

# DIARY OF AN EASTERN JOURNEY

By Aldous Huxley

**C**AWNPORE. From its advertisements, much may be learned of a nation's character and habits of thought. The following brief anthology of Indian advertisements is compiled from newspapers, magazines, medical catalogues and the like. Several of the most characteristic specimens are taken from the Cawnpore "Congress Guide", an official publication intended for the use of delegates and interested visitors. It is with one of these appeals to India's most enlightened public that I make a beginning:

Beget a son and Be Happy by using the "SON BIRTH PILL", my special secret Hindu Shastrick preparation, according to directions. Ladies who have given birth to daughters only WILL SURELY HAVE SONS NEXT and those who have sons MUST HAVE MALE ISSUES ONCE AGAIN by the Grace of God. Fortunate persons desirous of begetting sons are bringing this marvellous Something into use for brightening their dark homes and making their lives worth their living. It is very efficacious and knows no failure. Self praise is no recommendation. Try and be convinced. But if you apply, mentioning this publication, with full history of your case, along with a consultation fee of Rupees Ten (Foreign one guinea), only giving your "Word of Honour" to give me a SUITABLE REWARD (naming the amount) according to your means and position in life, just on the accomplishment of your desire in due course of time, you can have the same Free, ABSOLUTELY FREE. Act immediately, for this FREE OFFER may not remain open indefinitely.

Here are some pleasing hair oil advertisements from various sources:

Dr.—'s Scented Almond Oil. Best preparation to be used as hair oil for men who do mental work. The effects of almond oil on brain are known to everybody.

Jabukusum is a pure vegetable oil, to which medicinal ingredients and the perfume have been added to prevent all affectations [*sic*] of the hair and the brain.

There are several panaceas on the Indian market. There is, for example, Siddha Kalpa Makaradhwaja which "is a sure and infallible specific for all Diseases and it never fails to effect a satisfactory cure in the patient, be his ailment whatever it may. Among the various diseases amenable to its administration, to state a few, are the following:—Debility, general or nervous, including Nervous Prostration, due to whatever cause, Loss of Memory, Giddiness and Insanity . . . Asthma and Consumption, all stomach troubles . . . Cholera . . . all Kidney and Bladder Troubles . . . all Acute and Chronic Venereal Diseases . . . Leprosy of all kinds, White, Black, Red, etc. . . . Rheumatism, Paralysis, Epilepsy . . . Hysteria, Sterility . . . and all Fevers, including Malaria, Pneumonia, Influenza and such other poisonous ones."

Not a bad medicine, but nothing to the "Infallible Cure for 'Incurable' Diseases, habits and defects", advertised in the Cawnpore "Congress Guide". The announcement runs as follows:

I have discovered the natural system of cure for all diseases, habits, defects, failings etc., without the use of deleterious and pernicious drugs or medicines. Being Scientific, it is absolutely safe, simple, painless, pleasant, rapid and infallible. Diseases like hysteria, epilepsy, rheumatism, loss of memory, paralysis, insanity and mania; addiction to smoking, opium, drink etc; impotence, sterility, adultery

and the like can be radically cured duly by My System. Come to me after everyone else has failed to do you good. I guarantee a cure in every case undertaken. Every case needs to be treated on its special merits, and so applicants should furnish me with the complete history of the health of the patient and general occupation from birth, height, measurement over chest or bust, waist and hips, and a photograph with as little dress on as possible, along with a consultation fee of Rupees Five, without which no replies can be sent.

If the buying of a postal order were not so insuperably a nuisance, I should send five rupees to get the details of the adultery cure. So much cheaper than divorce.

The following are characteristic of a large class of Indian advertisements:

WONDERFUL WORK!!!

Works wonders in the earthly pleasure.

MARAD MITRA LAPE

Will make you a man in one day.

MARAD MITRA YAKUTI

Renews all your lost vigour and enables you to enjoy the pleasure with increased delights. Try once. 1 Bottle Rs 10.  $\frac{1}{2}$  Bottle Rs 5.

FREE! FREE!!

Do you want "Secret of Happiness from Conjugal Encounter" and "Good Luck"? If so apply for the illustrated literature to —.

