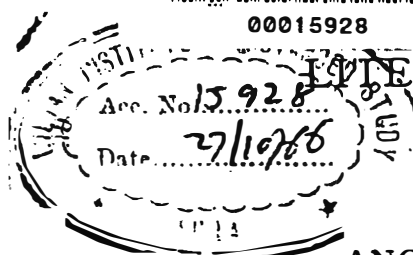




00015928

 PH  
 8093  
 R 58 A


LIBRARY SUPPLEMENT

ADING ARTICLE

ANGL-INDIAN NOVELISTS

BY STANLEY RICE

ONCE upon a time three Englishmen went into an Indian bazaar in search of what they could pick up. The first sought out a curio shop, and after the usual haggling and a certain impatience with the time-honoured custom of the country, finally left the place with a miscellaneous assortment, some of them genuine Indian art, some local imitations of it, and some imported from Birmingham. They were gods and goddesses of different shapes, it did not matter much what; there were *chadars* from Rampur, and inlaid alabaster from Agra; there were betel boxes and phials for attar, and *hugahs* and *nandis* and other things with intriguing names. He was quite satisfied. All he wanted was to decorate his English home and to be able to talk India to his friends.

The second man wanted none of these things. He took out a pocket-book and began to sketch rapidly and to make notes. He got a picture of a bullock-cart with its matting top, its lumbering wheels and its patient oxen with the heavy yoke on their necks; and another of the quaint little shop with the turbaned master sitting cross-legged among his wares. A few lines gave him a white robed clerk, conspicuous among the almost naked coolies and a few more, a woman with flowers in her hair and ornaments in ears and nose going to a festival. He looked up at a lattice window and imagined all the traditional horrors of Zenana life. He noticed the refuse thrown in the streets and the endless wrangling over the question of price at each little stall. Here was a domestic servant buying chickens for an English master whom, of course, he would swindle; and there a policeman in the Government uniform equally determined on extortion in the name of the law.

By and bye there came along a procession. The first man looked greedily at the god; how splendid it would be to buy the image and exhibit it as the real article straight from the car! How beautiful were the fans that those

brown fellows in white clothes were waving about! He supposed that they were not for sale and turned away without further interest in these heathen folk and their idolatrous rites. The second man took stock of the rigid car with its heavy ropes; those no doubt were Brahmans who stood aloft and gave contemptuous commands to the people below. Haughty fellows evidently, to whom the masses were as dirt, their very touch defilement, and their shadow pollution. Heavens! what a country!

The third man looked deeper. Into his nostrils entered that indefinable smell of the Indian bazaar that was a compound of saffron and coriander, and chillies and damp cloth and many other ingredients, and yet is none of these things. And he, too, saw what his companions had seen, and thoughts rose within him that partook of all that he saw but were too elusive for definition. He was drinking in the mysterious, inscrutable Spirit of India, that spirit which men have termed the Call of the East. He saw a joyous crowd, jostling each other good-humouredly. He heard the chaffering of the stalls but recognized it for what it was, the accepted custom of the country. He noticed the men carrying the babies, to help the women, and the happy faces of the latter as they trotted along under male protection. Here and there a sweeper scuttled out of the way of his betters; it was the custom of the country and there was no resentment. Little acts of kindness he saw, and he heard little scraps of good-natured chaff, and as the procession hove in sight and the people bowed in deep salutation of the god his thoughts ran on that stupendous fact, the dominating influence of religion in the land. A great country, he thought, with a great past, perhaps with a great future; the kindly spirit of the East had got hold of him, and though the words would not come, it was in that spirit that he looked upon the scene. The smell of the bazaar was still in his nostrils.

