The Literature of Travel about Asia from 1920 to 1940.

General Features:

The best books of travel about Asia appear during the years from 1920 to 1940. The Pioneers reveal the face of Asia, but their successors reveal her soul. It is a period of full blossoming, and rich abundance; great literary figures turn to travel, and they make a probe into the heart of the Asian people. For sheer literary beauty E.M. Forster, Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley, T.E. Lawrence and J.R. Ackerley have rarely been equalled; and for profundity of thought and learning too the writers of this period are unexcelled.

The literature of travel during this period is enriched by the different varieties of approach; there are the modern explorers - Bertram Thomas, Philby, Freya Stark and Aurel Stein; there are the great administrators and soldiers like Earl of Ronaldshay, George Dunbar, Sir Walter Roper Lawrence; there are mystics like Constance Sitwell, and Yeats Brown. To this must be added the modern journalists and reporters, sent on special missions, like Peter Fleming and Auden. This rich variety of literature has an uneven level as far as prose style is concerned; some books reach almost the level of perfection, whereas others are just trashy stuff. Lawrence creates a great epic out of travel, it is the whole drama of the rise of a great nation, it has a titanic force and Biblical grandeur. E.M. Forster lays bare the soul of a nation with admirable skill, he moves as if on a sleepy sublime spiritual level; every word and every hint is used with greatest art
in creating a magic web of light and gloom and many shades of gloom to make this temple of life. Constance Sitwell and Yeats Brown follow the same path, but they know not the mysteries of great creative work. Somerset Maugham and Aldous Huxley study men, manners and morals, they are intellectuals, and often mock at human follies; J.R. Ackerley creates a sunny warm look out of this mockery.

21. T.E. LAWRENCE (1888-1935) - Seven Pillars of Wisdom - 1926

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom is a great epic, an epic of travel and adventure, an epic depicting a huge upheaval of a great race, a blind Samson breaking his bonds, a flood of Arabian nationalism deluging the Turkish homeland, a stirring story of one man's virile leadership, told in prose full of force and energy and beauty of a Homeric story. The desert gives it a ruggedness and a purity, a poetic solemnity and prodigious energy; it has more human interest than Daughtry's Arabia Deserta; the men he paints have the lineaments of Old Testament heroes; they have an unbending quality and titanic vigour, drawn in bare outline they fire the imagination and haunt it for ever. It has more of sand and desert, sun and heat than Arabia Felix of Bertram Thomas; he gives life to the lifeless desert (Rub-al-Khali), and Lawrence drives before him the little life that he finds anywhere; he gives no Semitic matter but the moods are drenched in Semiticism; his characterisation of the Arab is scarcely equalled in the pages of literature, both modern and ancient. He depicts unique events - the fall of an empire and the rise of a great race; it is enhanced by fine descriptions of the men of destiny; Feisal, Auda, Nuri and others are like the heroes of Aeneid and Iliad. The book is entirely human, its interest is concentrated on the destinies of
of a single race. It has manly vigour, and little of feminine interest in it, that was left for Freya Stark to depict. Above all it is Lawrence's own personality that gives it a strange poetic beauty and a wild eccentric touch.

T.E. Lawrence has met with a great deal of unsympathetic criticism, as a writer and as a military leader; men have no generosity worthy of the generosity that Lawrence shows to others. This noble-minded traveller, poet and man of action meets unfair treatment at the hands of men who seem to have monopolised art and art fads, and who show their own narrowness while discussing that of T.E. Lawrence.

"His nature was masochistic; a psychological state of which we find not only the overt symptoms, but also the secondary characteristics. Every thing in his life fits the interpretation. A frigidity towards women was balanced by an impulse towards art. He was not an artist by nature but had a sick longing to be one. Seven Pillars is a straining after this aesthetic grace, and is an artificial monstrosity, as he himself so freely and fully admitted. Masochism explains too his disinclination to rebel". 1.

These priests of Masoch and Marquis de Sade have been properly answered by Captain Liddell Hart:

"Recent biographies of Lawrence have been written by authors who never knew him nor had opportunity to cross-examine his close associates, a few of whom are still living. Whatever the value of this remote view as an aid to detachment it is a handicap in gauging the validity of criticism. When I came to study the Arab revolt in 1920's I knew Lawrence's critics better than I knew him, and it was the evidence I got from the men who had worked most closely with him that compelled me to revise my view. For it became clear that most of the common criticisms were ill founded and that they had arisen from fleeting contact or were hearsay". 2.

In the same letter he quotes how Wavell recognised Lawrence's greatness and claim to inclusion among men like Napoleon and Churchill in his book Great Contemporaries asserted that Lawrence would have realised Napoleon's dream of the conquest of the East if the war had not ended too soon.

The distinctive qualities which fitted him for literature were qualities without which he could not have succeeded in Arabia, and his literary ability needed or appeared to need important events shaped by himself for subject matter. He had an epic theme to handle, there would not have been this epic theme if he had not forced events to take that shape; and he produced the epic. His book is as full of heroes as the Iliad, and its Achilles is the author himself.

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom is a great study of Arabian character; her heroes and warriors, chiefs and leaders, her herdsmen and camel drivers, her tribal feuds and festivities are all described flawlessly. Chapter-III is an excellent study and analysis of Semitic character as seen in history and everyday life. He seems for once to have captured the spirit of the Desert, the Soul of the Sands, the creed of the Burning wasteland, and has seen the Rub(God) of Rub-ul-Qali (The Great Waste Land). Doughty gives a diary of his impressions, but Lawrence gives the dialectics of racial ebb and tide, the mysterious growth and decay of a mysterious race.

"They were a people of spasms, of upheavals, of ideas, the race of the individual genius. Their movements were the more shocking by contrast with the quietude of the every day, their great men greater by contrast with the humanity of their mob. Their convictions were by instinct, their activities intuitional. Their largest manufacture was of creeds, almost they were monopolists of revealed religions". 1.

"They were a limited narrow minded people, whose inert intellects lay fallow in incurious resignation. Their imaginations were vivid, but not creative". 2.

"The creed of the desert seemed inexpressible in words, and indeed in thought. It was easily felt as an influence, and those who went into the desert long enough to forget its open spaces and its emptiness were inevitably thrust upon God as the only refuge and rhythm of being". 3.

2. Ibid., p.38.
3. Ibid. p.41.
The characters portrayed in the book have sharply contrasted individual characteristics, the desert seems to favour such individualism. In following the heroes of Lawrence through the many vicissitudes of the war towards the dream of their hearts, one understands the attraction that lies in this type of biblical characters; they symbolise the most essential existence of Arabia. A na"ve ingenuity invests them with a tangible reality; a sombre dignity and princely pride, an eloquent silence, and a pathetic simplicity - make them unforgettable characters. Here Lawrence shows a natural gift that is undeniable; he feels and perceives greatness; he shows how to express what he perceives; there is ease, lucidity and simplicity in his description; he has skill in dramatic effect.

"What is upon you Tafas?" said I.
"My Lord you saw those two riders at the well".
"The Sharif and his servant".
"Yes, but they were Sharif Ali Ibn al-Hussein of Yadhig, and his cousin Sharif Yehsin, Lords of Harith, who are the blood enemies of the Masruh. They feared they would be delayed or driven off the water if the Arabs knew them, so they pretended to be master and servant from Mecca". 1.

There is a sense of the dramatic in his first meeting with Feisal.

"And do you like our place here in Wadi Safra? Well, but it is far from Damascus". The word had fallen like a quiver, and held everybody present stiffened where he sat and held his breath for a silent minute. Some perhaps were dreaming of a far off success. Others would have thought it a reflection on their late defeat. Feisal at length lifted his eyes, smiling at me and said "Praise be to God. There are Turks nearer us than that". 2.

A description of Auda Abu Tayi the old chief illustrates Lawrence's method of etching a strong character with only a few strokes.

"His face was magnificent in its lines and hollows. On it was written how truly the death in battle of Amad his favourite son cast sorrow over all his life when it ended his dream of handing on to future generations the greatness and the name of Abu Tayi. He had large eloquent eyes like black velvet

1. Seven Pillars of the Wisdom - London-1935, p.82
2. Ibid., p.91.
in richness. His forehead was low and broad, his nose very high and sharp, powerfully hooked his mouth rather large and mobile, his beard and moustaches had been trimmed to a point. 1.

The story has deep human interest, and it rises to great heights, men become mere puppets; the cruel desert crazes them, the hot sands dehydrate them and destroy their bodies; even their ideals 'sit like gods' and watch them move towards their death and destruction. A slave of Nuri Shaalan loses his way in the desert, and meets a terrible end.

"We were not greatly perturbed about him. He knew the country and his camel was under him. It might be that he had intentionally taken the direct way to Jauf, Nuri's capital, to earn the reward of first news that we came with gifts. However it was, he did not come that night, nor next day; and when mon he after I asked Nuri of him, he replied that his dried body had lately been found lying beside his unplundered camel far out in the wilderness. He must have lost himself in the sand haze, and wandered till his camel broke down, and there died of thirst and heat. Not a long death, even for the strongest a second day in summer was all-but very painful; for thirst was an active malady, a fear and panic which tore at the brain and reduced the bravest man to a stumbling babbling maniac in an hour, and then the sun killed him".2.

"Each day some of us passed, and the living knew themselves just sentient puppets on God's stage; indeed our task master was merciless, merciless so long as our bruised feet could stagger forward on the road". 3.

The Seven Pillars of the Wisdom is a unique study of Arabia before the aeroplanes and the oil companies invaded the land, much of the charm and flavour of Doughty's days had already evaporated; none in future can expect a great literary book coming out of the burning sand. Lawrence destroyed many MS copies before the Seven Pillars were satisfactorily hewn. Yet he succeeded at least.

"I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands and wrote my will across the sky in stars, to earn your freedom, the seven pillared worthy house, that your eyes might be shining for me when we came". 4.

2. Ibid.,p.257.
3. Ibid.,p.29.
4. Ibid.,p.1.
Bertram Thomas, sometime Vazir to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, political officer in Iraq and Assistant Political Representative in Transjordan belongs to that galaxy of brilliant men who extended the British Empire and served it, and whose pen, expressed the inmost feelings of the British heart, feelings that sought this expansion, feelings that went in quest of wide horizons. It is not strange that all the best books about Arabia are written by the English and in English; Jews, Swiss and Irishmen seem to have conspired to help the Englishmen write them; there are some German books too, but of sober, tiresome learning, and one Dutch. The desert enriched Doughty's pen, and Palgrave's, Burchhardts' and Blunt's, helped Runkier with his Koweit, Burton and Wavell in their pilgrimages, and Bury among his sunstruck Yawani hamlets. But they are all gone, the poets and dreamers, politicians and explorers.

Arabia Felix (1932) marks the stage of the full discovery of Arabia, it is a great triumph, a single-handed conquest, somewhat in the spirit of Dr. Livingstone, but without his risks and adventures, he is nearer to the earth than Doughty and simpler in plan than Lawrence. He has love of humour and mischief, an aspect of life, completely ignored by others; he tells simple stories and anecdotes, he narrates the tribal feuds and murders, and all this is done in the language of every-day life. It has an intimate quality; warmth and beauty of human relations creep into a story of travel describing an Empty land. A depth of inward reflection is revealed by simpler and more direct means than in the Seven Pillars
or the Desert and the Town. He has no illusions about what he is writing; he is willing to cast every thing in the ready-made moulds of thought and expression; he is too practical minded to use rhetoric or poetic imagery, and he never imitates any one else. It is the mystery and antiquity of this land that he sets out to reveal; a touch of history, a description of the present day conditions, and the mere enumeration of places unknown does the trick.

"Arabia Felix, strange that the epithet 'Happy' should grace a part of the earth's surface, most of it barren wilderness, where, since the dawn of history, man has ever been at war with his environment and his neighbour. Yet there can be no mistaking the classical geographers. To Strabo, Pliny and Ptolmey the term Arabia Felix served for the entire peninsula south of the Syrian desert ('Arabia Deserta) and the mountains around Sinai ('Arabia Petraea). True the term consorts ill with the horrid wastes of Rub'al-Khali that form no small part of Arabia, but there lies in the central north, bordering the Indian ocean, a land at once of rare physical loveliness and ancient fame". 1.