The enormous number of such advertisements testifies to the disastrous effect on Indian manhood of the system of child marriages. The effects, as Gandhi has pointed out in his autobiography, would probably be still worse, if it were not for the fact that Hindu girl wives generally spend at least half the year with their own parents, away from their schoolboy husbands.

The testimonials of Indian sufferers relieved by patent medicines are generally of a most lyrical character, and the oddity of the English in which they are written gives them an added charm. Here is one from an Indian Christian:

I can say really the medicine — is sent by Lord Jesus Christ to the sinful world to

save the poor victims from their dreadful diseases. In my 8 years experience in medical line I have come across many preparations of medicine but I have not seen such a wonderful medicine as —. Please send 10 phials more.

Another pious gentleman writes:

I am living to see that I am what I am by the wonderful cure these pills wrought in me by the Grace of God who I think has put the wisdom of preparing such pills into the head of our Venerable Pundit —.

Another has "no hesitation in recommending it to the suffering humanity". Yet another writes as follows:

Several of my friends and myself have been using your — for over four months for Influenza, Lumbago, Dyspepsia, Syphilis, Rheumatism and Nervous Debility with complete success. There has not been a case in which it failed. I will call it an Ambrosia.

The classical allusion is elegant and apt. One is not surprised to find that the author is a Bachelor of Arts.

One of the evil results of the political subjection of one people by another is that it tends to make the subject nation unnecessarily and excessively conscious of its past. Its achievements in the old great days of freedom are remembered, counted over, and exaggerated by a generation of slaves, anxious to convince the world and themselves that they are as good as their masters. Slaves cannot talk of their present greatness, because it does not exist; and prophetic visions of the future are necessarily vague and unsatisfying. There remains the past. Out of the scattered and isolated facts of history it is possible to build up Utopias and Cloud Cuckoo Lands as variously fantastic as the New Jerusalems of prophecy. It is to the past — the gorgeous imaginary past of those whose present is inglorious, sordid, and humiliating — it is to the delightful founded-on-fact romances of history that subject peoples invariably turn. Thus, the savage

and hairy chieftains of Ireland became in due course the Great Kings of Leinster, the mighty Emperors of Meath. Through centuries of slavery the Serbs remembered and idealized the heroes of Kossovo. And for the oppressed Poles, the mediæval Polish empire was much more powerful, splendid, and polite than the Roman. The English have never been an oppressed nationality; they are in consequence most healthily unaware of their history. They live wholly in the much more interesting worlds of the present, in the worlds of politics and science, of business and industry. So fully, indeed, do they live in the present, that they have compelled the Indians, like the Irish at the other end of the world, to turn to the past.

In the course of the last thirty or forty years a huge pseudo historical literature has sprung up in India, the melancholy product of a subject people's inferiority complex. Industrious and intelligent men have wasted their time and their abilities in trying to prove that the ancient Hindus were superior to every other people in every activity of life. Thus, each time the West has announced a new scientific discovery, misguided scholars have ransacked Sanskrit literature to find a phrase that might be interpreted as a Hindu anticipation of it. A sentence of a dozen words, obscure even to the most accomplished Sanskrit scholars, is triumphantly quoted to prove that the ancient Hindus were familiar with the chemical constitution of water. Another, no less brief, is held up as the proof that they anticipated Pasteur in the discovery of the microbic origin of disease. A passage from the mythological poem of the Mahabharata proves that they had invented the Zeppelin.

Remarkable people, these old Hindus. They knew everything that we

know or, indeed, are likely to discover, at any rate until India is a free country; but they were unfortunately too modest to state the fact baldly and in so many words. A little more clarity on their part, a little less reticence, and India would now be centuries ahead of her western rivals. But they preferred to be oracular and telegraphically brief. It is only after the upstart West has repeated their discoveries that the modern Indian commentator upon their works can interpret their dark sayings as anticipations. On contemporary Indian scholars the pastime of discovering and creating these anticipations never seems to pall. Such are the melancholy and futile occupations of intelligent men who have the misfortune to belong to a subject race. Free men would never dream of wasting their time and wit upon such vanities. From those who have not shall be taken away even that which they have.