This little apologue describes not unaptly the mental attitude of those writers of fiction who have chosen either to take India for their subject or have used her as a background for their story. The scenes, or some of them, are no doubt laid in India, perhaps because some kind of foreign country was needed for the plot, but the background is often very sketchily drawn in, and India, in fact, merely serves like the cheap bazaar gods to decorate the story. To do this class of writers justice, they do not pretend to know very much about India or to take the slightest interest in the country. They are generally women who perhaps have

spent a season or two in Simla or Bombay and have learned just enough of the jargon to be able to use India as a background, with a touch here and there of what is called local colour to give the picture at least a semblance of truth. They have in fact bought their little gods and bric-à-brac and use them for decoration, neither knowing nor caring whether the images represent Narayana or Lakshmi, Hanuman, or Ganesh. To them India is simply Anglo-India as represented by the dances, the dinners, the polo matches, and the races of some gay place. The Plains which are the real India are just a kind of sweltering desert, where of course it is infernally hot and where thunderstorms roll up bringing a breathless air and not a drop of rain, and where men work with bloodshot eyes and a terrible weariness at uncongenial tasks, slaving, not, as in real life, with an absorbing interest in the work for its own sake and without thought of reward, but for the woman of their heart who is probably having a more or less "good time" in England or in the ever blessed Hills. India to these writers is the handful of British men and women, and if the men are not in the Army, why of course they are in the Civil Service, which naturally includes the Public Works Department, Forests, and the rest. The world is divided into soldiers and others; so why not? The aim of every right-minded civilian is to rise in his profession so that he may escape the fiery torment of the horrible Plains and be caught up to the delight of the Hills. The population of India is negligible; it is simply and comprehensively "the native element," generally rather unpleasant, often malicious, and always incomprehensible. Indians flit in and out like shadows, soft-footed butlers creep about verandahs in snowy turbans and murmur that dinner is ready; saices and dak-bungalows and ayahs are peppered over the dish to season it, and now and again a mystery with fierce eyes and a skinny arm obligingly provides the sensation. One does not go to such books as these for Indian colour. For all that it matters the scene might just as well be laid in Nigeria or Zululand; only as it happens Simla is in India and is more attractive to the novelist in search of colour. Novelists of this kind need not detain us.

"Non ragionam di lor ma guarda e passa."

If it were not for the impression they leave that they know something of India and find the "natives" both uninteresting and negligible they would hardly come within the scope of our subject. They tell their story of English

loves and intrigues and passions more or less well according to their gifts, and leave it at that.

Very different are those who have consciously chosen India not as a colourless background but as the essence of their subject. These writers have taken upon themselves a great responsibility, for they are the interpreters of India and all that she stands for to a public which has no intention of reading the heavy articles of the serious magazines or any other example of the more learned kind. Let it not be said that readers of this class read for the story alone. Do we not form an impression of Spain, or Corsica, or Russia, or some other country which that versatile writer, Mr. Merriman, portrays for us? Have we not all heard the exclamation that So-and-So's book makes you want to see such a place? An excellent parson once lent a novel of this class to the writer with the remark that it was "the finest novel that he had read"; the plot was vivid, the intention evidently earnest, but alas! it turned out to be a travesty of the Hindu home, coloured by the bias of missionary zeal and piling upon one devoted "heathen head" all the most sinister traditions of that little understood institution. It is a trite saying that the ignorance of the English in oriental matters is appalling; what can one expect when Mr. Punch calls Siva a goddess and scans Kemal as a trochee? How much greater then the task of the teacher! India has been called "The land of regrets"—we are all now familiar with the "Call of the East." Whence then come these regrets? What is this mysterious "call"? There are fascinations of light and colour, fascinations of the jungle and of the wild life lurking in it, fascinations of mountain and sky and river; yet all these do not suffice. There is surely a fascination too in the child-like unsophisticated people, and many a man there is who is proud to call Indians his friends, and who curses the distance which has turned so many pleasant conversations into memories of far-off days. Those who know India best admit the fascination is general, even while painting unflattering portraits of the individual; they leave India reluctantly and find disillusionment in that "home" to which their enthusiastic thoughts have turned so often.

"I suppose," says Mr. Hilton Brown, "there must be something wanting in my nature, for I could not feel anything of the appropriate elation in going home *qua* going home. I would much rather have travelled East and seen some new country. . . . Someone on board said, 'Never mind, my dear, we're going home—home!' To such people India must surely be a terrible incarceration. Certainly they do no good there."

Or, again, Mrs. Perrin, a true lover of India, who recognizes "the multitude below, the real people of India, who are India itself, who are as an army to an individual compared with the dwellers in hill regions."

