

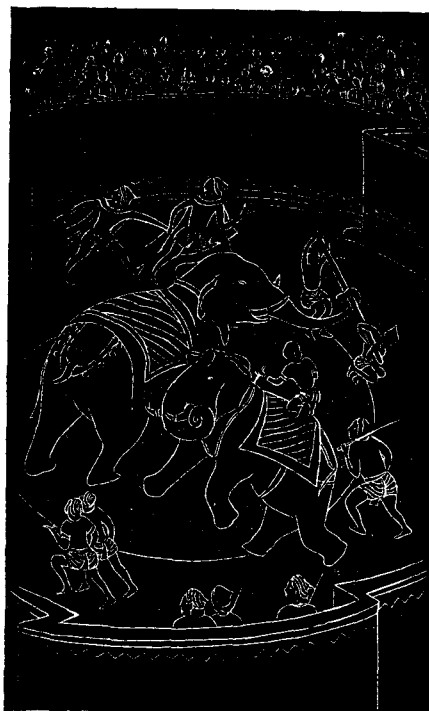
Fairyland on the Ganges

AND GAZELLES LEAPING. By Sudhin N. Ghose. New York: The Macmillan Co. 238 pp. \$3.50.

By JOSEPH G. HITREC

IN THE welter of childhood stories cropping up on publishers' lists with such regularity, running to Freudian hindsight, unleavened realism, and not infrequently to social pamphleteering, it is a change to come across one that breathes the mystery and naive wonder of those years without for a moment seeming to languish on it. Sudhin N. Ghose's "And Gazelles Leaping" is a winsome recapture of a childhood spent on a Ganges canal in a Calcutta suburb at the turn of the century—a fascinating time by all accounts, for writing of it almost fifty years later the author has no difficulty at all in refurbishing its golden hours, its sun-specked landscape and laughter. That may be so because he is an Indian, a Bengali at that, and because in his country childhood is a pastel blend of things that are and those that have been, of half-believed legends and animals roaming, and grown-ups themselves uttering and understanding the language of children.

The pains of awakening on Rani Nilmani's estate in Calcutta were no different from those in any other Indian village and Mr. Ghose does not strive to make them so. There was the kindergarten of Sister Svenska with its school building, to which the children of the estate came each day, and there was a small bazaar in its midst and some undistinguished huts belonging to distinguished people—the washerwoman, Moti Did; Cha-Cha, the wheelwright; Peon Dada, the mail carrier. The city of Calcutta, ever spreading and expanding, had already engulfed the estate but could not swallow it, since it was private property bequeathed in trust. Perhaps that was the reason why it became a sanctuary for those willing to respect its peace and unwritten codes, and why it abounded in animals. Of these there was quite a collection: the pint-sized elephant, Mohan, bearing his cross of arrested development with a shyness that was all but human; the duck of the girl Seeta; the goat of Mazdoor, called White Beauty; the monkey, the white crow, the pink mice, the does, and innumerable birds. Each child had a pet and brought him to school, but when young Ghose befriended Mohan and the animal began to distract the



—From "And Gazelles Leaping."

class by clowning at the window, Sister Svenska decided ruefully to draw the line somewhere. For the rest, the air was thick with mythology and stories of a circus nearby; ascetics and revolutionaries came and went. Later hoodlum gangs began to prowl the neighborhood and Ghose engaged in a private war with them, emerging battered but triumphant. Any moral to be drawn from this and other upheavals was at all times readily expounded by the adults, Cha-Cha, Moti Didi, and Peon Dada, whose sly and yet profound wisdom was the kind that India imparts to all her children, whatever their age. Towards the end "progress" and unscrupulous land speculators nearly liquidated the estate. The vitality and righteous wrath of its inmates, and the undefinable quality of plain good luck that shines on innocents everywhere saved the day most aptly.

Mr. Ghose has fashioned his form on his subject matter. His writing is artless and episodic, but permeated with a lively sense of the droll. He has loved his childhood and does not wish to clutter it with "psychology" at this late stage. He does not pose or justify. There is in his memories the light touch, the cheerful disregard for the norms of perspective and composition that lie on a Rajput water color, and also its charming literalness. At their best these reminiscences are limpid refractions of an experience that every grown-up will in some degree recognize as his own, shimmer though they may in the unaccustomed light of a quaint setting.

Fiction Notes

THE INNOCENT TRAVELLER, by Ethel Wilson. Macmillan. \$2.75. Miss Wilson lovingly presents the portrait of a lady living long and with ceaseless vigor. One hundred years is the time allotted Topaz Edgeworth for sojourn on this planet. She takes joy in it, enriching her spinster state with sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews, and generation after generation of collaterals. From an English Victorian childhood to an excessive venerability in Western Canada her scope increases while her personality grows proportionately more colorful. A splendid old party results. Invulnerable, mannered, inordinately loquacious, rich in importance, ever ready to do battle, eager for callers or a new idea, this grande dame makes marvelous material. Gladstone, Matthew Arnold, Kipling, and Queen Mary strew her path with prestige. Once she meets Otis Skinner, who, in his shining person, forever cleanses the theatre of evil.

Based partly on fact, padded with inventive fiction, "The Innocent Traveller" is gentle, engaging, quietly wise, and nostalgic without being dated.

—CATHERINE MEREDITH BROWN.

FAMILY FORTUNES, by Gwen Davenport. Doubleday. \$3. In "Family Fortunes" Gwen Davenport tells the story of an impoverished First Family of Kentucky whose ancestral mansion, tumbling about their ears, is publicized, glorified, and metamorphosed from simply the house where generations of Brackenwoods have lived into a state shrine, The Greatest Old Kentucky Home. No one could have been more astonished than the Brackenwoods themselves at the role into which they and the house were cast.

