A Brief Study of the modern literature of travel.

Chapter IV

Contemporary Tendencies.

Literature of Travel about Asia since 1940.

The spirit of time is a powerful spirit, it brings a change in the minds of men, and on the face of the earth, a study in literature of travel is essentially a study in time.

"These our actors
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
The yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind". (Tempest Shakespeare)

The old pageant of the days of Doughty has changed; the sands resound to the roar of aeroplanes, and the Gobi blossoms with many new creeds. Men are no more interested in places but in problems, Asia is a land for specialists, archaeologists, historians, economists and journalist; and those who travel for joy possess no literary skill. There are no adventures except of those who knowingly go astray, or of soldiers who escape from the battle front, and do not know the cause. It is a dismal look-out for the literature of travel. Moreover, as it draws near the precise study of a given literature meets with increasing difficulties. Perspective is lacking, and books cannot be easily given their ranks and categories. We know less of the living than of the dead. Moral and political, social and economic changes caused by the rise of Communism and by the Second Great War have simply exhausted the sources of art and thought. For the literary decline of the present day literature of travel is no superficial fact; the age of
the glory of the British empire is over, it is no more inspiring; Americans have stepped into their shoes, but they don't walk, they run, they fly; they do not write books they dictate them; travel is no more a romantic escapade but a dull affair arranged by the touring companies. The modern travellers go about in a mad haste, and they write in an unbecoming hurry, they cater for the tastes of the new reading public that demands sensational books of travel.

42. H.V. MORTON-MIDDLE EAST- 1941.

H.V. Morton is probably one of the most well informed travellers of modern times, a very painstaking researcher, a clear narrator of the account, too well informed to have any mannerism or any false values; he is a delightful companion and guide. History is his main interest; in this setting of ancient ruins and broken monuments his men and women move with a significant air. He has a method and a formula which he uses everywhere, and every land yields her secrets to his magic touch. Like all modern intellectual travel books his work bears the strong impress of a powerful mind; the expression of pure ideas is relieved by fine passages describing the beauties of nature and by imaginative flights into the realms of history.

The journey in Egypt is in fact a journey through the Egypt of pharoahs, Mersa Matruh, Siva, Alexandria, Cairo, and Luxor- all bring back to mind the past glories and the scenes and sites that still amaze the travellers. Mersa Matruh is the harbour where Antony and Cleopatra went after they had been defeated.

"When I opened the shutters in the morning I looked upon a scene that sent my mind back over they years to Ballantyne's 'Coral Island' and 'Stagpoole's Blue Lagoon'. Here was the perfect desert place of romantic fiction, white breakers curling in the morning sunlight on a half moon of gold,
sand hills white as snow, rising above lagoons as blue as grape hyacinths, and some way to the east a little harbour where a few ancient rigged ships rode at anchor. 1.

Siwa brings back to his mind the year 525 B.C. when 50,000 Persians sent to sack Siwa died in the desert, and were buried under the shifting sand. The romance of the desert lives in the pages of this book; he is alive to the changing colours of the glorious scenes of morning and evening; and he paints them with a few simple touches.

"In the early morning Siwa is like a Gauguin or a Van Gogh. It is a reckless exercise in hot colours, ochre brown hills, golden and vivid green trees, a hard sky of blue untouched by any cloud. Heat throbs in the open places. Goats run in blinding light to the welcome shadow of the palm groves. . . . . . . . All the sounds are little sounds, the note of a bell on a goat's neck, the lazy song of a man working in one of the water gardens, the bright click of a donkey's hoof against a stone, and the padded sound of the camels walking. 2.

He is in fact a pilgrim of the past, a pilgrim who ignores all else in the presence of the Pyramids, who has no eye for the men of today, and who travels as though in the company of ghosts of priests and princes.

"There are wreathes and banquets of flowers which look like brown paper and are as brittle as sealing wax. The mourners picked them one morning three thousand years ago in the gardens of Thebes, and carried them into the valley of death to cast on the king's coffin when at last the moment came to leave him to the silence of the centuries. 3.

In Palestine he moves on more familiar and more sacred ground, and hence the account is still more historical; if ever he looks at the present it reminds him of the past. Jerusalem, the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Bethlehem and Galilee, evoke memories, and pictures that cannot be denied.