*Benares.* A notable banyan tree stands by the side of the Jaunpur road, where it leaves the Civil Lines. Under the dense foliage lingers a kind of cathedral darkness, and the rooted and already massive offshoots from the parent branches are the cathedral pillars. But the shoots which have not yet reached the ground and hang in the dim air like the ends of aimlessly trailing cables, have an aspect strangely sinister and unholy. They hang there, motionless, and the cathedral of the banyan grove is transformed into a Piranesian prison.

The banyan is like the Hindu family. Its scions remain, even in maturity, attached to the parent tree. The national tree of England is the oak, and English families — once, no doubt, as banyan-like as the Indian — are coming to resemble handfuls of scattered acorns that grow up at a distance from their

tree of origin. Those who have had, in India or on the continent of Europe, any experience of the really united banyan family, can only feel thankful at the turn our social botany is taking.

It was said that the eclipse of the sun would be visible from Benares. But it needed more than smoked glass to see it; the eye of faith was also indispensable. That, alas, we did not possess. Partial to the point of being non-existent, the eclipse remained, for us at least, unseen. Not that we minded. For it was not to look at the moon's silhouette that we had rowed out that morning on the Ganges; it was to look at the Hindus looking at it. The spectacle was vastly more extraordinary.

There were, at the lowest estimate, a million of them on the bathing ghats that morning. A million. All the previous night and day they had been streaming into the town. We had met them on every road, trudging with bare feet through the dust, an endless and silent procession. In bundles balanced on their heads they carried provisions and cooking utensils and dried dung for fuel, with the new clothes which it is incumbent on pious Hindus to put on after their bath in honor of the eclipsed sun. Many had come far. The old men leaned wearily on their bamboo staves. Their children astride of their hips, the burdens on their heads automatically balanced, the women walked in a trance of fatigue. Here and there we would see a little troop that had sat down to rest — casually, as is the way of Indians, in the dust of the road and almost under the wheels of the passing vehicles.

And now the day and the hour had come. The serpent was about to swallow the sun. (It was about to swallow him in Sumatra, at any rate. At Benares it would do no more than

nibble imperceptibly at the edge of his disk.) The serpent, should one say, was going to try to swallow the sun. A million of men and women had come together at Benares to assist the Light of Heaven against his enemy.

The ghats go down in furlong-wide flights of steps to the river, which lies like a long arena at the foot of enormous tiers of seats. The tiers were thronged today. Floating on the Ganges, we looked up at acres upon sloping acres of humanity.

On the smaller and comparatively unsacred ghats the crowd was a little less densely packed than on the holiest steps. It was at one of these less crowded ghats that we witnessed the embarkation on the sacred river of a princess. Canopied and curtained with glittering cloth of gold, a palanquin came staggering down through the crowd on the shoulders of six red liveried attendants. A great barge, like Noah's ark, its windows hung with scarlet curtains, floated at the water's edge. The major domo shouted and shoved and hit out with his rod of office; a way was somehow cleared. Slowly, and with frightful lurchings, the palanquin descended. It was set down, and in the twinkling of an eye a little passageway of canvas had been erected between the litter and the door of the barge. There was a heaving of cloth of gold, a flapping of the canvas: the lady—the ladies, for there must have been several of them in the litter — had entered the barge unobserved of any vulgar eye. Which did not prevent them, a few minutes later when the barge had been pushed out into mid-stream, from lifting the scarlet curtains and peering out with naked faces and unabashed curiosity at the passing boats and our inquisitive camera. Poor princesses! They could not bathe with their plebeian and unimprisoned

sisters in the open Ganges. Their dip was to be in the barge's bilge water. The sacred stream is filthy enough under the sky. What must it be like after stagnating in darkness at the bottom of an ancient barge?

We rowed on toward the burning ghats. Stretched out on their neat little oblong pyres, two or three corpses were slowly smoldering. They lay on burning fagots, they were covered by them. Gruesomely and grotesquely, their bare feet projected, like the feet of those who sleep uneasily on a bed too short and under exiguous blankets.

A little farther on we saw a row of holy men, sitting like cormorants on a narrow ledge of masonry just above the water. Crosslegged, their hands dropped limply, palm upward, on the ground beside them, they contemplated the brown and sweating tips of their noses. It was the Lord Krishna himself who, in the Bhagavad Gita, prescribed that the mystic squint. Lord Krishna, it is evident, knew all that there is to be known about the art of self hypnotism. His simple method has never been improved on; it puts the mystical ecstasy *à la portée de tous*. The noise of an assembled million filled the air; but no sound could break the meditative sleep of the nose-gazers.