"Then a horse fell down" (her hero had arrived in England) "a few yards from him in the street and a crowd collected from nowhere as if by magic, a crowd of unwholesome looking men in dirty clothes, all apparently of the same age and size and type, strangely alike, equally repulsive; he wondered vaguely what they would look like washed and trimmed and deprived of their filthy covering. . . . He thought of an Indian crowd clothed in white or bright colours, picturesque, polite, quiet perhaps to apathy or noisy with a naive childlike excitement. What a contrast to these rough squalid human beings who gaped and pressed round the fallen animal."

How comes it, then, that such witnesses as these find but little good to say of the Indians? Partly, no doubt, because the main interest of the story is with the Englishman in India, partly too because piquant vice is more adaptable to their purpose than humdrum virtue, but mainly because they have not the knowledge. They represent the second traveller in the bazaar, and he who has carefully assimilated all the externals, has assiduously made his notes and his sketches, has all the materials for producing a realistic and unmistakable picture of India. But he has missed the heart of her, and in missing that he has missed all, for it is from such as these that the average reader draws his conclusions. There was in the Academy of 1923 a picture of a girl seated on a wooden balustrade, painted so realistically that one had to look closely to be sure that the woodwork was not carving but only paint. A clever picture, but a picture simply of a girl seated on a balustrade; nothing more. And so one might say of this type of Anglo-Indian novel that it represents most faithfully the various phases of Indian life—the details of a Civil Servant's life in "Dismiss"—the social aspect in kindly perspective of "The Anglo-Indians," the atmosphere of political unrest in the first of these and in Mr. Candler's "Abdication"—and yet somehow fails to get to the heart of things. The Indians themselves are to blame. Fenced round by the impenetrable wall of caste, the men appearing with the superficial mask of public life, and the women not at all, unless at their brief and childish attempts at the entertainment of other women, what chance do they offer to the intelligent and eager seekers after a fuller knowledge of and a more complete sympathy with the people? And so we get a fiction that is India and yet is not India—is the artificial India of the English with the artificial Indian

created by the system. One glimpses here and there the yearning to tell of the real India, but always the barrier rises up, and the veiled image of Sais remains veiled.

The favourite characters of this artificial India are the domestic servant and the Prince educated in England. Mrs. Perrin's Gunga, the old butler who has served his master so well, who is heartbroken when the time comes for separation, and whose loss can never be replaced in England, save by a type now dismally drawing towards extinction, is both a kindlier and a truer type than Mr. Minney's swindling, untidy, tyrannical master of the servants' quarters. "The Delhi Road" purports to tell us what goes on behind the scenes, and doubtless there are as bad servants as there are good. But why lay stress on the bad? If the Indian servant has his perquisites, does he not repay such custom by faithful devotion? To read "The Delhi Road" one would think that the Indian servant is the worst in the world instead of being, as he is, the best. And the denationalization of the Indian Prince or the Indian graduate, does it not leave us a little cold? We may beg leave to doubt whether the Indian is really disgusted, as some have painted him, with the prospect of marrying one of his own people and of living according to the customs of his ancestors. We pride ourselves upon our own culture and wrap round us the garments of our own civilization. Nor are we to blame for this; but we ought not to forget that every other people with any claim to be called civilized, with any shred of self-respect for their country and their race, does the same.

For the present attitude of novelists towards India the present political situation is in a large measure responsible. For the political novel is coming more into prominence and is written now, like "Abdication," as a *θρῆνος* over the waning prestige of the English, now, like "Dismiss" in so far as it is political (and the title seems curiously misleading as to the main theme), as the passing bell of the Civil Service, which is perhaps the same thing. But we must pass now to other and more congenial themes.

Side by side with the picture already mentioned was another of Hudson's discovery—huge rolling waves, impressive in power, and on the horizon a tiny ship, emblem both of the majesty and of the insignificance of man. That is the conception which is suggested by him, the supreme example of the Indian novel, and, in a lesser degree, by Mrs. Steel's work. In its own way there is no more charming vignette of Indian life than the little story of

Ganesh Chand, lumbaradar of the village, awaiting the arrival of the long expected son, who turns out to be only the unwanted daughter. But the Indian is made of flesh and blood, and if the grandmother cannot quite forgive the baby for its sex, the father is made of softer stuff. It is not a boy, but it is his and therefore precious. Far better this than your tales of a demoralized and denationalized people, only saved from ruin in so far as they consent to copy their European superiors.