2. Ibid., p. 22.
3. Ibid., p. 50.
Iraq, and Turkey too exist for him by association with history. The journey through Greece is an inspired affair. Here the style is animated by an imaginative and romantic ardour; elegance and beauty proceed above all from the transparency of the verbal arrangement, and from its perfect coincidence with the pattern of the thought. His prose remains supple and preserves a relative liberty of movement within the limits of a definite and settled form. The sentences like couplets link up the one with the other into development according to a natural and imaginative progression created by the action of a mind that is master of itself and that passes from one object to another with the full consciousness of whence it comes, and whither it is going, Phillippi, Athens, Theromopyle, Olympia and Delphi—the very names set off a fiery chain of poetic reveries.

"I took a farewell glance at the ruins lying in the shelter of the hill. Generations of men had grown up, and had been harvested like corn, and like corn had left no trace but that furrow on the plain. But the words of St. Paul's Epistles, to the Phillippines are as warm and as full of life as they were when the wagons creaked along the via Equatia, when streets which now lie cold and open to the sky rang to the sounds of men". 1.

43. WILFRID THESIGER-Arabian Sands-1959.

It is a book that illustrates the decline of the literary standard of travel books written after a land has lost its mystery, after the desert has yielded its secrets, and when travel has become easy. Hilaire Belloc and Priestley must make numberless digressions to make an account of a journey to Rome or to Arizona interesting. Somerset Maugham must travel into the domain of history or the human mind and character to give any colour to his books of travel. Old methods used for

1. Middle East-London-1945, p. 263.
old themes cannot make new books, Wilfred Thesiger's account of travel in the Empty Quarter (Rubai Khali) of Arabia suffers from this simple defect; his method is not much better than that of Sir Bertram Thomas or Philby, and his style too employs no new technique or trick. Arabian Sands is a meritorious book without a marrow; the facts are not enough to sustain the interest of the narrative; the description of his earlier days in Abyssinia and Sudan is a sentimental affair. The ideas are so simple and his narration so natural that one is tempted into considering it common place. These simple stones would have looked more precious if they were cut with the greater skill. The slackness of style is, rather the result of an attitude of a mind too regular and too sure of itself; there is a uniformity of tone which is neither robust or light. But all the same the book is not without value to a historian of the sands, and the modes of life that prevail there. There are many inspired passages.

"On the second day at sunset we saw the sands stretching across our front, a shimmering rose coloured wall, seemingly as intangible as a mirage. The Arab, roused from the nodding torpor of weary empty hours, pointed with their sticks, shouted and broke into a big spate of talk. But I was content to look in silence upon that long awaited vision as excited as a mountaineer who sees above the Indian foothills the remote white challenge of the Himalayas". 1.

Not men and ideas, not impressions or scenes but cities and deserts—famous old cities and deserts of Dhaufar, Salala, Mukalla, Sulaiyil, Abu Dhabi, Um and Samin live in these pages.

Julian Huxley - travels with a great aim before him, he is not a mere tourist and sightseer, he is not collecting material for a book; he is no student of ordinary human frailties and he does not make his books a vehicle of all the interesting bits of thought which he wants to convey. It is a journey through time and space, through the different epochs of history, it is a veritable cross section of a historical process. It is the travel account of a scientist who approaches everything in clear sightedness; whereas others mystify simple things he clarifies the confused issues. The ancient sites of palaces and tombs fire his imagination, and create as poetic a mood as any other romantic theme would. Julian Huxley in the Middle East is a poet where as the Julian Huxley in Africa is a sociologist and reformer. It is sad that poetry lost a great poet when science claimed a great devotee.

Inspite of being a professional scientist he preserves the critical freedom of his mind, and does not allow himself to be mentally imprisoned within the imaginative structure of evolutionism or Mendelism. He is a pilgrim who goes out on a materialistic search and reduces all matter to spirit, his religion is the worship of truth, truth that embraces all truths; he bows before many gods, and he worships at altars that do not exist. It is not a dry book of archaeological travel, it feeds on a sufficient fund of feelings, and is strongly enough bound up with the intuitive reasons for life, to stand the test both of practice and moral health; it is a new spirit of this age of
internationalism that breathes in these pages. He may
be called a master of modern faith.

"Humanity requires a coherent picture of itself, and its world, a picture in which the conflicting variety of
detail can be related to the unity of overall pattern. And the picture must be redrawn in every age. If this book
contributes any thing to such a picture, I shall be content". 1.

He makes this old history human, he gives it life and
force, he raises many a sleeping and forgotten god,
and behold the face shines with a new beauty.

*Typhon and Baalim
Forsake their temples dim;
With that twice battered god of Palestine,
And mooned Ashtaroth
Heaven's queen and mother both,
Now sits not girt with tapers holy shrines,
The Lybic Hammon shrinks his horn
In vain the Tyrian maids their wounded Thammuz mourn".  