At a given moment the eye of faith must have observed the nibblings of the demoniacal serpent. For suddenly and simultaneously all those on the lowest steps of the ghats threw themselves into the water and began to wash and gargle, to say their prayers and blow their noses, to spit and drink. A numerous band of police abbreviated their devotions and their bath in the interest of the crowds behind. The front of the waiting queue was a thousand yards wide; but a million people were waiting. The bathing must have gone on uninterruptedly the whole day.

Time passed. The serpent went on nibbling imperceptibly at the sun. The Hindus counted their beads and prayed, made ritual gestures, ducked under the sacred slime, drank, and were moved on by the police to make room for another instalment of the patient million. We rowed up and down, taking snapshots. West is West.

In spite of the serpent, the sun was uncommonly hot on our backs. After a couple of hours on the river, we decided that we had had enough, and landed. The narrow lanes that lead from the ghats to the open streets in the centre of the town were lined with beggars, more or less holy. They sat on the ground with their begging bowls before them; the charitable, as they passed, would throw a few grains of rice into each of the bowls. By the end of the day the beggars might, with luck, have accumulated a square meal. We pushed our way slowly through the thronged alleys. From an archway in front of us emerged a sacred bull. The nearest beggar was dozing at his post — those who eat little sleep much. The bull lowered its muzzle to the sleeping man's bowl, made a scouring movement with its black tongue, and a morning's charity had gone. The beggar still dozed. Thoughtfully chewing, the Hindu totem turned back the way it had come and disappeared.

Being stupid and having no imagination, animals often behave far more sensibly than men. Efficiently and by instinct they do the right, appropriate thing at the right moment — eat when they are hungry, look for water when they feel thirst, make love in the mating season, rest or play when they have leisure. Men are intelligent and imaginative; they look backward and ahead; they invent ingenious explanations for observed phenomena; they devise elaborate and roundabout means



for the achievement of remote ends. Their intelligence, which has made them the masters of the world, often causes them to act like imbeciles. No animal, for example, is clever and imaginative enough to suppose that an eclipse is the work of a serpent devouring the sun. That is the sort of explanation that could occur only to a human mind. And only a human being would dream of making ritual gestures in the hope of influencing, for his own benefit, the outside world. While the animal, obedient to its instinct, goes quietly about its business, man, being endowed with reason and imagination, wastes half his time and energy in doing things that are completely idiotic.

So I reflected, as I watched the sacred bull lick up the rice from the dozing beggar's bowl. While a million people undertake long journeys, suffer fatigue, hunger, and discomfort in order to perform, in a certain stretch of very dirty water, certain antics for the benefit of a fixed star ninety million miles away, the bull goes about looking for food and fills its belly with whatever it can find. In this case, it is obvious, the bull's brainlessness causes it to act much more rationally than its masters.

To save the sun (which might, one feels, very safely be left to look after itself) a million of Hindus will assemble on the banks of the Ganges. How many, I wonder, would assemble to save India? An immense energy which, if it could be turned into political channels, might liberate and transform the country, is wasted in the name of imbecile superstitions. Religion is a luxury which India, in its present condition, cannot possibly afford. India will never be free until the Hindus and the Moslems are as tepidly enthusiastic about their religions as we are about the Church of England.

*Lucknow.* At the end of the second day of the All India Musical Conference, I declared a strike. Accustomed to the ordinary three hour day of the European concertgoer, I found myself exhausted by the seven or eight hours of daily listening imposed on me by the makers of the Lucknow program. There was one long concert every morning, another every afternoon, a third at night. It was too much. After the second day I would not go again. Still, before I struck, I had had sixteen hours of Indian music—enough, at home, to hear all the symphonies of Beethoven, with a good sprinkling of characteristic specimens from Mozart and Bach thrown in. Sixteen hours of listening should be enough to give one at least the hang of an unfamiliar music.