Mrs. Davenport displays her considerable gifts of satire and sly wit in some really superb caricaturing of antiquamanias and devotees of local color. I haven't read anything much funnier than her description of the visitation of the Pioneer Daughters in their little paper coonskin hats; or of Mr. Peter Faunce, the Wandering Minstrel, and his dulcimer; or of Clem Pettigrew, the author who was more homespun than linsey-woolsey and who would have died for dear ol' Narruh Gap, where he was bohn, suh, but who preferred to live in Hollywood. She has a fine time with these characters, and so does the reader. Once it gets past its initial doldrums, "Family Fortunes" is a thoroughly de-

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Antidote for Dial-Hopping

GEORGE KENT

FOR the past three years, people who live in and around New York have been listening to something that seems almost too good to be true: a radio station with good manners. Instead of clattering into your privacy with a strident "Buy this. . . . Buy that. . . . It's the biggest. . . . It's the newest. . . ." WABF tiptoes into your living room with artfully chosen programs of classic music and then steps back to let you enjoy them in serenity. There are commercials, of course, but they are whispered almost apologetically, rarely more than a sentence or two, and stripped of adjectives and high pressure. Definitely tabu are the theme song, the jingling hosannas in praise of soap, cigarettes, and cereals. WABF does not forget it is a guest in your home, and behaves as becomes one.

The other day a Princeton University professor wrote the station a letter saying: "Anything as good as WABF must need money. Enclosed is my check for \$14."

The professor was wrong. WABF is making money. And it is growing. Engineering surveys, now completed, have cleared the way for the establishment soon of the six-station FM Metropolitan Network to link Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, New Haven, and Boston. Eventually, it will hook up with other FM chains, particularly those being operated without a profit by educational groups and institutions. By 1952 the programs of WABF should be audible from coast to coast and the new network will have become a great force for the improvement of radio.

When ordinary folks, like you and me, get mad at what the loudspeaker is spewing into our homes, all we do is turn it off. Ira A. Hirschmann, a dark, curly-topped man of forty-eight, also turned it off. But then he did more. He went out and started Station WABF, to broadcast, on FM only, good music, presented with tact and courtesy. He didn't have quite enough money but, being the type who can sell hatpins to porcupines, he persuaded a few men with money to join him.

Hirschmann had had some experience with radio. Back in the Twenties, as an employee of Bamberger's—a Newark, N. J., department store—he helped found Station WOR,

now key station of the Mutual Network. There he had had the distinction of putting the New York Philharmonic on the air for the first time. This was less showmanship than the gesture of a man who loved music sincerely and numbered Artur Schnabel and Arturo Toscanini among his close friends.

With the founding of WABF, split-second programming was abolished. "Music's the thing," Hirschmann said, "not the clock." On conventional stations, long musical compositions are often cut so that they will end on the hour or half hour. Hirschmann laid down the rule that all numbers were to be played through without interruption, regardless of time. (Usually there are no pauses between movements—certainly no commercials.) In a concert hall people do not keep looking at their watches; why in radio? Compositions on WABF wind up minutes after the hour, sometimes as many as seventeen minutes. Once a quartet was on the air when a cellist snapped a string on his instrument. On any other station, committed to a rigid advertising time-table, this would have been a calamity. On WABF the announcer simply informed the audience what had happened and a few minutes later the concert resumed. Characteristically, it started not from where it left off but from the beginning.

WABF does not play jazz. Occasionally, in historical surveys of the

American musical scene, there will be hot numbers, but at no other times. Last year an attempt was made to include a little jazz as a regular feature. But the listeners spoke up vehemently. The nays outweighed the yeas by ten to one. For much the same reason there is no newscast. Hirschmann feels that it becomes unpleasantly repetitious besides interrupting the flow of music. There is only one exception: a weekly fifteen-minute report from the United Nations.

Commercials, Hirschmann decided, were a necessary evil if the station was to become self-supporting. But he felt that they should be edited, spaced, and delivered in a normal speaking voice. To make sure that the music remained more important than advertising, he gave the program department dominance over the sales people. Theirs is always the last word. He also gave them a mouthpiece in the monthly *Program Magazine*, which, in addition to listing all compositions, publishes editorials and articles on music for a paid-up circulation of 25,000.

Presented one day with a long, high-pressure blurb for a record company that had leased six hours on his station, Hirschmann reduced it to a lean six paragraphs that told the story without frills or offensive insistence. The advertising agency that had prepared it was in a tizzy. But the sponsor, oddly enough, was enthusiastic. He thought it fitted better. "It married the music," he said.

Normally, commercials are given on the hour and half-hour, and never take more than two minutes for every sixty minutes of music, much less time than on most other stations. If a long composition is being played, the announcement waits until it is over. In the case of the "Requiem" of Berlioz, for example, there will be none for nearly two hours.

WABF announcers are forbidden, under pain of dismissal, to *punch* the advertising message into the mike. They may recommend, they may suggest; they may not implore, wheedle, or bully the listeners. They are not permitted to use their position, as do disc jockeys, to build up a personality. It gets in the way of the music, Hirschmann believes. "The radio station is merely the fortunate intermediary between Beethoven and the public," he said. "The broadcaster is a guest in a home and he must talk as he would talk sitting in a friend's living room." In the past three years two WABF announcers have been discharged for violating this rule.

WABF is estimated to have close to
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