He brings a new blood, a new force and a new vitality
to literature by new expressions, forms of speech, and ways
of thought borrowed from science and sociology; in a supple and
sparkling language he lays bare age after age of history
that is past, and time that ruthlessly throws every thing
back into the abyss of oblivion. He explains facts,
discusses views, and explains problems in a shining manner,
there is the poetry of imagination, and the lyricism of long
forgotten things and distant lands, it is a journey to the
land of Shelleys 'Ozymandias', and Keats realms of gold.
The style is attractive, and it shows natural or acquired
gift of clear expression.

"It is one of the duties and privileges of man to
testify to his experience, to bear witness to the wonder and
variety of the world in which he finds himself. I had the
fortunate experience of being plunged into the Middle East
and its history; and in this book, I have tried to give my
personal testimony of the impressions which that experience
made upon me. I am only too well aware that my acquaintance

was brief and my experience superficial. But the impressions it made were profound as well as vivid, and the attempt to order them into communicable form has been a satisfying though sometimes a difficult task". 1.

The vividness of description, and the clear narration of historical details makes the book a lovable guide through the vast field of dead and living cities of the past. It is a window of vision into the dim and distant past, and yet it opens on the 'fairy lands forlorn'; it is a pageant of history, kings and queens, gods and goddesses, rise up again and walk before our eyes like the descendants of Banque passing before the eyes of Macbeth; he raises the ghosts and then lays them to rest.

"On these (inscriptions at Byblos) Nebuchadnezzar records his subjugation of Phoenicia, Allenby's inscription is there, very large and prominent; Tiglath Pileser III came here from Ninevah, among other things to hunt in the forests of Lebanon; Sennacherib with his cohorts, gleaming in purple and gold also passed this way, and Assarhaddon on return from his victories in upper Egypt. Marcus Aurelius records the building of a better road round the point, while Caracalla's mention of the third Gaulish legion reminds us of the comprehensiveness of the Roman Empire. The Turkish conquest of Syria is recorded by Selim I. The latest inscription at the moment dates from 1941, to commemorate the occupation of Syria, although none of their forces actually passed the point". 2.

The age of imperialism in the literature of travel is over, the brotherhood of nations begins. The intrusion of the writer's personality in this study of history gives it animation, oratorio delights and a warmth of dramatic narration. His happy unconsciousness is a lovely weakness. The Zoologist that he is the birds delight his heart in the ruins of Babylon.

"Isaih prophesied that owls would dwell in the ruins of Babylon. Here at Ctesiphon, birds were nesting in the queen's palace, but birds much more beautiful than owls. As I approached the great arch, I saw quite large birds flashing in and out of holes and cracks in the brick, very lovely with soft greenish, blue breast and belly and rich chestnut back, and in flight rendered conspicuous by a brilliant patch of turquoise on the wings". 3.

2. Ibid., p.32.
3. Ibid., p.184.
It is a long tale and an exciting tale, it grips the reader and carries him in the time machine from century to century, from clime to clime.

"Whether he likes it or not, he is being forced to explore history as well as a region. His journey into the past a thousand years here, four thousands years there, may be even more exciting than his physical displacements, and almost as fatiguing. The middle east is a region; but it is also and even more an historical process". 1.

45. ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE:

1. East to West - 1958
2. Between Oxus and Jammuna - 1961

Arnold J. Toynbee is not only a great historian but also an exquisite writer of prose. His literary favourites are the geniuses of all ages and all climes, and his monumental study of history is the work of a mind which could have won a great name, an immortal name in literature. His life is that of a voracious reader who dips into everything and then dives deep to find new gems; his literary instincts and ambitions are stamped ineffaceably by the writers of antiquity. He is a romantic dreamer and some wanderer of the heavens who uses the classical discipline by habit, his style gains stability in the search after disciplined order. A rational attitude of mind with no dogmatic excess or system, conservative tendencies, the sincerity of a personal judgment, the religion and moral principles based upon an austere philosophy and wisdom of all wise men of the world; such is his method of studying the gigantic movements of life, states, nations, civilizations and individuals. Before he sets out on his travels he has seen all lands through the eyes of the mind; he has wandered with Changez across the

1. From an Antique Land - London-1953, p.15
Gobi, and sailed with the Roman fleets in the Mediterranean. And then one day he leaves his magic web like the lady of Shallot, and finds the reality more charming than the shadow.