Professional musicians, mostly attached to the courts of reigning princes, had come to Lucknow from every part of India. There were accomplished singers and celebrated players of every Indian instrument—including even the harmonium which, to my great astonishment and greater disgust, was permitted to snore and whine in what I was assured was the very sanctuary of Indian music. I listened to all the virtuosity of India. That it touched me less than the more modest accomplishment of the old Lahore musician was due, I think, to purely physical causes. The vina and the sitar must be heard at close quarters. All the expression and feeling that a performer puts into his playing evaporates at a distance and nothing can be heard beyond the jangle of the plucked strings. At Lahore I had been amazed by the richness and variety of the tone that came out of the old musician's sitar. At Lucknow, I was wearied by its tinkling monotony. Space had sucked the soul out of the music; it came to me dry and dead.

## THE BOOKMAN'S GUIDE TO FICTION

THE BOOKMAN will present each month tabloid reviews of a selected list of recent fiction. This section will include also the books most in demand according to the current reports in "Books of the Month", compiled by the R. R. Bowker Company, The Baker and Taylor Company's "Retail Bookseller", and THE BOOKMAN'S "Monthly Score". Such books as the editor specially recommends are marked with a star.

WINTER WHEAT — Almey St. John Adcock — *Doran*. A novel of remarkable promise, filled with beauty and power.

THE BLUE WINDOW — Temple Bailey — *Penn*. The farm wins in this tale of a young girl's fight for her true love as she sees it.

\*EAST OF MANSION HOUSE — Thomas Burke — *Doran*. Vivid drama in the London slums he knows so well.

HANGMAN'S HOUSE — Donn Byrne — *Century*. Mr. Byrne's fine blend of mysticism, romance, and shrewd sentiment again in evidence.

\*THE SILVER STALLION — James Branch Cabell — *McBride*. Another exquisite and remote romance of the mythical land of Mr. Cabell's dream.

THE SPLENDID RASCAL — George Challis — *Bobbs-Merrill*. Murderer, thief, pirate — yet so skilful is the author one cannot help liking the villain.

\*MR. MOFFATT — Chester Francis Cobb — *Doran*. A young James Joyce — but with a superlative technique and a fine sense of story values.

THE TENTS OF JACOB — Hyman Cohen — *McBride*. A tiny Jewish village in the Russian pale has found a sympathetic Main Street chronicler.

CHILD OF THE NORTH — Ridgwell Culum — *Doran*. A love story which has rare appeal and a vigorous setting.

SORRELL AND SON — Warwick Deeping — *Knopf*. The second coming of a war wreck ably and entertainingly detailed.

\*AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY — Theodore Dreiser — *Boni, Liveright*. With this two volume novel the public has accepted the one struggling realist.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF HELEN OF TROY — John Erskine — *Bobbs-Merrill*. The subtle moods of the Queen of Beauty, Ltd. and Preferred.

AFTER NOON — Susan Ertz — *Appleton*. A father turns to mothering and finally finds virtue its own reward.

THE PAINTED STALLION — Hal G. Evarts — *Little, Brown*. Is it the horse or the love story that is the more fascinating?

THE HIGH ADVENTURE — Jeffery Farnol — *Little, Brown*. The road to romance again, with many a new twist and turn.

MASTERSON — Gilbert Frankau — *Harper*. A determined gentleman described by a determined author in a determined manner.

\*SOUNDINGS — A. Hamilton Gibbs — *Little, Brown*. Father, daughter, and the inevitable young man, with the war period as background.

\*UNCHANGING QUEST — Philip Gibbs — *Doran*. A great study of European madness and of love in various forms.

GLASS HOUSES — Eleanor Gizycka — *Minton, Balch*. A few stones thrown into Washington hothouses.

THE FOUR WINDS — Sinclair Gluck — *Dodd, Mead*. Love, detectives, and a problem: Who stole Mrs. Devine's emerald bracelet?

COUNT BRUGA — Ben Hecht — *Boni, Liveright*. The adolescent's hero gambling and doing it rather well.

CO-ED — Olive Deane Hormel — *Scribner*. Sprightly campus capers, including young and slangy love, in Illinois — presumably Urbana.

THE OLD HOME TOWN — Rupert Hughes — *Harper*. A clean, swiftly told tale, easy to read.