About Dhufar he remarks:

"Here according to the writer of the Genesis, Jehovah had set the limit of the known world, 'as thou goest east unto Mount Sephar'; hither came the ancient Egyptians for frankincense to embalm their sacred Pharaohs; here, may be, were hewed the pillars of Solomon's Temple, if indeed Dhufar may not be site of Ophir itself, and the traditional market for ivory and peacock feathers". 2.

From Risit near Dhu°Far he journeyed northward passing through Quara Mountains, Dhufar, Nejd, Urug Adh Drahiva, Dakala, Baniyan and reached the sea at Doba. Tribal customs and conventions, superstitious and stories enliven the account, and there is a good deal of kindly humour. While measuring skulls, to study the racial characteristics of Arabians he had a number of hilarious incidents.

2. Ibid. p.23, Introduction.
"Are you quite sure you are pure bred"? I asked a Somali member of the Police who was next. "I claim to be", he replied, "but God is the knower, and then my mother".

Beauty and romance of the desert, the desert of antiquity, is still there; here he is not a simple narrator but a poet who stirs up impressions of the past and the present with a happy choice of words, he has the perfect simplicity of style: there is always an unerring and safe accuracy and an impassioned desire for nothing but truth. This intimate friend of the Arabian princes and their adviser provides a picture more familiar and precise than that of eulogistic admirers of this antient land.

"Hidden in these desolate Wadi beds, which drain north across the steppe, flourishes the wild Mughur, the frank-incense tree. . . . Frank-incense has from the earliest times been a precious spice, and the most acceptable of offerings. It was used by the Egyptians to preserve the bodies they held sacred, Pharaohs and others of royal blood and crocodiles; it was burnt before the tabernacle of the Israelites in the days of Moses; the hill of Frankincense is mentioned in the Song of Solomon, and it was brought as a gift with gold and myrrh to our infant Lord".

"Very impressive is a great dune region at first sight - a vast ocean of billowing sands here tilted into sudden frowning heights, and there falling to gentle valleys, marvellous merciful for Camels though without a scrap of verdure in view. Dunes of all sizes, unsymmetrical in relation to one another, but with the exquisite roundness of a girl's breasts, rise tier upon tier like a mighty mountain system. No contrasting shades are afforded by the sun's almost vertical rays in these tropical latitudes and the resulting impressions are soft plane, and an exquisite purity of colour".

The mere fact that T.E. Lawrence gave recognition to this book places 'Arabia Felix' in the list of great travel books of this age. But his 'Alarms and Excursions in Arabia' is in no way less interesting or less important.

2. Ibid, pp. 122, 123.
3. Ibid, p.76.
ALARMS AND EXCURSIONS IN ARABIA

alarms and Excursions in Arabia is a collection of memories and recollections of a political agent in an ancient land, and hence the interest and authenticity of these reports from the desert bear the stamp of British Imperialism and diplomacy; it is an imperialism unifying an ancient land, and bringing peace to the tribes constantly at war. Leaving aside the political implications we discover in it an intimate study of Arabian life, a fine description of scenes and sights, a freshness of perception a spontaneous looking at things, which one connects with minds of practical bent. These reports of so diverse a nature can be grouped round the single theme - a study of modern Arabia; he lets us hear the actual voice of the Marsh Arabs, the insurgents in Mesopotamia, the inhabitants of Oman, the rebels of Musandam, and many unknown dwellers of the unknown Interior. The book smells of the camel and the goat, the insect ridden marshes and saline wells; it has in it fragrance and flavour of mangoes, dates and wild fruits; he has approach to the prince and the pauper, the tent and the adobe house; he is never scared of his life like Doughty, and he is never afraid of falling into the hand of the enemy like Lawrence.

"As we emerge on the distant side the sun is setting in a glorious paradise of colour - where else except perhaps in Ceylon, do I recall such sun-sets - sinking gradually to the dying horizon, into which it suddenly seems to dip. There is an immediate and welcome change of temperature; the boatman ceases from his labours for the evening prayer, the wind freshens to send black patches of cloud suddenly across our bows, a V formation of loud quacking geese goes flighting over, well out of range, and darkness descends upon the frog croaking waters". 1.

The Desert is cruel and breeds a love of self preservation and struggle for existence in every creature; they fight and struggle over elementary necessaries like water; a man jumps into the well to drink water quicker, and then children of the desert make fun of him.

"Hamdan was drawn up only when he had agreed to give his water to a woman waiting to depart, and to take his turn for water ration with every body else. His emergence was greeted with the ironical shout of Allah-u-Akbar, which was taken up one after the other by every tribal group in the amused camp. But nobody blamed the action. It was an inbred impulse, which was perfectly understood. To me it was an interesting commentary on the stern war of survival which the son of the desert must wage with his surroundings, and on its implication of the devil take the hind-most". 1.

The whole of the work of Bertram Thomas is full of the rich substance of concrete things; he is daring enough to narrate his travel without embellishment, he is an observant and discriminating traveller.

1. H.S.J.B. PHILBY

23. H.S.J.B. PHILBY


The Empty Quarter is a book of love, love for the mysterious unknown desert, the love of a lover forgetting all else, and dedicating his life and soul to the dream of his heart. His life was one of passionate devotion to his ideal to which he gave himself with a true and deep zeal. It is a story of a fulfilment and a disappointment, a realisation of a dream a bit too late, a victory without the crown, a meeting with the damsel after she has been ravished by another.

"For fifteen years my life has been dominated by a single idea, a single ambition, rather perhaps a single obsession. Faithfully, fanatically and relentlessly through all those years, I have stalked the quarry which now, in these pages lies before the reader - dissected, labelled and described. I have not perhaps accomplished all that I planned to do, but I have done enough to set my soul at rest, relaxed from

1. Alar and Excursions in Arabia - London - 1931, p.200
Its love bondage. Nor again have I been alone, even first in the field. The honours of priority have gone to another that outwent me in the race, and Bertram Thomas deservedly wears the honours of a pioneer. 1.

It is a story of the perpetual making of plans and the failure, the vicissitudes of life and work which carried him this way and that, and very nearly out of Arabia, till in the autumn of 1924 he returned to Arabia to try a throw with fate. To that effort and its consequences he sacrificed everything, the security of an orthodox career, and the comforts of a civilised existence. But then the Jahabi Revolution broke out, and he had to wait for seven years more.

"For seven years I had laboured in vain as Jacob of old for Rachel. In place of the Rub al Khali I had found a home by the green waters of the Red Sea, to toil other seven years, for the bride of my constant desire. And the great peace of Islam slowly and surely descended upon me, enveloped me, who has had known no peace before; in the austere mantle of Jahabi philosophy which tilting at the iniquities of the ungodly, had imposed a peace, that passeth all understanding upon a country which since the beginning of time had known no peace, but that of death and desolation". 2.

This book has a greater similarity with Doughty's Arabia Deserta than any other description of this empty desert; the style too is quaint and the syntax has a queer re-arrangement, an influence of Arabic speech is clearly visible. His book shows a taste for observing new facts and details and adding to the knowledge already accumulated, and there is more of hardship and physical effort than in Arabia Felix. His prose is admirable, he has a love for long learned sentences; his long sojourn at the court of King Ibn Saud gives it a courtly flavour.

2. Ibid., p XV, Introduction.
"To than (The guides) and the great beasts that bore us hungering and thirsting but uncomplaining the credit of a great adventure. "For the pleasure of telling the tale with heart-felt homage to the Arabian Caesar". 1

He started in January 1932 from the wells of Dulaiqiya, and passed through Al Kutrih, Jafura (Northern and Southern) Al Rimal, Maqaimna, Nahar, Shanna, and he returned by Maifa, Adra, and the range of Rani Lainan. He gives wild and fascinating details of Rub al Khali (pp 224 to 269); he makes a number of important discoveries.

"I knew not whether to laugh or cry, but I was strangely fascinated by a scene that had shattered the dreams of years. So that was Nahar. A volcano in the desert and on it built the story of a city destroyed by fire from heaven for the sins of its King who had heeded not the warnings of prophet Hud - generally identified with the Biblical Nebir, and had waxed wanton with his horses, and eunuchs, and concubines in an earthly paradise until the wrath came upon him with the west wind, and reduced the scene of his riotous pleasure to ashes and desolation." 2

Arabia of Vahabis

Arabia of Vahabis is an account of a sojourn in Arabia in the years 1917 and 1918. He was the very last European to stay in Vahabi Arabia before its desert spaces were desecrated by the advent of the motor car which made its first appearance in the territories of Ibn Saud within a twelve month of his departure. It is a more intimate study rich in details, and local colour; it has much similarity with Alarms and Excursions by Bertram Thomas. The great fast of Ramdhan, Adi Maifar, the ancient settlement of Ayainna, Al Casin, Buraida, Khubub and Kwait are all visited by him. The old world atmosphere of populated Arabia, the individual character of every town and hamlet, the spirit of every spring and oasis is described simply and authentically. Buraida where old Doughty had faced persecution at the hands of fanatics is still unchanged when Philby goes there.

2. Ibid., p.165.
Yet neither remorse nor enlightenment born of travel will ever wean the citizen of Furaida when at home, from his bigotry in which his city has grown great among the cities of Arabia. Abroad he is not less genial or hospitable than the rest of them, and it is difficult to account for the blight that settle on his soul within the precincts of his native town.

24. FREYA STARK
1. The Valley of Assassins and other Persians travels - 1934
3. A Winter in Arabia - 1940

Miss Freya Stark leads the lady travellers of this age and their number is considerable; they are as adventurous as men, and decidedly more reckless because their feminine gender is an added terror for the men of the East; women are safe where men would think twice before venturing. There are reasons and good reasons for this restless wandering of lady travellers, but somehow they are not convincing, and the literature of travel written by these women is not comparatively as successful as the novels written by women novelists. Freya Stark's style is uneven; there are fine poetical passages and many which are simply puerile; she is uncertain and apprehensive of criticism; her womanish self consciousness makes her at times rather 'ultra-modern' and at other places she is unnecessarily sentimental or pensive; but there is not a lavish display of feelings. Yet in spite of all her fears and frights she is one of the most original travel writers, she has spontaneous vivacity, and extreme veracity; she brings a fresh new touch to the observation of customs and manners, and has entry to the harem, that sanctuary of home life, never

seen by men writers of highest repute; Arabia of Doughty is a many splendoured affair, that of Lawrence is a veritable image of the fields of Troy; Arabia had never before been seen through the eyes of a Young spirited lady who could penetrate social life of that land from the femine as well as masculine point of view. At the same time she flatters the tastes of the reader by giving first hand information about unknown lands. Her description is pleasing except when she is merely decorative; then she seems to be standing on tiptoe, and very easily with a single in-appropriate word the whole thing topples over. Freya Stark does retain a personality, a Charm peculiarly her own. Never before has the real atmosphere of the Arabian home and public places with all their gossip and the talk of the young and the old been described so successfully.

The development and growth of her literary skill is also an erratic affair; it is not a slow gradual maturing of her art, her first book is the best, and then comes her last where she breaks new ground in travel writing; this again is probably the result of her femine fears, and her sensitivity. THE VALLEY OF ASSASSINS, AND OTHER PERSIAN TRAVELS 1934

The Valley of Assassins is a story of her first successful flight from Western Civilisation, and it bears the marks of that first flush of success; the sheer joy of wandering on the foreign land gives it a certain warmth of colours and sharpness of outline, the landscape sank into her memory with all its rough edges because the mind was clamouring for it; somehow Persia with all its antique associations was more to her liking and the barren monotonous desert which she visited later appealed to her, but never fired her imagination, and yet it is her Arabian travels that are given greater importance.
The Northern Persia, sometime the haunt of the Assassins, and till recent times given to new religious sects and consequent feuds - is painted by her in the form of a simple itinerary, but her likes and dislikes, her choice of themes and points of discussion indicate her marked love for the waste land and the forest rather than the town and the city, yet she is not deeply read like Gertrude Bell to follow the paths of ancient Kings, and the roads that time has obliterated.