"Again and again I have found that one glance at a landscape with the living eye reveals the answer to riddles, that cannot be read from a lifelong study of maps and monographs. I had always been unable to grasp the causes of the power of Assyria. How had this country, which occupies so small a patch on the map, found the power to subjugate the whole of the fertile crescent; and Egypt, and Elam as well. True, Assyria exhausted herself by the effort; but how had she ever mastered the strength to succeed at all". 1.

He studies the souls of nations, of people collectively, of places and places, great architectural ruins and other curiosities of history. His account has isolated notes which a purely scientific method of the historian cannot explain; the poetic temperament peeps out of the debris of dates, and facts, poetry and philosophy discovered from history would make his work dull and boring. The deep continuity of the current of imaginative emotion which had dried up on the surface of scientific history is again turned into an active force without taking away the scientific top soil. His travel books give him a freer field for the working of his imagination, it is fanned by an inward joy of the type that Keats had on first looking into Chapman's Homer.

"Nothing is less monotonous than empty space, and sets the imagination free. The pacific ocean, the Siberian forest, the Lincolnshire Fenlands all have this magic influence. And now I am feeling it once more on the Nullarbor Plain". 2.

"There, there it is - the consummate work of Buddhist art which I have so often gazed upon longingly in photographs. The obliging pilot of the Garuda plane has gone out of his way to wheel round the stupa crowned hill of Borobudur enroute from Djakarta to Jogja. Though he is travelling as slowly as he can, the vision has come and gone in a flash". 3.

2. Ibid, p.53.
3. Ibid, p.58.
“Countries have characters that are as distinctive as human beings. There is an extraordinary difference in the effects that they produce on human feelings. There are countries that can make your fortune for you without gaining any hold on your affections. . . . There are other countries that offer you no flesh pots but win your heart so completely that you feel yourself an exile anywhere else in the world”. 1

The style and spirit of the book combine all that is best in the modern literature of travel, and it goes a few steps better; it has the romantic favour of Kinglake’s Sothen, Gertrude Bell’s love of facts and architectural details in the desert and the Sown, E.M. Forster’s mystic approach to the spirit of things, Lafcadlo Hearn’s love of the exotic and the oriental. His style has the graces of all these without their defects, but it is a style purely personal, it starts in the plodding heavy style of the classical thinkers, but then it sparkles, and gets warmer, it has a delicacy as well as firmness, calm regularity and strength.

“India casts a spell over visitors from all quarters of the earth. . . long after one has seen the last of this fascinating subcontinent, the music of its life goes on singing in one’s ears. It is a strange orchestration in which a harmony is produced by a mixture of strains that would sound discordant in any other country. The creaking of bullock cart axles comes into it, and the cawing of crows, but the dominant strain is the inaudible voice of the rivers which speaks to the eye, and transmutes itself in the enchanted mind”. 2

“Standing inside the dome at Sultanieh, one marvels at the grand simplicity of its structure. Looking at it from a distance, one marvels at its present loveliness. Might St. Paul’s look like this one day, if it survived a third world war fought with atomic weapons? I fancied myself pacing the Spaniard’s Walk on Hampstead Heath, and seeing nothing but the dome of St. Paul’s between me and the Surrey hills. The city of God endureth when human empires pass away. The solitary dome at Sultanieh speaks volumes”. 3

The earlier part of the book describes scenes and sights in South America and Australia.

1. *East to West* - Oxford - 1958, p.199,
2. Ibid., p. 107.
3. Ibid., p. 190
Between Oxus and Jamuna is a much simpler and less poetic affair than the East to West; the old enthusiasm lights up the description here and there, but he is mostly nearer the earth and walks on solid ground; nowhere does he get ecstatic or effusive. In the first book there is accentuated predominance of emotional life provoked or directed by imaginative vision, but that intensity of emotion and display of imagery gives place to more serene and poised study of the historical and cultural factors operating in these isolated places of the ancient world. But that poetic and religious spirit and the philosophic instinct is still active in this book; he flew in the first case but now he walks or drives, and prefers the bullock cart to a Comet and hence has his reservations about Sophocles laudation of man the craftsman. In these lovely hills he feels like the Greek hero Ulysses.

"Every view is bounded by an horizon; at every stage the traveller has to choose some single direction from among all the quarters of the compass. And the unseen and the unvisited lands in many directions that the traveller has to renounce give him twinges of regret which he might perhaps have escaped if he had unadventurously stayed at home".

