fr. Y should go up into the hills for a couple of days, just until the main body of tribesmen has passed through’.

‘Take to the jungle! Not on your life. I am too much of a coward, Yusuf. I’d never dare to face Baramulla again if I ran away like that!’

‘As you wish, Father: I hope you won’t regret it’. And Yusuf had marched off importantly to help with the preparation of the triumphal arch through which the conquering tribesmen would enter the town.



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Watching him go, Fr. X wondered what had prompted this sudden solicitude for the safety of the Fathers. Ten years among the Kashmiris had taught him not to expect much in the way of gratitude from them, to look uncharitably for a double motive. Born twisters, these Kashmiris. Ah well, they had the saving graces of infinite long-suffering, good humour, and, when caught out, a cheerful acceptance of fate.<sup>10</sup>

The priest gave away in his diary jottings as much about his attitude to the people to whom he was ministering as about their perspective towards the invasion. It is revealing on both counts. Among Baramulla's none-too-numerous educated Muslim elite, there was sympathy for the advancing army.

It can be no more than informed conjecture, but it's possible that the student Shanks remembered talking to was Muhammad Yusuf Saraf. He was born in Baramulla in 1923, and had attended St Joseph's College where he was president of the students' union. Saraf had been active in local politics, first in Sheikh Abdullah's National Conference and then in the rival Muslim Conference. Writing in the 1970s, when he was chief justice of the high court in Pakistan Kashmir, Saraf gave his own graphic description of the scene in his home town of Baramulla as the invaders approached—a remarkably telling account of the initial support for the lashkar, and its rapid ebbing away.

'How anxiously Muslims waited for the arrival of tribesmen,' Saraf wrote. 'Hundreds walked several miles down the river to welcome them ahead and accompany them on their historic entry in to the town—perhaps to enshrine in their family annals the proud heritage of at least having joined their steps with those who were coming to help them rid off [sic] the century-old Dogra slavery. Never, never in its history of several hundred years, had the town witnessed such a spontaneous gaiety and enthusiasm. The whole populace looked almost mad . . . Which face it was that was not lit with beaming smiles, having shed aside, for a while, the woes and sorrows suffered over centuries? It was a spectacle to watch. How can a writer like myself, trained in a hard school where emotions have no place, arrest in words the ecstasy and the fantasy that it was? Almost the entire male Muslim inhabitants and thousands others from the countryside—as far away as Sopore, had turned up in their choicest clothes to greet the liberators at Khanpura. Major Khurshid Anwar particularly was the centre of attraction. Almost everyone wanted to thank him personally.'<sup>11</sup>



From the perspective of the priests' house in the grounds of St Joseph's College, the entry of the tribal lashkar looked not in the least like an act of liberation. The nuns had been on a religious retreat, interrupted by the approach of the tribal army, and had decided to stay at the mission. Father Shanks, however, seems to have tried to arrange a last-minute evacuation. A British man working in Baramulla for a timber company, J.E. Thompson—who was then courting, and later married, Leela Pasricha—was prevailed upon to make contact with the Kashmiri authorities. 'I myself was living in BARAMULA,' he later told British diplomats, 'but at the request of Father SHANKS went into Srinagar by cycle the day before the trouble started to try and arrange evacuation.' It seems that he was also carrying a letter from Colonel Dykes 'asking for transport for himself, his wife, three children and a servant from Baramulla to Srinagar'.<sup>12</sup> But by this time, what was left of the Kashmiri military and civil administration was focussed on trying to repulse the raiders. The beginning of Indian army operations in the Valley prevented any possibility of taking a truck into Baramulla to rescue those in the convent and hospital. The attempt to get out had been left too late, and the small band of missionaries and those that flocked to their sanctuary were at the mercy of the marauders.

Father Shanks recounted the final stages of the tribal army's approach on the morning of Monday, October 27. The tribesmen appear to have advanced not along the main road, but down the hills at the other side of the mission:

There they come! Over the top of the hill there! All eyes turned in the direction of his pointing hand. Down from the summit of that hill where, last night, the remnants of the J[ammu] + K[ashmir] army had lain concealed, thin white lines could be seen winding through the scrub bushes. Puffs of white smoke hung over them: occasionally the line would break + disappear, only to reappear lower down the hill-side

'Looks like the poor old J + K's have had it' observed Anthony. 'They can't hold up a horde like that for long'.

The heads of the creeping white lines disappeared among the trees at the bottom of the hill; one by one the thin columns followed, leaving the slopes bare again. The whole descent had taken not more than ten minutes . . .

The firing was close at hand now; the watchers could see nothing of either side, but shouts could now be distinguished, and





an occasional yell of triumph showed where a tribesman had found his man. They could not be more than two or three hundred yards away from the Mission now—<sup>13</sup>

Within minutes, separate groups of attackers had targeted different buildings within the mission in what was a race to bag the best booty. The priests were outside their house adjoining the college when the raiders reached them.

We found ourselves surrounded by some fifteen of the most unpleasant hoodlums I have ever seen. Armed to the teeth with rifle, sword, dagger, most of them carrying an axe for business purposes. Untidy black beards, unkempt long hair, dirty black turbans, ragged clothes caked with blood and dirt, dull bloodshot eyes, which completed the picture did little to raise our spirits. One of them extended a grimy hand—politely I shook it. It seemed that is not what he wanted; and impatient of making himself understood in Pushto, he asked no further. By plunging his hand into my trouser pocket and helping himself. The others were being treated in like manner—money, watches, keys, were taken away from us, and then Father Mallett and I were half dragged, half pushed into my two roomed house, followed by all the gang, the door locked, spirits sank still further. A scene of indescribable confusion followed; locks were burst open with axe blows, drawers were pulled out and emptied, furniture overturned and ripped open. The accumulated treasures of ten years disappeared into spacious pockets—we were too busy dodging swinging axes and getting out of the way of rifle butts to worry about that . . . In the midst of the wreckage, we could not help admiring the thoroughness of the half savage raiders, trained from childhood in the art of looting half an hours [sic] work with the axe and knife in those eight rooms, and the ragman would not [have] looked at what was left. . . .

Staggering from under the weight of their loot, done up in our blankets, one of them wearing my beret, that perched on top of his turban, another feeling very proud of himself in a confessional stole worn as a tie, most of them sporting the College ties they had found, they eventually departed, and we were allowed to come to the open.<sup>14</sup>

By serendipity, this almost comic scene of clerical vestments being borne away by the tribesmen as trophies had a remarkable reprise. One



of the grander of the priestly robes, an elaborate brocade and gold cope, reappeared a few years later at an elite boys school in the hill town of Murree in Pakistan. The school's English principal was given it by 'one of my Pathan boys' and showed it to a visiting young American. 'The boy is the son of an important chief,' our host explained. 'He brought this for me to make into a dressing-gown. It came from Baramula. . . . When the tribes were on the Kashmir *jihad* in 1947, they went through there. The wilder ones made quite a mess, I'm afraid, before their chiefs came up . . . This thing must have been down in Waziristan ever since.'<sup>15</sup>

The anecdote dovetails neatly with Father Shanks's account of the attack, providing a trail that points unambiguously towards Waziristan as the home of the perpetrators of the raid. But while the two missionary priests were watching their personal possessions being baled up and carried off, scenes of much greater tragedy were taking place a short distance away, in and around the mission hospital.