"In the waste of civilisation Luristan is still an enchanted name. Its streams are dotted blue lines on the map, and the position of its hills a matter of taste. It is still a country for the explorer".1

This too accounts for her love of wild nature; and the beauty of natural scenes and sights which she describes with an ecstatic heart, though she never makes it into a cult.

"The most beautiful valley is in the jungle. Through glades and leafy waves, reddish mountains break into it like hulls of ships, high in the sky. The trees - thorn, beech, ash, sycamore, divar medlar, pear - spread there as in a park, to great height and girth; and the river stumbles over their roots in shining eddies. Over all is a Virgin sense of freedom, a solitary joyousness, a gentle bustle made by stream and sunlight, and the warm light wind independent of the life of man". 2

"The dawn crept dove coloured over the solitary landscape, subduing the high ridge before us to a uniform shadowy gentleness, even as the mind of man, growing in wisdom may yet subdue and smooth away, by very excess of light, the obstacles before it". 3

1. The Valley of Assassins - London - 1934, John Murray
2. Ibid., p.310
3. Ibid., p. 83
Her general method is to describe the scenery of a place, and the climate, and then some interesting dialogue with the more interesting natives; songs and poetry and jokes, also come into it; It is thus that she sustains our interest; excavations, and tomb and treasure hunting, along with the adventures with the bandits and the police do more than to sustain the interest of the reader.

"That night I slept in the ladies tent. They wore sarbans or turbans even bigger than those of Alishtar and Kh. va. and as they moved about stiffly in their loose gowns, and enormous head dresses, it looked as if the figures of a pack of cards had come to life in the half light of the tent". 1.

"The great and almost only comfort about being a woman is that one can always pretend to be more stupid than one is, and no one is surprised" 2.

This journey from Varzan pass in the North to Tehran is a great success.

**THE SOUTHERN GATES OF ARABIA - A JOURNEY IN THE HAJDH-HAWIT - 1936**

Freya Stark was probably exhausted intellectually and emotionally when she undertook to write this book; it has all the signs of a tired mind trying to grind out ideas which somehow refuse to come; The first mark of this failure is quotations from poets and authors, both European and Arabic at the opening of every chapter; these probably are a good feature of the book which is otherwise deprived of all literary beauty. This lady travel writer, already famous was probably impaired on all sides, to attempt a journey of Arabia, this would answer the need of the public, and give her a place by the side of giants like Doughty. She submitted to the solicitations, and undertook the task beneath which she often screams, and then breaks

---

2. Ibid, p. 67.
Her achievement and is rescued by the R.A.F. Her achievement in a way is quite a feat; it is remarkable for courage and capacity for physical endurance, and her understanding of a foreign people, specially the Arabian home and women. Landing at Ma'alla at the head of ancient Incense Road she journeys into the interior, very rarely visited by women; Wadi Hanin, Zaminal Kabir, Jol, Khuraiha and Robat, Hajrair, Wadi Hadramaut, Shibam, Sewun, Tarim, Wadi and are all visited by this indomitable woman. Probably the finest parts of the book are the passages describing the scenes and sights of nature, especially wild nature.

"The wind still rushed through the motionless tree whose leaves were too small and hard to bend before it, it showed its swift feet in white clouds from the North that billowed up, glittering to be swallowed and melted in moon light. The frozen air shimmered, the moon rode high, but the opposite Western sky was soft under an avenue of stars". 1

"The Jol has the fascination and the terror of Vastness not only in space, but in time. As one rises to its unheated level, the human world is lost. Nature alone is at work, carving geography in her millennial periods; her temporal abysses made visible in stone". 2

But somehow she fumbles and falls while trying to understand Arabia, the soul of the land cannot be easily understood by a woman because her soul is a Male soul; it is a land of men and all her ideals and aspirations, all dreams and prophesies are concerned with them. She fails where she tries to be amusing and un-Arabian, she forest what quality of moral life and civilisation she is cut to study, and what she notices if often pompous and ludicrous.

2. Ibid., p.87
"I have often wondered why a ship should be on the whole a more satisfactory possession than a woman." 1.

"Like a peacock's tail opening, the night filled the sky. The green western light fan shaped from the sunset, transparent as water, died into the cold blue upper dome; the coastline turned to a silhouette, and so did the Indian helmsman at the wheel. The small dark round headed people from Surat are found in most stream vessels of the coast". 2

Somehow the story is incomplete, the picture has not much depth, and the expression is cold and stereo-typed inspite of all the good intentions with which she opens every new chapter. Doughty's Arabia is great and grim, Lawrence finds fire and fury in the Arabian heart, but Freya Stark's Arabia sleeps in the shade of the trees; it is the common man's Arabia, it is devoid of all majesty and grandeur, even the past lies buried and forgotten.

A WINTER IN ARABIA - 1940

Freya Stark's second journey and its account are almost of the same literary level as the first one, it has more pretensions but less palpable results; it is the journey of a seasoned traveller, yet the old freshness and charm of a first visit to the realms of gold is missing. Leaving aside the results of the work of exploration undertaken and achieved - the general reasoning and the intellectual content gains little by this second attempt at the discovery of Arabia; but there is no doubt that she is now a person of importance, and enjoys important patronisation.

"The notes for this diary were written during a winter in South Arabia, made possible by the generosity of Viscount Wakefield of Hythe, of the Royal Geographical Society, of Ashmolean Museum, and of Mr. Louis Clark of Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. The scientific and more serious records of this venture are to be found elsewhere."

2. Ibid., p.24.
This is but a record of actions and reactions that might occur in any small Arabian town unused to Europeans, and of a journey from Hureidha to the sea. 1.

Her critical judgment is somewhat timid, and her creative and her creative instinct is impeded by the scientific interests and her own physical ailments. From all the incidents, places, and persons described in these pages there emanates the feeling of dullness and boredom. Arabia is too much for her nerves, in fact she ventures beyond her powers, and again suffers from a serious illness. It is in the soul that the trouble lies; her intellect never falters. She could never be at peace with the soul of Arabia, whatever she observes is only a surface affair. Her best passages could have been written anywhere outside Arabia.

"But the spring was everywhere. Intangible yet it lurked like a promise in the sharpness of the air, in the milky transparency of the sky, in the buzzing of an early bee and the faint pink pea flowers that sprang from their small bushes in the sand. It washed with a secret beauty the brown town on its brown hill side, and threw its fugitive illusion even on the ancient remnants of the wadi." 2.

"Seen from so high triple lazy, lace like edge of waves crept slowly; they did not turn all at once, but unrolled from end to end in a spiral motion, as it were the heart of a shell unwinding. Our aeroplane hung over the azure world with silver wings" 3.

Alexander's Path -1958

Alexander's Path deals with the tour of the different places on the path of the Great Macedonian when he marched through Turkey.

"To find what he did between Xanthus and Sagalassus became my object and the gathering of the evidence and gradual unwinding of the clues got involved in my daily gossip of travel". 4.

2. Ibid. p.116.
3. Ibid. p.1.
but her own journey and Alexander's journey are properly woven together, the landscape is the landscape of today, though the past appears through it, like the warp in the world's threadbare weaving. It is a piece of scholarly research, and quotations from various authorities embellish her pages; and these are used in her own passages very tastefully.

"In the rapture of such beauty, in the soft season when the voice of a calm, the grey blue daughter of ocean calmly sings (Euripides 'Helen'), one could scarcely have borne a companion. One looked not at but through experience as if life in general were a window to interpret the world, and this must perhaps be a solitary pastime, the secret of travel. The stray roadside events are part of its solitude, but companionship—unless with one more me than I am myself ('Wuthering Heights') produces the destructive sock which every artist knows". 1.

History and Geography are woven into the story very skillfully, the standard of the treatment of the subject is fairly high, and markedly scholarly, but a little pedantic. Her research has nothing original about it, her general view belongs to literature rather than history or geography. With her clear alert and realistic mind, she observes the facts of the past and the present, and then weaves them into a fine narrative.

"Ihat I liked best in Anamur was the road from the river valley and the bridge to the town, lined with harvests like the road of Shallot, and with the same sort of traffic along it, in little cavalcades of donkeys, or horses with foals, or people who looked like Canterbury pilgrims; or bananas of Anamur (the only place in Turkey where they grow) carried down on camels to the shore. The camels make a great ado with their forefeet, lifting them high as those of a stepping trotter and using all the muscles in an accomplished way, while the hind feet trail behind as best they can, and the boy with the shaved head and rags tied together feels like a prince riding on his donkey". 2.

1. Alexander's Path - London - 1958, p.31
2. Ibid, p. 39
The ancient bridges and theaters of Pamphylia arouse in her mind strange emotions and memories which immediately resolve into a tragic commentary on the great drama of life itself.

"In the Greek theatre with its simple three domed stage and chorus undertone of sorrow, the drama of life could penetrate, without any barrier between them, the surrounding vastness of the dark. I have listened to the Hippolytus of Euripides in Euripides where the words of Artemis and Aphrodite with the mountain pines and the sunset behind them become a limpid fear - a play no longer, but nature and all that ever has been, anguish, and waste of days speaking to men". 1.

Alexander's Path possesses many merits which her other books lack entirely; it has compactness, solidity, and what may be termed density; concrete facts of life and history, ideal, sentiments and shades of meanings are enveloped, and harmonised, by a simple, vigorous and straight forward flow of prose. Her prose passes from the most naive exposition to a semi-epic style from the weightiest discussion to the most trifling remark heard on the road side. So far as form and style are concerned this is undoubtedly her best work, though the general reader will continue to give importance to her books about Arabia.

25. SIR AUREL STEIN-(1862-1943)

2. Old Routs of Western Iran- London- 1940.

It is a story of great discoveries and epoch making additions to the knowledge of historians that Sir Aurel Stein tells in these books; here is a great master shown at his work and a clear head telling the story to an average reader not well versed in these matters. There is a great writer in Stein, since there is a vigorous

mind that sees and knows how to picture up its visions of the past by means of words. Without being an artist in the proper sense he has artistic merits. He is clear as the activity of the mind is clear, his language is concrete like his thought, his expressive power, and his disinclination to attempt effect of any kind—make him a conscientious writer. He possesses certain faculty for composition and fine shading, and he digs deep into the fund of historical language to give a monumental charm to his books. He is like no one else unless we find some affinity with Sir Francis Younghusband.

On Ancient Central Asian Tracks—1933.

On Ancient Central Asian Tracks is more important and more charming than his other books.

"The years spent on hard travel in those little known regions, difficult of access and trying in their physical features, remain among the happiest memories of my life. But more strenuous still and longer were the years needed for the elaboration of the abundant scientific results which my three Central Asian expeditions had yielded". 1

The scene of his great travel book extends over a vast area; Samarkand and Tashkand in the East, Hami and Sancho in the West, Kulja in the North, and Leh and Srinagar in the South mark the boundaries of this theatre of action. There are ancient and buried cities, temples and buildings, but the men who raise these ghosts are themselves an interesting study, and the dreams and fantasies of these men are still more interesting.

"Old Turdi with instinct bred by roamings of some thirty years and perhaps also inherited—his father had been a treasure seeker before him—would find his way even where the dead uniformity of the sand dunes seemed to offer no possible guidance. So skirting the foot of several high ridges of sand, he brought us next evening to ground where

dead trees were seen emerging from heavy sand. Shrivelled and bleached as they were, Turdi and the men could recognise among them trunks of the white poplar, the willow and other planted trees, unmistakable proofs that we had reached the area of ancient cultivation." 1.

It is a perfectly satisfactory book on the whole, science does not encumber the simple flow of the narrative; there is sublimity of gigantic open spaces, lifeless deserts, and the wide distances between dead buried cities where the caravans move once more.

OLD ROUTES OF WESTERN IRAN- 1940.

"The present volume is intended to furnish a record of the last and longest of four journeys which carried me during the years 1932-1936 through an extensive belt of Southern and Western Iran". 2.

"The happy memories of the years spent since 1931, on its ancient soil will accompany me where ever chance of fresh work may yet take me*. 3.