Multan, Hazara, Gandhara, Charsada, Mewar, Qandhar, Herat, Surkh Kotal, Gilgit, Hunza, Chitral, Dir all appeal to his mind, but what appeals most to this consummate judge of landscapes and sights is the old city of Balkh.

"Yet Los Angeles and Chicago leave me unimpressed, while Balkh the empty shed of a dead city - has knocked me quite flat. I had been prepared to be impressed by its grandeur. I had pored over photographs and plans; I had read all the descriptions on which I could lay hands, but this

second hand picture had given me no idea of the reality. I feel sure that the visiting Alexanderians in the days when Balkh was the capital of Greco-Bactrian empire, would have been awestricken. And I also feel sure that visiting Romans, in the days when Balkh was one of the capitals of the empire would have felt the same sensation. Any way I myself was awe-stricken today". 1.

Toynbee is a charming companion in travel, he learned in all lores, he finds sermons in stones, and books in running books; there is poignant poetry in the melancholy procession of the great images. His style has vigour, and his personal feelings give it a lyrical eloquence; the glory and the downfall of the past are as stirring as the glories of art and architecture existing today. The emotion infused in these descriptions is born of the delightful relaxation of a book-wormish soul digging deep into old musty cities.

46. JEAN BOWIE SHOR - AFTER YOU MARCO POLO - 1955.

Mrs. Shor's book is an example of modern journalistic adventure stories; there is no more Elizabethan adventure, but there are plenty of men journalists and photographers who take risks to get a good copy - a sensational story - a rare photograph. In Gunther there is beauty of presentation of abundant material - certainly collected and sorted by a secretarial staff, much before the actual tour; in Edgar Snow the actual observations made on the spot dominates though facts too are given. In Mrs. Shor's book written in co-operation with her husband there is certain simplicity of observation, and freshness of approach which is its distinguishing mark. It is very much in inspiration like the three nonstop dancers of Walter de La Mare who dance their way to the sea, and one of them dances into it. It is only a young heart and only a foolish heart at that that can decide to walk

into the trap of a brigand like Rahman Qul, raiding Russians, looting Chinese, and escaping and living freely among Afghans. Who would think of a bandit on the highest pass in the world - Delhi Sang - smoking 'Abdulla's preference' cigars, which even emperors cannot get. The subject is highly interesting and the treatment is simple and naive, it is more American than English, it lacks polish and restraint, it is not condensed and brief, and it is written after reading other great masterpieces of travel. It is something easy and intelligible and even persuasive, but nothing that resembles the noblest flights of Stevenson or Somerset Maugham. This medium narrative power is not to be despised; there is a quiet and facile way of describing adventures that can provide enough material for a number of widely appealing books. Despite traces of journalistic shoddiness it has a marked modern character. The unity that links the whole story is not her own personality, but that of Marco Polo - he is omnipresent; they have in a way re-enacted the whole story 'Marco Polo's travels. It is full of fun and fantasy, it is a honey moon trip and the book is certainly fit for being read by all honey mooners.

"I chose the Gobi for our honey moon for many reasons, none of them very sensible". 1.

It is so ridiculous in conception and execution that it provokes both laughter and tears; the ship in which they sail to Turkey is described by the master thus:

"She has sunk twice in the past ten years, but both times she was fortunately raised. But don't worry, this is her last voyage. After this trip she is to be broken up for scrap". 2.

2. Ibid., p. 30.
The book is full of good spirits.

"Franc sat in front with the Shah, and I sat in the back seat in lonely grandeur firmly resisting any impulse to give a Queen Mary nod and gracious wave to the bowing subjects". 1.

An interesting study of mankind, the book presents a parade of men and women of various races and nationalities; it is a wide world and a various world that we live in. It is also a fine study of their own personalities, a jovial self revelation tinged with the madness of honeymooners, and the sweetness of first love. Humour, adventure, spirit of romance all make the narrative a delightful piece of travel literature.

"I have never stopped travelling. I hope I never shall. Somewhere in the world there are other people like the Shah of Iran, like Rahman Qul, like Mirza Hussan. Somewhere perhaps there is another Hunza. And I like Marco Polo, shall be ever hunting there hunting with a hungry heart". 2.

47. STEPHEN SPENDER (1909 - ) LEARNING LAUGHTER-1952.

It is rather surprising that jews - a wandering tribe of great men - a homeless nation of wealthiest people on earth have produced very little literature of travel. Perhaps the reasons are not far to seek - it is a psychological effect of being homeless. They never travel, wherever they go they consider it home and travel must take a man away from home and then back to it. They have not received much kindness in the world that they should praise different lands and nations, now that Israel exists the jews will become travellers or pilgrims at least. But Spender's book has a clear aim and a definite plan.