But it is to *Kim* that the reader of fiction must look for the real India, and it is with the wand of Kipling that every writer aspiring to write of India must wish to conjure. Popular as it is, the very conception of the English boy, rejecting the boasted civilization of his race, casting in his lot with the Indian, and miserably unhappy in his English clothes and his English school, must lose its full flavour to those who cannot appreciate the charm and the fidelity of the story. Kipling is the third of our travellers. The deftly introduced touches do not obtrude upon you with a show of learning or even of diligent observation. They are taken for granted, just as an English novelist will take for granted the sights and sounds of Oxford Street or the glamour of the sun upon the gorse. The mastery of *Kim* is gained through its atmosphere rather than through its detail. It does not matter what sort of bullock coach the Kulu woman had or what a third-class Indian carriage looks like; what does matter is the garrulity, the innate kindness and hospitality, the cursing of the servants that means nothing of the one, the joyous light-heartedness, the frankness, the badinage of the other. One does not grasp it, but as the scent of the bazaar is elusive, so is the atmosphere in which we move. Mahbub Ali, the rough, rascally, swashbuckling Afghan, the Lama, as simple as a child yet always to all the holy man, the sturdy woman of the Hills falling in love with *Kim*, the English parson quite unable to understand how anyone can fail to be impressed by the glories of Western civilization—these are more than types; they are living portraits.

Genius is not given to many; and this last class of Anglo-Indian novels is as rare as snow in May. Beside *Kim*, and perhaps one or two more, the ordinary Anglo-Indian novel pales its ineffectual light. For *Kim* shows us India as she really is—lovable and joyous, with her weakness and her strength, untouched by the artificialities of the grafted West, at times not far from detestable, yet always calling, calling to those who have forsaken her. As the

Lama found his river, so we have at last found the Land of Regrets. There is the field for those who will reap; would that there were more labourers who could give us so rich a harvest.

---

## OUR REVIEW OF BOOKS

---

MONEY, BANKING AND EXCHANGE IN INDIA. By H. Stanley Jevons.  
(*Government Press, Simla.*)

THE FUTURE OF EXCHANGE AND THE INDIAN CURRENCY. By H. Stanley Jevons. (*Oxford University Press.*)

(*Reviewed by SIR JAMES WILSON, K.C.S.I.*)

By the publication of these two books Mr. Stanley Jevons, who is Professor of Economics in the University of Allahabad, has done good service to India. In the first book he gives in simple language a clear and useful summary of the general principles which regulate the use of money and systems of currency, more especially with reference to Indian conditions. He describes the banking system in India, so far as it has been developed, and deals with such questions as the changes which have taken place in the price of silver and in the sterling value of the rupee, and the effect on prices, currency and exchange of the war and of the action taken by the Secretary of State and the Government of India since the Armistice. In the second book he states his views as to the probable future course of prices, and as to the policy which should now be adopted by the Government of India. He also gives a number of tables of prices, index-numbers, rates of exchange, etc., which will be found useful for reference. The books are well worthy of study, both by students of currency questions generally, and by all who are interested in the prosperity of the millions of India's population.

In dealing with exchange he confines his comparisons too closely to the rate of exchange of the rupee reckoned in sterling, and does not eliminate the effect on the value of the rupee of the changes which have taken place in the value of sterling itself, when measured in gold, which is still the basis of international transactions, and a much better measure of value than the variable British paper pound. As was shown in my article on "The Indian Currency Policy" in the April issue of the ASIATIC REVIEW, the value of the rupee in fine gold in London, which before the war was steady at 7.5 grains, had risen on January 31, 1920, to 9.6 grains, but had by January 31, 1923, fallen to 7.4 grains. On August 16, 1923, the rupee was quoted in London at 1s. 4d.—that is, at one-fifteenth of the pound sterling—but on the same date gold was sold in London at 90s. 2d. per fine ounce, as compared with the par rate of 85s. per fine ounce. This means that on that date the pound sterling would buy only 106.5 grains of fine gold, while the sovereign contains 113 grains; so that the pound sterling was worth only 94.2 per cent. of the gold in a sovereign; and as the rupee was worth one-fifteenth of a pound, its value in gold in London