This story of ancient Persia has more of the archaeological interest, and the theme is treated rather severely and coldly; the poetry and literature of ancient Iran that could have lightened the tedium of the journey are rarely invoked; somehow he avoids the haunts of men, and the memories which the book calls up are rather dim and vague. What gives sunlight and warmth to the book is the present and not the past, here and there he turns away from ruined bridges and buildings and lifts his eyes unto the hills.

"It was delightful hill scenery which met the eye next morning. Oak trees clothe even the precipitous rocky slopes on the opposite southern side of the narrow valley. Down this the track wound in wavy steep zigzags, often difficult to recognise among the abundant growth of trees with which also low conifers mingled. After close on two miles of such progress it was somewhat of a surprise to come upon a considerable stretch of open gently sloping grounds with fields cultivated in the summer by semi nomadic Jaws". 4.

3. Ibid., p. 422.
4. Ibid., p. 13.
A Passage to India by E.M. Forster ushered in a new age in the literature of travel about India, it is a mark of progress in the spiritual progress of the imperialists, the old beliefs are in jeopardy, and hence a pilgrim sets out to find the way in the darkness. There is the painful and perturbing phenomena of the dissolution of old forms of thought, and hence the reaction to it of different minds, great in their own spheres has an element of obscurity. There is a schism in the soul, and Jesting Pilate (1931) by Aldous Huxley, and A Hindu Holiday (1932) by J.R. Ackerley show this shattering of an old dream; but deep down this spiritual chasm is still perceived a profound beauty and truth beheld by E.M. Forster, Constance Sitwell (Flowers and Elephants (1929) and by Yeats Brown (Lancer at large 1936). Even the purely political and militarist writers of travel accounts lack the old fire and fury, certainty and superiority. The literature of travel after the war as a whole, wears an aspect of confusion and conflict of impulses, it is the result of unsettled times, it is an age divided against itself. Yet the travel writers of this age have a sense of order, and a spirit of inquiry, they go out to find, stable values in life. They have clarity of mind but confusion of feelings; and hence they remain divided, and what they lack is the certainty and serenity of their predecessors.

A Passage to India - 1924.

E.M. Forster visited India in 1912 in the company of R.C. Trevelyan and Lowes Dickinson; E.M. Forster found much material for admiration and thought, whereas Dickinson found
much material for admiration and thought, whereas Dickinson found the conditions disgusting, and the people devoid of hope. In 1922 E.M. Forster paid a second visit to India; and all these impressions appeared in the form of the novel "A Passage to India". It is primarily a great book of travel. Roger Fry, in a letter quoted in Virginia Woolf's biography of him, wrote of "A Passage to India".

"I think it is a marvellous texture - really beautiful writing. But O' Lord I wish he were not a mystic or that he would keep his mysticism out of his books". 1.

"A Passage to India" is not a book of mysticism, but a book about a land of mystics - there is no denying the facts. The author is not a mystic, his subjects are mystical, it is a penetrating study of the spirit of India, a courageous and bold commentary on the meeting of the mystics and materialists. It is this understanding of the heart of India and the soul of this land of antiquity that separates him from writers like Kipling. Both are great in their own way, but Kim is the surface of India and 'A Passage to India' is the soul of India. Kim is a voice of a boy, and A Passage is the voice of the servants and scholars of this land.

"Compared to such a disingenuous fairy tale as Kim, 'A Passage to India', is a monument of integrity and enlightenment". 2.

'A Passage to India' is a spiritual diary of a wanderer, a lovely book of colours, a symphony of mystic notes, a search in the land of dreams, a book of men who are more than men, and of gods who are much less than gods. It is a finely woven tapestry, a damask curtain with many shades. Here is

Here is perfection of form and beauty of style; his prose is rich and mellow, soft and noble; a generous man, he has his charming felicities; he is a romantic and also a neoclassicist; he is a figure of the past, and also of the days to come. He possesses sensitivity, passion and detachment, strong individualism, faith in human values and the wisdom of life. He has the gift of delicacy and fine shading.

"The shorter and the taller ladies both adjusted their fans and smiled. There was a curious uncertainty about their gestures, as if they sought for a new formula which neither East nor West could provide. "Then Mr Phata, chariya's husband spoke, she turned away from him, but she did not mind seeing the other man. Indeed all the ladies were uncertain, covering, uncovering, giggling, making tiny gestures of abasement or despair at all that was said, and alternately fondling the terrier or shrieking from him", 1.

Not only ladies in India but squirrels and all other creatures are minutely examined by his inquiring eyes, and are made to yield the secret of their behaviour; he is out to hear the still sad voice of all existence; he pursues his quarry ruthlessly, and he takes nothing for granted till he has examined every thing thoroughly.

"Opposite Amj's bungalow stood a large unfinished house belonging to two brothers, astrologers, and a squirming hung thereAuto-writing on it, pressing its belly against the burning scaffolding, and twitching in rage. It seemed the only occupant of the house, and the squirming it gave was in tune with the infinite, no doubt, but not attractive except to other squirming. More noises came from a dusty tree, where brown birds chattered and floundered about looking for insects; another bird the invisible coppersmith had started his 'pok pok'. It matters so little to the majority of living beings, what the minority, that calls itself human, desires or not. Most of the inhabitants of India do not mind how India is governed. Not are the lower animals of England concerned about England, but in the tropics the indifference is more prominent, the inarticulate world is closer at hand and readier to resume control as soon as men are tired." 2.

2. Ibid.,p.112.
"A Passage to India" is a psychological analysis of a whole
nation, both Muslims and Hindus fare equally well at the
hands of the master, and to some extent this analysis
applies to all humanity.

"Suspicion and belief could in his mind exist side
by side. They sprang from different sources, and had
never intermingled. Suspicion in the oriental is a sort of
malignant humour, a mental malady, that makes him self-
conscious and unfriendly suddenly; he trusts and mistrusts
at the same time in a way that the Westerner cannot
comprehend. It is his demon, as the Westerner's is
hypocrisy". 1.

Great as the problem of India is Forster's book
is not about India alone, it is about all human life.
Indians he conceives of have reality but no dignity, and
that can be no reason for not liking what he creates; the
theme of the separateness of fences and barriers, the old
theme of Pauline Epistles which runs through all Forster's
novels is highly expanded in his Passage to India. The
separation of race from race, sex from sex, culture from
culture, even of man from himself is what underlies this
story of his travel in India.

"A Passage to India" will have a permanent place
in the history of literature, a rare picture of a restless
vague uncertain country and uncertain people has been
sketched with the exquisite skill of a historian of
manners and morals, a critic of the human soul, and a
wizard of language who can quickly toss his sentences about
and build caves, and temples out of nothing. He has
registered the impressions of a slumbering land in a
sleepy language; a little more of light and sound would
make it harsh and unpleasant, and a little less of it
would turn it insipid and flavourless.

1. 'A Passage to India'. London -1921, pp. 226, 231.
27. Constance Sitwell
Flowers and Elephants - including Lotus and Pyramid-1922

Flowers and Elephants and the Lotus and the Pyramid, particularly the first, are essentially a sequel to 'A Passage to India'. Both books have the same spirit and atmosphere, the same charm and colour, the same dreamy quality and uncertainty; a sense of mysticism prevails through both these books. Flowers and Elephants does the trick without employing the tacle of fiction; it is a simple travel book, but its pages enclose all the essences and fragrances of the Indian fields and forests. An indwelling spirit informs the book, and the colour of a sea voyage gives it a distant effect, there are vivid touches of oriental life; clever sketches of talk are bound together by the central theme of perfection and imperfection; life for her is at one moment exquisite and perfectly understandable, and at another moment it is remote and worthless. This is probably one of the finest travel books written by a young lady.

The Preface given by E.M. Forster is a little flighty and misleading; she is not so metaphysical as he tries to make her out. It is a very fine account of her days in the East, but it is not so symbolic, and so mystical as some would like to believe.

"Flote was one of the inheritors of this third vision (Delias in God), and the writer of this book has inherited it also. She possesses it not as a system or a philosophy, but as a gift. To her, as to Flote, the world is real, as far as it goes; it as she sets it forth in her simple and profound prologue, a marriage feast to which the herald-groom has not yet come".

The book gives excellent pictures of natural beauty in India, it is the typical India of thick green forests, and wild flowering pastures, a land of perpetual delight and the beauty of paradise.

"another walk that I shall never forget was one along a jungle road at mid-night. How wonderful was the silence, the stifling scented stillness of the night. The earth seemed to be drugged by its own scents and heat. I remember as I went along looking at the fronds of the palms outlined against the crowded starry sky. I remember how there trailed along the road, a scent - so sweet, so strong, that it seemed to concentrate in itself all the ecstasy of that land, all the intoxication of the still heavy night". 1

She is a lover of solitude and mystery, a dreamer whose thoughts are discreetly coloured by visions both mystical and gloomy, she stands at the edge of an unknown world, and her imaginative romanticism gives it a restless pessimistic beauty. The scenes of India are only a way of remembering the far distant past, and thus her melancholy seems to spread over the whole of human destiny. The oriental colour of the setting together with the intensity of her own emotional experience works a miracle of a refined literary travel book. Every new scene and every luminous thought is a pearl in this poetic necklace, and the result is not unworthy of being compared with the work of the greatest artist.

"And a man among them gave me a bunch of narcissi. How sweet the flowers were. And life I thought as I looked at the little group what a mixed affair, Here the flowers and the delighted villagers, and there the wounded bear under the rocks in the dark". 2

"I said to myself this coarse grass that I have picked is the same as grew in the time of David, also a shepherd boy; these same sounds that I am hearing fall on the ears of Esau in his rough clothing; and perhaps Abel, a keeper of sheep heard just this calling on his last evening on earth. The rock I am leaning against is still hot from the sun that has beaten on it all day just as it was at this hour a thousand years ago. Is this the sort of rock that Jacob slept on, I wondered when it had cooled in the night". 3

There are moments when these earthly limits are crossed and the poor human nature falls off trembling and shaking in the presence of vast great mystical experiences.

2. Ibid., p. 121
3. Ibid., p. 34
And then again as once before in that hot moonlit station in India, there opened out a sudden way of deliverance. The disquiet of the past months fell away from me. I knew there was permanence, I felt reality. A bubble of eternity had risen through time, and held me for an instant in its shining peace. I shall find them again; I said to myself, 'The flowers and jungles, and innocent huge beasts. I shall find them where the pattern of these things eternally dwells'.

This metaphysical and religious anguish gives a note of eloquence to this simple book. Her melancholy is broadened and spiritualised, even the beasts of the forest share her sorrow; the sight of elephants in the stockade causes her a terrible agony.

"But what exactly are you frightened of?" he persisted.

"Every thing I said helplessly. And I meant that every thing in life seemed too pressing, too vivid, being born and dying, loving and worse still not loving— every thing was overwhelming— especially beneath the stupendous stars which are never hidden here".


Col. Yeats Brown is a successor of Col. Sir Francis Younghusband, he carries forward the tradition of militarymen turning mystics and wanderers in the land of the mystics. His mysticism is more pronounced and sharply individualistic, and his travels are merely for joy and not for adventure. He is romanticist whose imagination is stirred by the scenes and sights of India, but his intellectual curiosity is not very exacting. As an eccentric dressing himself in the local garb he would appear in the native quarters looking every inch a Pathan with his plumed turban or a Hindu Yogi with his sectmarks on his forehead. From all his personal experiences he builds up a store of reflections and ideas; he wants to give only a picture of this great experience, he is not concerned with a philosophy nor he wants to give a definite shape to his religion.

2. Ibid., p. 155.
His admiration of these pure and matters mystical is only an illusion of the heart; he does not dissect or analyse; but his idealism bears the clear impression of the East. There is even a diffuse puritanism, and the Gallic love of mystery; but there is also inherent generosity and nobility of soul is responsible for the glowing tribute to all that is good and great in India. He is a dreamer who has spiritual sympathy for this ancient land; he may be counted upon; the soldiers of the empire who ventured into the domain of the soul, and devoted literary efforts to an interpretation of the heart of India to the mind of Europe.

The artist and the mystic in him is an integral part of the mystic.