"This book is based on the journal of a tour in Israel made in the spring of 1952. Impressions are grouped around a study of Youth Aliyah, the organisation which has cared

2. Ibid. p.294.
for 60,000 children brought from all parts of the world to
Israel . . . . The idea of a travel book with a theme appeals
to me. Impressions inevitably superficial should I think acquire
proportion and direction if they are related to a central subject"

The children in Israel form the main theme of the story,
but other places and persons also come into it. The book lacks
Spender's poetic touch, only rarely does he directly give
the scenes of nature; he seems to be under the enthu­
siastic spirit of Zionism which is certainly a new name for
Philistinism as far as literature and art are concerned.
His creative instinct is hampered by these narrow considera­
tions; this subject in itself is not sterile, it is full of great
possibilities but vigour and inspiration are lacking; when
Palestine fails to inspire writers, it is a sad look out
for the literature of travel.


Mrs. Bourke-White's book is a faithful eye-witness
account of the days of the partition of the Indian sub-continent
it is a sympathetic, touching, and thought-provoking account
of her sojourn in India before and after 15th August 1947,
the book will have a place in the important records of that
period. It is a human document, a pathetic study of masses
of men gone mad, and nature - wreaking vengeance for human
follies. Her language is simple, clear, matter of fact.
yet the book has a dramatic beauty and the thrilling quality
of a film of Biblical days. Some day a new Tolstoy will
write another War and Peace, based on it. It is the story
of the Exodus enacted on the land of the Five Rivers; and

the River Beas from the banks of which Alexander returned to Babylon plays a prominent part in the story.

"The hoofs of countless cattle raised such continuous columns of dust that a pillar of a cloud trailed the convoy by day. And in the evenings when the wayfarers camped by tens of thousands along their road-sides and built their little fires and made their chapatties - a good deal I suppose, like the unleavened bread of the Bible - the light of their camp fires rose into the dust filled air until, it seemed as if a pillar of fire hung over them at night". 1

There is progressive lighting up of a new horizon which extends beyond the merely political situation of the time; the distant centuries fall off, and the young country is revealed without the magic garb of the past. There is a deep probing into the reality through the observation of facts and not merely the exercise of pure imagination. Being an American she has no nostalgic memories of the past; she stands on the date-line of history; she looks to the future and not to the past.

No book of the partition days would present a better contrast with Mrs. Bourke White’s Book than this excellent God Bye to India by Sir Henry Sharp. It is a book of regrets of days that are no more, of the imperialism that has vanished and the sorrow of separation from the scenes of activity. It is in the tradition of Sir Walter Roper Lawrences, 'India We Served', and breathes the fine spirit of the Indian Civil Service enthusiasm for India.

He whose way has led him through a long valley, when he nears the pass, turns back his gaze, to scan the path that he has trodden. The larger features, hill, lake, or river, stand out clear; and, if he retraces his journey on a map, he will see them there accurately recorded. It is the way side slights - the lanes, the cottages, the orchards, the

rivulets, the flowers that already fade in the distance; and no map will show them. But it is just these that have become familiar and agreeable to him. He would keep some image of them”. 1

These are lovely images, these are fleeting pictures of the past, a sweet and warm past, and yet their day is done. It is astonishing that the English Civil Servants worked and lived in a spiritual climate that never changed; only rarely an Orwell or an E.P. Moon washed his hands of the imperial stable cleaning work, but no good books could have been written without the nourishment that this special soil afforded. The pictures of the hills and Indian hill towns that he gives would haunt the mind of every Kim and every Simon Danz, for one more mule ride along the Tibet road, and across the hills to Shangrila.

"Then the sun wanes and we turn homeward, shadows gather in the Valleys and creep up the hills. The sunset fades. The sound of mule bells dies, on the long road to Tibet. The hush of the mountains closes about us, and the rising moon bathes height and depth in enchanted slumber. Such a scene, and such an hour may well have inspired the lyrics of Alkman and Goethe”. 2

50. William O' Douglas, Beyond the High Himalayas - 1956

The American age in travelling starts right from the beginning of the Second Great War, but their literature of travel never reaches the level of the English writers of any period before this. American travel books of recent times seem to have no traditional contact with the books of old great masters like Herman Melville and Frederick O' Brien. The new tradition takes its inspiration from journalism, and very rarely rises to the heights of true literature. Justice Douglas's book arouses high hopes, but they are not fulfilled.

"There will be memories of moon turning glaciers to gold. Pieces of old Tibetan love songs will come floating down a canyon already drenched with loveliness. Drums once more will beat in such frenzied rhythm that one will want to cast off convention, join the natives, and jump and whirl in a mad exciting dance... There will be the sweet voice of a lovely girl singing of love under a popular tree in a tiny garden of a village... And perhaps loveliest of all will be the sound of a flute whose music sounds like falling water". 1

But most of these hopes are not fulfilled, only the political conditions prevailing in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan are well-reported; there is lively humour and merry account of his romantic bus driver who goes off to his girl; they wish to be saved and start off with prayers.

"I told him of the old Negro down in Virginia who ended with these words", O'Lord don't let nothing come my way that you and me together can't handle". 2

The book is written in the simplest language of journalism - a common feature of much that is written in America perhaps that is its distinguishing mark.

51. LOWELL THOMAS J. J. OUT OF THIS WORLD-1961

Lowell Thomas Junior was called from Iran to Calcutta by his old experienced famous father, and with the party they set out for Lhasa. The narrative gives a faithful account of this journey, but it does not pretend to be a book of literature, it has little literary merit. Yet the book starts with high hopes and grand dreams; Tibet is too big a subject for an inexperienced young writer travelling under the gigantic shadow of his father, with everything made smooth by diplomats and political agents.

"Forbidden Tibet, Westerners have called it that for centuries, the mysterious mountain kingdom beyond the towering Himalayas on the very roof of the world has long been Number One Eldorado for explorers and travellers with a keen appetite for the unknown". 3

It is strange that Tibet with all its mystery and

1. "Beyond the High Himalayas". New York - 1956, p.7;
and inaccessibility has not inspired a single good book which should have a high place in literature. The land is too wild and the people too dull to stir the imagination, history and civilization are essential for the working of the creative power; the same happens when one finds oneself in the darkest Congo or among the Bushmen of Australia, even beauties of nature cannot be appreciated when there is the constant danger of slipping and falling headlong into abysmal depths to meet one's death; they are marooned in the flood waters of Brahmaputra which has changed its course because of an earthquake, and while returning old father Lowell fractures his leg at eight places.

52. THEOS BERNARD, LAND OF A THOUSAND BUSHAS - 1952

Theos Bernard who was killed by communal rioters in the partition days in India in August 1947, while travelling in Himachal Pradesh looked exactly like D.H. Lawrence; the one was a sex mystic, and the other was a mysticism mystic; one went to Mexico and the other turned to India and Tibet.

Lawrence was influenced by the position of his parents, particularly his mother. Theos Bernard too had crankish parents in Arizona following a mystic Yogi in India, but there the resemblance ends. Bernard completely lacks Lawrence's power and vitality, and even his mysticism is a pose; it is crankishness and craftiness, and one can clearly see where one ends and the other starts. There is no doubt about the affinity of temperament that is at work, but all these mystic suggestions require a Tagore to handle them, he condemns the Western men for lack of imagination, but his own imagination is either defective, or it is obstructed by his hypocrisy. He can neither
raise the atmosphere by use of appropriate words nor does he efface the hard outlines of things to create a dreamy mistiness. His images are too thick to be mistaken, his words too harsh to be harmonious, and his whole attitude is that of a charlatan who wants to impress his audience. There are laboured reflections, and studied effects. There is no wistful aspiration for the beyond, and there is no ethereal grace.

"I had never realised what a holy room I had been occupying until one morning I had a visitor with some books to sell. His partner on entering the room and observing the complete set of Kangyur and Tangyur next to my shrine immediately went forward and began mumbling off his mantras. . . . While this was going through with his short ritual of devotion, his partner was doing his best to drive a bargain. . . . With the book sellers gone I retired to my study to enrich my mind with matters for which I had come here". 1

The book is full of thrills, and gives an insight into many Tibetan rituals and ceremonies, and describes many monasteries, but as a whole it is a huge piece of buffoonery.

53. JOHN MASTERS, THE ROAD PAST MANDALAY - 1961

John Masters is known for his delightful novels based on his experiences in India where he served as a Colonel of the Gorkhas, his novels have breadth of movement, a wide scene of action, and a good exciting plot, as his story is calculated to appeal to the average reader. But he lacks fine touches, subtle study of human mind, gentle natural characterisation and above all values of life. He has lived and worked in a world which is not his own and which is itself like Proteus adopting new forms and facets.