"I had forgotten how graceful Indians are, especially Indian women. That girl in a pink sari moves like a queen. One handsome girl almost balances a bright water-pot; it is a joy to see her dignity, an candor, an ease; one would like to see her walking for hours, instead of sitting, by like this. The waves of the waves of India, in the rhythm of her movements, in her supple grace and latent strength. Shall I turn back, write her life instead of sitting in the lives of millions". 1.

"As we are approaching the shrine, a tall girl passes us, in a lemon coloured Sari, unveiled. Her luminous eyes meet mine in a frank and friendly way. The idea of a child's love, because I have never known, nor have I seen her, I like to think that even the passing glimpses, this sympathetic instant out of some of another's life has been crossed by Karma. Perhaps I was given to see what I may know what Hervor's mother looked like, Maya said, she dreamt that a six months old infant was born on the night that her child was born miraculously conceived". 2.

Pure Vedic mood find a fairly good expression through the words of this wanderer of the East. It is more of romanticism than the exact philosophy of Sankara; and his romanticism

is more of a personal ecstasy than an intellectual or rational affair. It is his fine prose that enhances the effect of these moods which come when they come, and which are beyond his power to check or to reshape.

"Like a rose unfolding, the dome of the Taj takes on the tints of dawn up there, not in the visible marble, but in the spirit which made and informs it, as blood sustains it, I see my soul reflected, Christ will for give me that I find his peace here, rather than in his churches. My heart is not troubled for in His Father's House, there are many mansions". 1.

"Who worshipped here, and with what strange rites? Who fashioned the marvellous symmetries of dancing hall and forecourt and pagoda? Who built that marvellous roof, with its exquisite proportions, and its delicious humorous sculpture (free from objectionable features here) especially those smiling modern buxom ladies on the parapet looking sea ward, as if prophesying the coming of another race. The sand keeps its secrets". 2.

The Lancer at Large is a triumph of the self; sensibility and imagination are of the very essence of it. There is an accentuated predominance of emotional experience. There is a feeling of nostalgic strangeness, and a quest of an obscure world which finds resurrection through his words.

The Writers Note Book (1944) is a veritable treasure house of memories; it has in it much that he saw in different lands, there are fresh thills of exoticism, charm of landscapes, and a fine study of souls- given briefly and succinctly, and it is pregnant with possibilities of being turned into stories and novels. These notes for the year 1938 (pages 219/ to 242) in the Writers Note Book concern India, but as all these passages were selected at a later date much material must have been left out.

1. Lancer at Large—London—1936, p. 313.
2. Ibid, p. 151.
The method he employs here is the same as in his On a Chinese Screen (1922). In Don Fernando (1935) he displays his vast knowledge of the land, the people, their art and literature; he has summarised his impressions of almost thirty years; and in The Gentleman in the Parlour (1930) he gives a sufficiently elaborate description of men and problems, scenes and sights. He is primarily interested in India's Yogis, Sufis, Fakirs and Mystics, but he displays no zeal for this creed, and is rarely inspired enough to become sentimental or enthusiastic. He is interested in this ancient form of wisdom, but in his mode of thinking, and in his imagination, and narrative method - he is purely intellectual.

He is a student of human nature and the absurd and ridiculous side of human nature interests him more than the depths of vedantic meditation. Inspite of all that he has to say in The Razors Edge (1947) he does not spare the wise old-men of India. He is never so bitter as Aldous Huxley in his Jesting Pilate, but he pushes the philosophers down from their pedestal in an absent-minded way. Prose he writes here is clear, simple, and razorsharp. The holy-man introduced by Sir Akbar Hydari proves a bore.

"He said the things I had heard from others twenty times before. That is the worst of the Indian thinkers, they say the same things in the same words, and though you feel that it should not make you restive, for if they possess the truth, as they are convinced they do, and if the truth is one and indivisible, it is natural enough that they should repeat it like parrots - there is no denying the fact that it is irksome to listen interminably to the same statements." 1

But there are moments when he leaves that pose of superiority, and discloses his simple preferences, and moods

of joy and sorrow. It is in describing scenes that he shows his true feelings, and also his poetic powers; here are intuitive flights into the realm of the beautiful; he soars with tranquil assurance. Here his mind works in open defiance to the laws of his literary self; his joy shakes itself loose of all his love of irony and sarcasm, it moves on the edge of the truly beautiful, and he shows his narrative powers in capturing in a few words what others believe to be inexpressible. The sight of a peacock moves him deeply.

"It walked, a proud, magnificent object, treading the ground with a peculiar delicacy, with a sort of deliberation and its walk was so elegant, so wonderfully graceful, that it recalled to my memory Nijinsky stepping on to the stage at Covent Garden and walking with just such a delicacy, grace and elegance. I have seldom seen a sight more thrilling than that peacock threading its solitary way through the jungle." 1.

The sight of the river scene at Benares and the Taj too move his mind with genuine feelings that they give rise to; here he is not posing as he often does when describing human nature, its weaknesses and frailties.

"Nothing can be more impressive than to saunter down the Ganges by boat in the evening just before the sun set. It is thrilling to look at the city with the two minarets of the mosque standing up against the pale sky. A wonderful sense of peace descends upon you. There is a great silence..... It is a moving a wonderfully thrilling spectacle; the bustle, the noise, the coming and going give a sense of a soothing vitality, and those still figures of the men in contemplation by contrast seem more silent, more still, more aloof from human intercourse." 2.

"Taj Mahal. Not with standing my expectations and all the pictures I had seen of it, when I got my first and proper view of it from the terrace of the gateway, I was over come by its waauty. I recognised that this was the authentic thrill of art, and tried to examine it in myself while it was still hot, and tried to examine it in myself vivid. I can understand that when people say something takes away their breath it is not an idle metaphor. I really did breathe shortness of breath". 3.

2. Ibid., p. 227, 228.
3. Ibid., p. 230.
Somerset Maugham's love of the poor and the peasant gives a sombre dignity to his observations on India, he is not a Kipling type imperialist or patriot, or an anti-British propagandist.

"When I was leaving India people asked me which of all the sights I had seen had most impressed me. I answered as they expected me to answer. But it was not the Taj Mahal, the ghats of Benares, the temple at Madura or the mountains of Travancore, that had most moved me; it was the peasant, terribly emaciated with nothing to cover his nakedness but a rag round his middle, the colour of the sun baked earth he tilled, the peasant shivering in the cold of dawn, sweating in the heat of noon, working still as the sun set red over the parched fields, the starveling peasant toiling without cease in the north, in the south, in the east, in the west, toiling all over the vastness of India, toiling as he had toiled from father to son back, back for three thousand years when the Aryans had first descended upon the country, toiling, for a scant subsistence, his only hope to keep body and soul together. That was the sight that had given me most poignant emotion in India". 1.

Maugham's prose has great simplicity and restraint, and yet every word is carefully chosen and loaded with meanings. It is the bare skeleton, and hence it has greater charm and power than when it is developed into a full fledged book.


The Jesting Pilate is an important book of travel, it is the study of India from a purely intellectual point of view, it is a landmark in travel and also a milestone in Huxley's journey through life. The Huxley of Jesting Pilate is not the Huxley of Time Must Have Stop or the Grey Eminence; it is a halting place, a point in the desert around which he marched and retreated for almost a generation, but his prose style is already attaining a maturity and the original quality of its own. The Jesting Pilate asked the question

and waited not for answer, but Aldous Huxley waits, and does get an answer; the materialist turns mystic, the cynic becomes a salvatiohist, and this short sighted myopic has at last the vision in The Island. He starts with his account of the journey through the Red Sea, and he goes round the globe taking India, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, Phillipines, Shanghai, Japan, U.S.A., in his stride; he reaches London poorer by many exploded convictions, but he finds the answer to the quarry with which he sets out.

"I acquired two important new convictions: that it takes all sorts to make a world and that the established spiritual values are fundamentally correct." 1.

But the book is strewn with ideas scattered haphazardly the sights and scenes of different lands are like so many pegs from which he hangs his ideas. The sight of goods and voyagers at Port Said makes him think of man's useless activities in the world.

"Moving bits of matter from one point of the world's surface to another forms man's whole activity. And the wisdom of the East, I reflected consists in the affirmation that it is better to leave the bits of matter where they are." 2.

Many of the adolescent qualities that motivate the work of H.G. Wells may be seen exemplified in the more polished and cultured mind of Aldous Huxley. He is a subtler acuter, and altogether more agile mentality than Wells, but there is in his work always a strain of emotional immaturity, carefully masked beneath a cultured scepticism, that prevents him from really coming to grips with and following out to their active conclusion the results of his own analysis. He is never free from the taint of superficiality.

"Hindus are too much interested in the metaphysics and ultimate reality to make good artists". 3.

2. Ibid., p. 3.
3. Ibid., p. 88.
"Religion is a luxury which India in its present condition cannot afford".

"For the imperial city (Delhi) is not less rich in social comedy than Paris, its soul is as fertile in snoberies, dissimulations, prejudices, hatreds, and envies." 2.

The essential liquidness of his mind is clearly perceived in the book. It is a quality which he confesses and explains through the character of Phillip Quarles in Point Counterpoint.

"But this question of identity was precisely one of Philips chronic problems. It was so easy for him to become almost any body, theoretically and with intelligence..... He had been a cynic and also a mystic, a humanitarian and also a contemptuous misanthrope; he had tried to live the life of detached and stoical reason, and another time he had aspired to the unreasonableness of natural and uncivilised existence." 3.

Huxley's career opens with a dominant intellectual and empirical bias. It was this funny dry mindedness which made Lawrence call him "a barbarian of the intellect ". Congenitally intellectual Huxley himself confesses his taste for and love, ideas, and an aversion to practical activities.

"In the world of ideas everything was clear, in life all was obscure, embroiled. Was it surprising that one was miserable horribly unhappy". 4.

The Jesting Pilate is an excellent diary of these personal confessions of the period of reason and restlessness; he had not yet turned to the worship of instincts which finds full display in Do WHAT YOU WILL. On a reduced scale, Huxley might be described as the Voltaire of this modern age. The French man's levity, irony, scepticism, his multifarious knowledge, and his awareness of scientific and philosophical advance are also his by virtue of an affinity of temperament; by the legitimate process of intellectual descent, he is a spiritual child of Voltaire. But at a later stage he

2. Ibid., p. 138.
betrayed the Frenchman.

"One is all for religion until one visits a really religious country". 1

"Old Shanghai is Bergson's Élan vital with the lid off". 2

About the women in Panang he says, "They are so to speak High Renaissance from the waist upward and a Louis Phillip below". 3

Huxley is dis-satisfied not only with the ancient countries, but also with the United States; he is happy nowhere. His intellectualism is steeped in anti-intellectualism. It is this duel condition of the mind, that shows the precise significance of The Jesting Pilate. But the book lacks the eloquence of the heart, and the poetry of feelings, it has more of intellectual snobbery than spiritual sunshine.


Hindu Holiday, is not strictly speaking a travel book, but a fictionalised piece of satire. It is a cross between Gulliver's Travels, especially his visit to the Learned of Laputa and The Alice in Wonderland: the India he knows is the princely India, and the integration of the Indian states has made it possible for him to say the whole truth in the new edition of 1952. Whereas Huxley is bitter and pessimistic Ackerley is humane and hilarious, sympathy and satire go together; he has nothing to say against the India of the peasant or the priest, religion and morality do not at all find any comments. There are lifelike characters transported from real life to the pages of this book with perfect artlessness and simplicity; and the author right from the beginning selects, reflects the material with the true spirit of a humorist and

2. Ibid., p. 241.
3. Ibid., p. 175.
a Pickwickian philosopher.

His Highness the Maharaja is beautifully described. This old Maharaja of the comically named state of Chhokra Pur is fond of Spencer and Rider Haggard, and desires that his English Secretary should be somewhat like a character named 'Olaf' in the Wanderers' Necklace by Rider Haggard. He chooses cars by their names.

"This morning His Highness took me out for a drive in one of his cars. He knows no more about cars than I do, and chooses them by the appeal of their names. So he bought a Sun-Beam! It would surely be a very pretty car, but it seemed much the same as any other; and he was equally disappointed by a Moon! He asked me today what his next car should be for two of the four he already has are getting very old, and I suggested a Buick which was the only make I could call to mind, but after pronouncing the word two or three times with evident disfavour and making it sound like a sneeze, he did not refer to the matter again". 1.