The Road Past Mandalay is an account of his days in

India, his part in the Second Great War; as personal narratives go it must be given the credit of being free from personal vanity and ego, and of having a generous and charitable attitude towards life, and all that life brings in its wake. At places it becomes as exciting and sensational as his novels; he cannot give up his love of the scandalous and the lewd.

"But Quetta was not dull. It was electric... Something in the air produced pregnancy in the child-less, nymphomania in the frigid, larceny in the respectable, and scandals of wonderful variety... There was the musical Beds scandal of the mid 1930's, when four Officers in a remote outpost "passed their wives around in a year long orgy the odd man out a week at a time, doing all the military work". 1

The stirring story of General Wingate and his Chindits who gave a hard time to the Japs is told by one who took an important part in this jungle fighting; but sections of the book where he gets most inspired on seeing the beauty of the Himalayan mountains have the greatest appeal. The din and clash of the War, and the stiffness of a soldiers' life are subdued in the soft colours of the mountains, and noise of life sinks in the harmony of nature.

"There is nothing so remote, so calm, with the calmness of original creation, as the side of a Himalayan mountain towards evening. To watch the night climb out of the valley on to the snows, to look across windless depths to far ice walls and father heights, the gold of the snow turning to a pure cold blue as the night dies, to turn then and see a yellow light spring faint from a shepherd's hut miles down in the darkness—These are the rewards after the day's work". 2

There is no conscious artistry, and also no laborious effects in his prose, he writes naturally, the vigour and force of his style is self apparent; it is doubtful if he will have enduring fame as a writer of prose or even fiction.

1. Road Past Mandalay - London-1961, p.84
2. Ibid. p.118.
This is a fine specimen of the journalistic travel books; it is more literary more personal an account than Gunther's Monumental Inside Asia or Edgar Snow's Red Star over China, or even Auden and Isherwood's Journey to a War. He stands in no need of amassing details (like Gunther) or using invective and satire to give colour to an otherwise dull story (like Auden), he does not look into the minds and motives of men (like Somerset Maugham). Life in itself is interesting enough to give charm to the story, he wanders in China as Borrow did in Spain or as Hudson did in Patagonia.

"I have come to the end of the world we are imprisoned by loess hills, and with the very greatest difficulty can believe there is any other world than this. It is the oddest impression. You feel that you have come to a place so ancient, more ancient than any thing else in China, and its very ancientness makes it impossible to move away from it. It is very much like the Surrealist paintings you used to see before the war". 1.

He looks at China through the mist of romance; he looks not at one lone tree or an isolated old man, but at China of vast horizons and distant horizons; every rider rides out of the history of hoary times, and every shepherd is a prince of dreamers. This romantic touch is rather unexpected in a modern war reporter; but the inveterate romanticism of the hard headed British will well up at the least expected moments.

"One evening when the sunlight fell on the uplands and the valley was already frozen in greyness, a boy came down the dusty road leading some pigs, the pigs were black once, but now the yellow dust had turned them almost silver,... He had forgotten about the pigs. He leaned negligently on the staff, and continued to sing and play on his flute until someone came to attend the forge. Then he went down the road, and you heard the boy's singing and the grunting of the pigs". 2.

2. Ibid., p. 106.
This is equal to anything written by Ernest Hemingway; there is restraint, simplicity, clarity and a vividness which is easy to handle. His feeling for typical figures of oriental romance is voiced with infinite gracefulness.

"Once I saw a man riding furiously on horseback, and noticed that the horse was one of those heavy cruppered horses which appear in Tang Dynasty memorials, a descendant of one of the horses which a famous Tang Emperor captured in Ferghana, he rode through the dust he resembled a Prince, the face very red and heavily bearded, the saddle cloth bright blue and embroidered with Persian roses, and he wore bright yellow sleeves, and a red cap fell from his shoulders. When he had disappeared at last you could have sworn it was someone you had seen in a dream". 1.

There are fine pictures exquisitely drawn with a few touches that grace the pages of this book; the Great Wall looking like a mysterious white thread 2, the cave of Ten thousand Buddhas 3, and the sleepy charms of Peking 4, are all described with great skill of a mature prose stylist. He mingle no humour or irony as others do; the canvas is not crowded with figures, sincerity and simplicity are its hallmark. If Stevenson had gone to China he would have written on the same lines, only the military and political leaders would not have met with the same favour.

2. Ibid., p. 192.
3. Ibid., p. 83.
4. Ibid., p. 4.