This decrepit old man with his tiny state has dreams of becoming a Caesar or a Stuart Despot.

"I want to be like the Roman emperors", he mumbled, and then asked, "Do you believe in Kings, or are you Bol-Bol Bolshevist"? 2.

"He sat up. Ah, I like those old times. And Charles, the First and all the Stuarts, I like them very much". 3.

He wants that his house should be built in the style of the Parthenon.

"Parthenon, I like Parthenon!" he cried, and then rather dimly, "What is Parthenon"? 4.

His poor command of English is another source of delight.

"Yes, Yes, I am imaginary man, and not a practical man", said the Maharaja. 5.

At another occasion when sitting in prayer he is asked if he can be approached.

"Is the Maharaja Sahib touchable or untouchable?"

"Untouchable", he added, and directed me to sit in the long chair. 1.

The untouchables in India form the lowest rung of the society, they are the out castes and aborigines, and other worthless people.

It is an intimate study and an authentic picture of a certain slice of territory, but it has been properly dissected, sliced up and served as a tasty local dish, and it suits all stomachs, Indian as well as English. It is a little master-piece of atmosphere, of airy gracefulness, and Tom-Sawyer-like mischief. The peril of the method—the journalistic method lies in what is indeed its greatest attractiveness—the day to day impressions through which the outline of the figures runs the risk of disappearing; but this fragmentary method is used with exceptional cleverness. The minor incidents of daily life in an Indian petty state are put together intuitively; they turn into a manifold and shifting thing; every thing is steeped in the spirit of reality, and its freshness is never spoiled; humour and mockery, irony and sarcasm are fused into a link that ties the whole bunch of memories. The method is not artificial; it answers to the distinctive quality of experience. Ackerley's journal has a permanent place in the literature of travel.

32. Earl of Ronaldshay (1876- ) lands of Thunderbolt- 1923.

The world of the soldiers and civil servants is different from that of the writers and authors poets and novelists; they have more intimate knowledge, and much longer acquaintance with the scene of the story; they have

practical experience of dealing with men and matters, and 
hence necessarily they possess much deeper understanding 
of life than a tourist can ever have during his hasty 
journey through the country. They look with the eyes of a 
new Purchas and a modern Hakluytus, and they describe the 
joys and sorrows of a new world of colonisers, and cultural 
ambassadors of Britain. They have no doubts like those of 
E.M.Forster and they do not condemn British imperialism 
as Aldous Huxley and George Orwell do; they still breathe 
the spirit of easy superiority and self glorification. They 
know a swarm of tales of distant races and religions, and 
though their books are not exactly fine pieces of 
literature, they have animation and force, pride and power 
to move. The beauty and sublimity of nature, its 
grandeur and force, its variedness and vagaries find 
a place in this book of a governor's memories.

"It is essentially a place of moods. At times it 
is immensely still. Bright sunlight filters through a 
fretwork of rich green foliage, lighting up splashed of 
colour where flowers grow softly cushioned on the slopes 
of moss covered banks. Butter flies of many hues 
flash like living jewels from flower to flower, 
dancing a mad dance of ephemeral existence under the 
stimulus of the sunladen air. Such is a forest in a smiling 
mood. Suddenly there comes a change". 1.

"Before we left the pass we were to see them undergo 
a dramatic transfiguration. From a glorious incarnation 
of the sublime they became a fierce embodiment of wrath. Far 
up the draughty channel of Talung Valley angry clouds 
came eddying, transfiguring the expression of serene repose 
on the face of the great white world to angry scowl. It 
was symbolical of the storm of anger and hatred which 
far away in the plains of India, over the frost bound 
stretches of Russia-Yea and amid the green fields and 
beneath the soft breezes of the Emerald Isle—was sweeping 
over the world of man". 2.

He combines the romantic and the real in a way the like 
of which is rarely discernible except in some books about the 
Alps.

1. Lands of Thunderbolt, London-1923, p. 64.
2. Ibid, p. 177.
"One is face to face with the enchanted forest of one's childhood dreams- the home of spirits and witches pictured for us by the bizarre fancy of Hans Andersen and Grim" and by the skilful hands of Arthur Rackham and M. Edmund Dulac. 1.

"The picture which she made as she sat in exactly the same position, going through precisely the same motions with shuttle and loom, with the same expression of detachment on her face, fitted so accurately over the impression which the same picture had left on my mind on the previous occasion, that it was difficult to realise that the two years of crowded events which had intervened were anything more than a curtain pulled for a moment across the frame of a picture which had been all the time before me". 2.

The twenty years that have elapsed since the publication of his book The Outskirts of the Empire, bring a maturity and mellowness to his style; not persons and places but the spirit interests him more; the gods preside over all the transitions that go on around him. The sorrows and storms of heaven and earth unfold themselves, in all their grandeur and brilliance. His inspiration remains intellectual, but we have the particular value of the images and sensations evoked. He deals with the concrete but does not lack the imaginative touch; thus his style has vitality and vigour, and a poetic fecundity. He is capable of strong and delicate impressions, and this wealth of impressions is strengthened by his diffuse sentimentalism. But the whole thing is a tempered passion without anything violent or exalted; he has a taste for pure and peaceful emotions, there is a calm rapture called forth by wooded hills. 'The Heart of Aryavarta' 1925 is his other book about India.

2. Ibid. p. 127.
The India We Served is a book of regrets, sweet and touching memories and a book of confessions written by a noble proconsul of the British Empire, the diary of a sensitive heart, and a lover of life. He never makes a special effort to evolve a special form or give a special touch to his style; his sketches reveal an attitude of intellectual sympathy, and imaginative perception. Sentiment is interwoven in the nature of every day surroundings and landscape; some aspects of human destiny give it a sombre touch. No doubt he is rarely interested in history or architecture, but the spiritual stirrings caused by the present and the real have sufficient intensity to lift the narrative to the level of good literature. The diverse scenes and subjects, themes and thoughts call forth and beget one another, they tend to form an organic whole; they form the psychological substance of a colonial romanticism. Incapable of creating for itself an adequate form the inspiration can express itself in a mixed description of matters and moods; a subtle shade of emotion, namely wonder and love, steeps every thing. His flights are weighed down by a matter that is heavy, and there is no freedom of choice in his subjects, his work is of an uneven quality. His style is not immune from dross, but the dominant impression is that of vital sincerity. He is a real lover of the land, and her people.

"The crisp air and the bright pleasant sunshine; the drowsy music of the Persian Wheel, as the little cups come up brimming from the wells; the wholesome smell of the unleavened bread, and the pulse in the little pipkin, the shy gaze of the pretty children, and the kind welcome of the villagers with their simple wants, and their
little troubles often so easily remedied. And then these
touched winter rains, patterning on the tent, and lulling
blessed to further sleep in the dark morning, and the sound from
the village of the peasants singing, and even laughing
as they slip on the greasy mud of the narrow lanes. As I
listened to the singing, I realised what rain for the wheat
and pulse meant for the villagers". 1.

The book takes us round the northern states and
cities of India, and vigour vitals, humour and
laughter of these northmen is always a delight; even
death visits them with dignity and beauty. He attends a
hanging of a proud father and his accomplice who have
murdered for the sake of honour.

"When the day came I stood by them as the blacksmith
knocked off the irons from their legs before they ascended
the steps. They were both dignified and composed, and
the elder said "Look Sahib, there she is remember your
promise". And there well in front of the line of spectators
was a pretty girl of about fourteen years, who made a
graceful obeisance of farewell to her father, and of thanks
to me". 2.

This hard headed man of affairs, the civil administrator
and settlement officer has a peep or two into the India
of mystery and illusions, the shadowy world of the spirits,
the edge of the unknown where there is more than meets the eye.

"One day I experienced a curious illusion. It was
in the break of the rains, and I went out in the evening
by myself to shoot. The ground was familiar to me, but it
was all changed. There was a large lake where I had formerly
walked, and on the lake was a punt with a paddle. I got in
and paddled by the high bank of the lake to a little
green promontory. On it by the edge of the lake, sat a
most lovely girl." I asked her what the name of the lake was
and where her village was! But she laughed and shook her
head, and said nothing. I paddled on, landed on the opposite
bank and walked home. I was quite well and had no fever! I
could remember every detail of the place, the dress and
face of the girl, and a few days later I went back to the lake
But there was no lake and no sign of a punt, and no one had
ever seen a lake or punt in the neighbourhood. Hallucination?
I do not think so". 3.

1. The India we Served - London- 1929, p. 119.
3. Ibid, 42.
Lawrence's style is natural, free, and original; it is never ornate; it is simple prose with minor beauties of word and phrase, it is a triumph of plainness, and is never remarkable rhythmically; sense gets more importance than sound.

Frontiers is an account of the dreams and despair, joy and joviality of the services in India. The experience of change of station by road, the hazard of being shot at by the hidden enemy, the adventures of the tribal thieves, the tricks of Pathans and baniyas, expeditions against frontier rebels, the myths and stories of the primitive men—form some of the themes of this book.

As little interested in the problems of the empire as any true servant of India he gives an admirable unbiased account of the land and her people.

"Most of the people have an instinctive feeling that the country at the back of beyond must be full of far greater interest than their own surroundings. This possibly explains the impression that the majority of Londoners know less about London than any one else. Anyway the wish to see and not just imagine what it is like on the other side of the hill, fills the services that look after the frontiers of the British Empire.

There were two stars in the sky, a brother and sister. The brother was called Dupuir, and his sister Dutfeng. They had a son whom they called Puirsham. Puirsham died and tumbling out of the sky, as a shooting star, fell into the water, and was carried down by the stream. Now Tapur Talar, one of the water spirits had set a trap for fish and Puirsham got caught in it. Tapur Talar found the star, took it out and ate it.

Dunbars' book is a simple and straightforward account of his experiences in India. Its literary merit is of the same level as of Walter Roper Lawrence's India, we Served. He rebels against the yoke of mysticism that every Indian travel book must bear, he is tempted by lucidity and order, rather than the romantic effusions and flights of fancy. This hard

1. Frontiers-London-1923, pp. 43, 44.
2. Ibid, p. 56
4. Ibid, p. 5
5. Ibid, p. 17.
head-onness of the typical empire builders, this love of clarity and simplicity stimulates rather than subjugates these new chroniclers of the empire. He paves the way for the change in style that comes within the third decade. By virtue of his tendencies he belongs to the new scholarly and simple writers who appear in the forties and fifties; his style harmonises with the new era in travel literature impregnated with sociology and psychology, economics and anthropology; in a way it represents the earliest effort of reason against the orthodoxy of the myth of oriental glorification and foggy mysticism. One of the causes of the relative impunity with which he comes out unscathed is his sincerity and disregard for all that is controversial. The intellectual influences, colonial as well as English, give rise to the new clear and logical writing in the field of travel.

35. Colonel R.C.S. Schomberg, Between The Oxus And The Indus-1935.

Between The Oxus and the Indus deals with journeys in the interior of the wild areas between the Indus and the Oxus. Though the very foreshadowing of the ancient world the land has no ruins and no architectural remains—except the strange remnants of humanity, wild, cruel, uncivilised and yet using Greek grammar in their daily speech; hungry, starved, unclean and yet hefe and there showing the features of Venus and Apollo. The book is mainly concerned with the political problems, but it is a fine study of human character, of humanity of a particular variety. It is the land that could be subdued only by two nations, the Sikhs and the English; it is the land & where the hero of Sir Henry Newbolt's poem
He Fell among thieves' lost his life. Gilgit, Nagar, Hunza, Chilas, Yasin, Punyal, Kuh, and Ghizr, Jarel and Tangir have never found a better chronicler and traveller than Col. Schomberg. It is a land of terrific contrasts.

"We in England are unaccustomed to vegetation and aridity being near neighbours, and we never cease to marvel at the feats that the power of water can achieve in a desert place; the spectacle of the wilderness blossoming like the rose always enthrals us. In this glaring stark burning country, with rocky valley sides rushing upwards like monstrous walls, to thin glaciers and scanty snows high above, these emerald villages soothe and allure."

Schomberg's narrative is veiled by transparent reserves, still the analysis and description reveals a robust mind, resolved to shake off the obscurity and mystery of this most ancient land. His work is sound and animated by a scientific will, and its object is clear sighted wisdom. He invests his account with the pure virtue of direct simplicity; his account is warm and soul stirring, but he never uses eloquence for the sake of eloquence. It has a natural rhythm and an easy harmonious sense of balance.

36. Lowell Thomas - India Land of the Black Pagoda- 1930

Lowell Thomas approached India with his mind full of all the ancient myths and legends, and 'Kubla Khanish' spirit of wonder and surprise; he has much in common with Pierre Loti in so far as the attitude towards India is concerned. The book is a cross between Keyserling's Travel Diary and Loti's India, sprinkled with bits of American stuff used for flavouring.

"Mark Twain once said that India was the land that all men long to see, and having seen so much as a glimpse would not trade that glimpse for other sights of the world. He wrote of it as the only land with an irresistible appeal to alien prince and alien peasant alike."
"Napoleon was charmed and tricked by it, and held it in the back of all his dreams. Throughout history in the higher imagination of statecraft that same beguiling idea appears again and again. Alexander was motivated by such intuition. The idea is this - who holds India holds the world*. 1.

This visit to India was inspired by Allenby when he was busy giving talks on India and Allenby. He was led round the different sites of this ancient land by Yeats Brown-the author of The Lancer at Large. The book bears the mark of the hasty journey, and still hasty judgment which he passes on places and people without knowing much about the spirit of the sites, and the minds of men. His praise and condemnation, his good and bad criticism both are unreliable- he moves in a world which he cannot penetrate, and judges only by the outward show. The caves of Ajanta leave him cold, and the Golden Temple makes him ecstatic, but he does not give enough evidence to justify these reactions.

"The stench, the blackness, the noiseless stir of bats, the looming figure of Budha, the sense of all the wasted toil of serfs, of all the ruined beauty of dead hopes, dead creeds, death, that is the keynote of Ajanta". 2.

"It is certainly like nothing else in the world, that gold dome reflected in that jewel lake, gorgeous and unreal inspite of the blinding sun light, with the unreality of a restless day dream. Or rather it is what a monk would have dreamed in the Middle Ages of Jerusalem the Golden. It is with milk and honey blessed, its halls are jubilant with song, its bulwarks glow with jasper, and there are pilgrims casting down their golden crowns of marigold around the glassy sea." 3.

It appears that all the fancies of the writer do not come out true; the poetical lure that Move itself round all Indian tales loses much of that charm in the event of being seen and scrutinised. So this account of his Indian journey is no more that a series of eulogies of Indian themes:

2. Ibid, p.139.
3. Ibid, p.228.
but these possess beauty of language, rhythm and balance. Often the narrative gains a lyrical eloquence when sustained by the personal feelings of the writer. These passages infused with emotion provide means of relaxation to his bored soul; he never pretends to have understood the soul of India; so this beauty is due to his egoistical effusion rather than a mystic communion with India. His book has its dross, its traces of affectation, and its evidence of carelessness. His attempt to understand the blackness of the black pagoda has not been a successful one. It is a journey into a land of childhood dreams, but he returns poorer by many an exploded illusion.


Nature, civilization, and literature of travel have a deep relation. A backward country without history and without ancient remains and ruins of buildings and pieces of art, without the rudimentary amenities of life, and the basic comforts of life cannot inspire great books. A Doughty is not found everywhere, and a Kinglake cannot travel in a land without means of travel, and without hopes of any useful discovery. Men have lived and died in that distant unknown land, and yet no good book has been written about it.

F. Spencer Chapman went to Tibet with the political mission that went there under the leadership of Mr. Gould in 1936. The introduction by Sir Charles Bell gives a brief account of the earlier political missions.

Chapman is a reliable chronicler, and no fact of importance escapes his vigilant eyes. His language has a certain force and vitality, and a pictorial power by which, he is able to give a realistic picture of that Shangrila.
There are few objects capable of awakening inner reactions or which possess an implicit eloquence, there are few signs or symbols of the absent reality except the rugged hills and the Potala. On the other hand the land and the landscape have a force of attraction, it can satisfy a consciousness that seeks the mysterious horizons of the fairyland. There is the obscure belief of being face to face with a way of life that is beyond the comprehension of western mind and the feeling of having a peep into some former mode of being, it is a veritable journey through time, to the beginnings of the race, and to former modes of sensibility.

"Before visiting Tibet I had read of the horror of winter travel, of the unmitigated grimness of the scenery, of the filth and heightenedness of inhabitants, and the squalor of their dwellings. After spending several months in Tibet I had to amend my preconceived conclusions... The country is bleak and forbidding at first sight; the hills are bare as the rocks of Aden, the valleys frequently sand or stone deserts— but what depth of colouring what marvellous contrasts. The silver gold barley rippling in the wind, the tremulous willow groves, the dun and olive hills swept by deep violet shadows as the heavy cumulus clouds sail across the pale turquoise sky. And for those who have eyes to see, the hills, bare at a casual glance are bright with gentians, primula, and delphiniums, and teeming with innumerable species of brightly coloured birds".

To me the Potala represents the very essence of the Tibetan people. It has a certain untamed dignity in perfect harmony with the surrounding rugged country, a quality of stolid unchangeableness. It seems to say, "Here I have been for hundreds of years, and here I intend to stay for ever. Yet underneath this beauty, which is reflected not only in the inspired simplicity of its lines but in the exquisite workmanship of many of the smallest details, there is a lurking grimness, personified in the unfortunate political offender, Lungs la, who having fallen foul of the government, lies with sightless eyes in a dungeon at the foot of the building".

The cultural desert of Tibet can be traversed only with patience and a dogged spirit; the book turns into a dull record.

1. Lhasa— The Holy City— London— 1933, p. 146.
2. Ibid., 171.
C. Books about China, Indocluring, and Japan.

38. Miss A. S. Rea—Chance and Change in China—1920

A sweet book of honeyed memories written in sugary words Chance and Change in China is a book of great literary worth. It is more intimate than the very intimate novels of Mrs. Pearl S. Buck, it is light as a paper lamp, and shines with a steady soothing brightness. Life is observed with love and sympathy, and the ghosts and spirits of dying China are made visible for a while with the Prosper like touch of magic. The womanly touch of interests entirely feminine, life seen from inside the women's pavilion, give it a rare grace and beauty.ars, armies, ships, and harbours, English and American Consuls, and their officers do not figure in the book. It is the true unadulterated China of La Hsun and Lin Yutang. It is a work of love, and ardent sincerity; it is a sharing of joy that she has had the good fortune of enjoying in that land of happy lotus eaters.

"From the heights of a blue mountain between the Yangtze river, and the lake we looked once again upon the scene of our steam launch journey. In the sunlit haze at the foot of the hills the Poyang lake lay like some enchanted world, remote amid the peaceful shadow of soft mauve and heliotrope that hovered here and there over the ridge of golden sand, in and out of which, silvery streams and the wide pools of a summer sea glittered in the light. A land of dreams and summer afternoons so would it seem from the height of the blue mountain."

It is the family life and women, children and marriage, old mothers and poor relatives which come in for a special study. In this respect it is a priceless record of a vanished way of life; this provides food for many a lovely reflection, noble expression of sentiments; she never upbraids and never rebukes the erring, she laughs and smiles with the persons whom she studies, she merges in them, and merges with all their inmost secrets.

It is a happy circumstance that pauses in conversation never appear to disconcert a Chinese hostess. The precept familiar to her from childhood that 'if a woman's mouth is like a closed door, her words will become proverbial, but if like a running tap no heed will be paid to what she says' has no doubt been a restraining influence. It is evident that Li Tai no longer "sits in a well and looks at the sky", (has a limited outlook) 1.

"By many it is not considered respectable to drink the tea of two families i.e. to marry again, and in this land where the majority of women are born into the world to "suffer and obey", there are many lonely souls whose husbands are either dead or have cast them off like a fan in autumn. It is a melancholy life to sit" Opposite one's own shadow, as the Chinese put it, drawing near the wood (death) knowing oh, the bitterness of the thought that when they get to the next world, there will be no son or grandson to worship at the grave and provide one with the necessaries not of life but of death" 2.

Miss Roe's book has an important place in the literature of travel; it is not a study of places and towns, men and characters, it is the study of the more fluid affair— the life of the people- the life of Chinese women particularly, it has the smell of Chinese flowers and dishes, the echo of the Popo (mother-in-law) and the Nai Nai (the Woman). Even death has the fragrance of the garden around it.

"The life of old Ah-Ba-Ca-Han, the farmer in the village of River Sand, had long been like a candle in the wind. His springs and autumns were many. Therefore it was no surprise to hear that he had passed out of this generation" 3.

There is a calmness and repose, a soothing power in this book of sedative or seductive powers. It has a simple style, the narrative moves effortlessly and naturally; and the splendour and beauty of the past mixes harmoniously with the peaceful rhythm of the present. There is not a single discordant note.

2. Ibid., p. 250.
3. Ibid., p. 68.
Somerset Maugham has written the finest prose in these travel books: unadorned, dignified, gently flowing prose has an enchanting beauty; it has something in it of Hazlitt's freshness and rhythm, it is sinewy prose, soft, yet strong, and sleepy at times like De Quency's opatic effusions. There is restraint which gives it weight and substance, but it does not lose its spontaneous character. He is serenely objective, and faithfully records whatever he beholds around and whatever he feels in mind; there is a simple reproduction of the note books, and hence it serves as a safety measure against repetition and prolixity. Here is a style most suitable for travel accounts a calm sober, balanced style, recording all things, without losing its poise; he uses it with exquisite skill.

"In 'On a Chinese Screen' and 'The Gentleman in the Parlour' I was writing fiction, I was relating facts indeed far from embroidering on the facts to make them more effective, as the writer of fiction is justified in doing, I took pains to modify them when I thought they were too fantastic to be credible". 1.

"When I got them into some sort of order, it seemed to me that they had a freshness, for they were made when the impressions were vivid, which they might lose if I elaborated them into sucha narrative as I had intended. I thought it enough if I made them a little more succinct, and if I tried, as I could, to remedy the carelessness and slipshod character of hasty writing, I hope they would give the reader who cared to make some use of his imagination, a truthful and perhaps lively picture of the China I had seen." 2.

On a CHINESE SCREEN.

On a Chinese Screen; is a collector's specimen book, an album of exotic scenes and oriental faces, a study of human follies and contradictions, it is the complete Chinaman seen from a hundred different directions, all faces come and go.

1. Travel Books- London- 1955, Preface, VII.
2. Ibid, Preface, IX.
pass as in a pageant, but one face is always peering at us—Maugham is always present. He chooses the sights which people must see, always detached and calm he acts as the curator of this vast museum of humanity, he is a wise guide and gifted guide, except that he seems to be posing now and then. It is not easy to catch him when he jests or sympathises, and he can hide his real self with great success. Some rare and charming pictures of scenes in China grace the pages of the book; he has an eye for colours and tints, like an El Greco critic and admirer he looks at the sights as if they were paintings.

"It is no longer night but it is not yet day. This is the moment of most magical beauty, when the hills and the valleys, the trees and the water have a mystery which is not of earth. For when once the sun has risen, for a time the world is very cheerless, the light is cold and grey like the light in the painter's studio, and there are no shadows to diaper the ground with a coloured pattern". 1.

"There in the mist enormous, majestic, silent, stood the Great Wall of China. Solitarily, with the indifference of nature herself, it crept up the mountain side, and slipped down to the depth of valley. Menacingly the grim watch towers stark and foursquare, at due intervals stood at their posts. Ruthlessly, for it was built at the cost of a million lives, and each of those great grey stones has been stained with the bloody tears of the captive and the outcaste". 2.

The poor Chinese excite his sympathy, he has love for them, and even tears, the man who mocks at human passions is genuinely moved by the sight of human poverty. Death and starvation, hunger and disease are the common lot of humanity- and he gives a noble expression to this pitiable sight.

"The day wanes on and it grows warmer. The coolies take off their coats, and walk stripped to the waist. Then some times in a man resting for an instant, his load on the ground but the pole still on his shoulders, so that he has to rest

1. 'On a Chinese Screen'-Travel Books—London—1955, p.43.
2. Ibid., p. 70.
slightly crouched, you see the poor tired heart beating against the ribs; you see it as plainly as in some cases of heart disease in the outpatients room of a hospital. It is strangely distressing to watch. The pressure of the pole for long years, day after day, has made hard red sores, great sores, without bandages or dressing that rub against the wood*. 1.

"They are barefoot and naked to the waist. The sweat pours down their faces, and their song is a groan of pain. It is a sigh of despair. It is heart rending. It is hardly human. It is the cry of souls in infinite distress, only just musical and that last note is the ultimate sob of humanity. Life is too hard, too cruel, and this is the final despairing protest. That is the song of the river". 2.

It is a book of many impressions and many moods, it is a gallery of men and women, and human follies and human sufferings. There are some superb pen pictures given with a few touches of the pen but the figures live and breathe, his mastery lies in the economy of language, and the method of giving both inner and outer pictures of these creatures.

"He seemed not to notice that others were travelling the pass. He was accompanied by his henchmen, six or seven of them, somewhat bedraggled it is true, on sorry nags, but they had a truculent air.........He held himself, riding a little ahead of his followers, proudly, and as he rode, his head high and his eyes steady you wondered if he thought that down this pass in days gone by his ancestors had ridden, ridden down upon the "fertile plain of China, where rich cities lay to their looting". 3.

"And now at last he had the pitiful air of a broken man; there was even something touching in it, like the appeal of woman who cannot believe in the loss of her beauty and implores the compliment which reassures, but no longer convinces, and yet, notwithstanding, he had a solace; he had still a magnificent assurance, he was a failure, and he knew it; but it did not really affect, for he was the victim of fate, no shadow of a doubt in his own capacity had ever crossed his mind". 4.

As travel books go on a Chinese Screen has a charm and beauty of its own, it is very much like a literary album, he has an eye for the beautiful, the novel, the picturesque and the abnormal.

2. Ibid., p. 80.  
3. Ibid., p. 5.  
The Gentleman in the Parlour - 1930.

The Gentleman in the Parlour has more flesh and blood, more warmth and breath than the mere bones of 'On a Chinese Screen'. Here the style is more elaborate and easy paced, he is in no haste to finish off summarily. It must be considered the finest of his travel books, it shows Maugham at his best, it has all the merits that a book of travel should have.

"The Gentleman in the Parlour, is not like 'On a Chinese Screen; the result of an accident. I took the journey it describes, because I wanted to; but I had from the beginning the intention of writing a book about it. I think it is very well for a novelist now and then to give himself a rest from writing fiction. It is a dreary business to write a novel once a year, as many authors must do to earn their year's keep or for fear that, if they remain silent, they will be forgotten". 1.

"It was an exercise in style. In a novel the style is necessarily influenced by the matter, and a homogeneous manner is hardly practical". 2.

There is a maturity and mellowness in the style, the decade that has passed since the journey to China has made him less critical of humanity, the love of hitting men below the belt, and in fact everywhere, is replaced by the love of human achievements, and faith in human goodness.

"Their heart is in the right place but their head is a thoroughly inefficient organ". 3.

There is a free spirit of a happy wanderer looking at life like Hazlitt, with no ties with the world; it has more sunshine and free air than other books; the birds sing and the streams flow, but the Gentleman sits and meditates, and is happy. The result is poetic prose, with rhythm, and the sweetness of the land of Lotus Eaters.

1. Travel Books, Preface, p. X.
2. Ibid., p. XIII.
Oh, it is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of the public opinion to lose our importunate, tormenting everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties- to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweetbreads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening- and no longer seeking for applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title, than 'the gentleman in the Parlour'. But I had no sooner read these words than it occurred to me that here was an admirable name for a book of travel, and I made up mind to write it". 1.

It is a book written with the object to enjoy it; it is more endearing than any other book on the region- Burma, Shan States, Siam and Indo-China. It has a link with the Romantic prose of Hazlitt and De Quency, it has a mingled grace- Maugham is too strong a man to forget himself completely, he can shake off the world, but the world cannot shake this ownself off. All the same he is a delightful traveller. His prose has lucidity; scenes, images, moods and minds of man are described nicely, calmly, and without employment of any tricks.

"I saw things that day that I had seen a dozen times, but never with such polonancy, and as I sauntered down those long grey passages, and saw and then caught sight of the forest through a door way, all I saw had a new beauty. The still courtyards had a mystery that made me wish to linger in them a little longer, for I had a notion that I was on the verge of discovering some strange and subtle secret; it was as though a melody trembled in the air, but so low that ears could just not catch it. Silence seemed to dwell in these courts, like a presence that you could see if you turned out, and my last impression of Angker was like my first, that of a great silence". 2.

"And now the plain spread out with a noble spaciousness. The rice fields were no longer little patches laboriously wrested from the jungle, but broad acres. The days followed one another with a monotony in which there was withal some thing impressive. In the life of cities we are conscious but are merely parts of time in which they conduct such and such affairs; we begin when they are already well on their way, and continue them without regard to their natural end. But here they had completeness and one watched them unroll themselves with stately majesty from dawn to dusk; each day was like a flower, or rose that buds and blooms and without regret, but accepting the course of nature dies. And thus vast sun-drenched plain was a fit scene for the pageant of that ever recurring drama". 3.

2. Ibid., p. 136
3. Ibid., p. 84, 85.
There is a new frivolous spirit born of these open lands and vast horizons, like Hazlitt he does not laugh, and run, and leap over the barren heaths; but looks at things in a new way; new images occur to his mind, and there is a wealth of these new startling comparisons, pictures, and similes, he is shockingly cheerful.

"A little cheeky bird hopped down, turning round every now and then jauntily as though to call my attention to her smart suit of silver gray. She looked like a neat typist tripping along from the station to her office in Cheapside. A swarm of saffron butter flies upon the droppings of an ass reminded of pretty girls in evening frocks hovering round an obese financier". 1

"The tamarind is a noble tree. Its trunk is rough and snarled pale like the teak logs that have been floating down the river, and its roots are like great serpents that writhe upon the earth with a convulsive violence; but its foliage is lacy and fernlike, so thick that notwithstanding the delicacy of the leaves it yields a dense shade. It is like an old farmer's wife, full of years but rugged and hale, who is clothed incongruously in fiery muslins. Green pigeons roost in its branches". 2

It is truly a book meant for diversion, here he forgets human weaknesses, though not completely, and enjoys the spectacle of life as he finds it.

40. PETER FLEMING (1907) NEWS FROM TARTARY - 1936

A Forgotten Journey - 1952

Peter Fleming would have been much happier in the days of Mungo Park and Dr. Livingstone he has too much energy and too fiery a nature to be happy in this age of lazy travel or journalistic tours. His complaint like that of the Great Macedonian — is that the globe is too narrow a place for his ambitions.

"The trouble about journeying now a days is that they are easy to make but difficult to justify. The earth which once danced and spun before us as alluringly as a celluloid on top of a fountain in a rifle range, is now a dull and vulnerable target; nor do we get for hitting it in the right place the manicure set or the packet of Edinburgh rock which formerly rewarded good marks-manship. All along with the line we have been forestalled, and fore-stalled by better men than we". 3

2. Ibid. p. 23.
It is a hastily written book or it is a book about a journey made in haste. It lacks the calmness and charm of other writers on China; the true spirit of that sleepyland is nowhere to be seen; it gives a strange effect of restlessness and excessive effort; and there is too much of grumbling in it. He is perhaps trying to give an extraordinarily honest account of the journey, and the fidelity to facts distorts the impressions as much as an unscrupulous imagination, and the emphasis is misapplied and fails to reflect the reality. This journey from Peking to India via Gobi Desert, Khotan, Kashgar, and Hunza Valley is planned secretly by four journalists who have gone there to send war reports, they enjoy it; "there had been a long prelude to this comic expedition", and they start like Pickwick and his friends; "Peking had seen us off in fancy dress". The romantic Gobi Desert does not fail to make its romantic effect upon them; the cynic, as he pretends to be, has a romantic core.

"Presently moonshone. Scrawny feeble patches of tamarisk solidified, grew black, put on strange shapes, and tried our eyes. The sand was silver, and the dust we breathed hung like an emanation, as of steam, round the caravan. Its flanks were pricked by little red eyes where men were smoking pipes, White horses gleamed like wraiths, the camels towered, and were monstrous. Hour after hour the line of camels moved westward with silent shuffling strides. In all our world only the moon, the familiar moon, was real, and linked us to a life we knew". 3.

His attitude is that of the journalist; he has no leisure to look into the minds of men; he has no spare hours to sit and gaze at the stars, or admire Chinese calligraphy. He has rightly called it News from Tartary. He has no love for China, and little toleration for the lice-ridden people, who provide them antityphus serum.

His prose gleams and glows, moves easily when he has no news to give, and when he feels that he is perfectly free from the ties of Tartary.

"A cock crowed. The familiar sound unheard for nearly three months asserted definitely our return to a world where men had homes; we began to think gloatingly of eggs. I think it was sounds, that were for me, the most vivid part of a strange and unforgotten experience. The wind in the leaves, the gurgling water, a dog barking, men in the field calling to each other in the fields. These noises and especially the wind in the leaves, changed the whole texture of our environment, filled the air with intimacy, evoked forgotten but powerful associations. Then a cuckoo called lazily, the essence of the spring that we had missed". 1.

A FORGOTTEN JOURNEY. - 1952.

A Forgotten Journey is a sentimental affair; it is a collection of old papers made after almost two decades; here he gives accounts of the desultory travelling which he did before he started on his journey from Peking to India; the book is based on the diary that he kept, and the book too is in the diary form. There is little or no beauty of style, the book has no regular form. This book will have a place in history but never in literature; the Russia that he saw, the rugged and rude and shocking Russia lives and roars and pulsates in these pages. It has freshness of its boredom, the ugliness of life he saw is uglily visible in these pages.

41. W. H. AUDEN (1907- ) AND CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD (1904- )

Abandoned by his general and his lice under a padded quilt he closed his eyes, and vanished. He will not be introduced when this campaign is tidied into books". 2.

It is a restless melancholy book, a reflection of a mind feeling uneasy and upset by conditions, and realities that can be given no regular shape. The form reflects the instability and wild awkwardness of the mood, and his scrupulous

desire to convey the facts. It is a resolute break with the old forms of travel literature, the authors try to find a shape somewhat similar to the *Letters from Iceland*, but it is more nervous, more palpitating, and more restless. This account of war torn China as seen by them during the first half of 1938 is a combination of poetry and prose, and has been written in collaboration. The sonnets have a grace and a satiric touch, they come at both ends of the book, like plums added to bad pudding, there is a sonnet sequence with a verse commentary. Like the rest of the book they are full of disillusionment and disgust—a common feature of much of their work.

"Rococo images of Saint and Saviour
Promise her gamblers fortunes when they die,
Churches beside the brothels testify
That faith can pardon natural behaviour". 1

They pretend to be Byronic travellers, but they lack his force and his power, but with Hamlet they have some affinity—only their melancholy is not grand but boring, sublimity is replaced by mockery.

"One's first entry into a war stricken country as a neutral observer is bound to be dream-like, unreal. And indeed, this whole enormous voyage from January London to tropical February Hong Kong had the quality now boring, now extraordinary and beautiful—of a dream. At Hong Kong we had said to each other we shall wake up, everything will come true. But we had not woken, only the dream had changed." 2

He takes pains to create comic and queer effects; life is seen in caricatures, cartoons, and farcical figures; his irony and humour distort the true picture of China.

"History grown weary of Siam Shanghai, bored with Barcelona, has fixed capricious interest upon Hankow. But where is she staying? Every body boasts that he has met her, but nobody can exactly say. Shall we find her at the big hotel, drinking whisky with the journalists in the bar? Is she the guest of the Generalissimo or the Soviet Ambassador". 3

2. Ibid., p. 28.
3. Ibid., p. 50.