THE INDIAN EYE
ON ENGLISH LIFE

OR
RAMBLES OF A PILGRIM REFORMER

BY
BEHRAMJI M. MALABARI

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ashamed of the rôle assigned to him in the economy of nature. One day I see the sun about 12 A.M., exactly like our Indian moon. I am not sure that the moon is not visible in England oftener than the sun. The full moon in a clear sky is a sight worthy of the place of honour in all the picture galleries of England. What I myself dislike most in the English weather is the death-laden East or North wind, Son of Ahriman. May his face be blackened for ever!

The North or East wind sometimes grows into what they call a storm. To show what an ordinary London storm means I have only to detail my first experience of it. One afternoon I have to return the visit of a friend at the India Office. As it is not nearly four o'clock yet, I jump into a bus from Ludgate Hill, and am carried off to Waterloo. I take the return bus then for Charing Cross; but the conductor points out another passing us half way, which, he says, will take me right into Whitehall Place. Whilst barely out to catch the other bus, I am overtaken, all of a sudden, by a heavy gale. Instead of making for the bus, I have, therefore, to run across under a bridge where many others have already sought shelter, as if by instinct. In attempting to protect myself from the gale I badly hurt my umbrella. My poor Gamp! She has her nose flattened and throws up one of her arms. Finding the rain does not cease, I hail a cab and ask to be set down at the India Office. The man puts me down at the wrong end, and I have to enter another public office next door. Here, in the open square, Salty and I have to breast a fiercer gust of wind. She throws up more of her arms, and I nearly lose my chimney pot and get a ducking in an attempt to regain my balance. In this plight I go up to the porter and ask if he could smuggle me into the right room. "You have to walk across to the India House, Sir," he titters, eyeing me from head to foot. Once more into the square, and then out at the end of Delahay Street. One more trial for my poor little Gamp. She moans and gasps for breath, and shuts herself up the wrong way. I am sprinkled all over with mud in my efforts to keep steady. On arriving at the porter's gate I try to doctor my companion with the aid of the porter. But the best surgical skill on the spot fails to set her fractured bones. The more we try to poke them back, the more we tear her flesh. It is a cruel operation, which we give up in despair. I am told it was a mistake to have carried an umbrella that afternoon, more so, to have held it to it when it wanted to go. In a storm people had better lose their umbrellas and hats rather than risk their limbs in saving these encumbrances.

It makes one laugh to hear the English talk of their "fine day," their "lovely, splendid, magnificent, glorious weather." Why, I never saw a whole day in London that could honestly be described as "fine," let alone the hyperboles. One may speak of a "fine" five minutes; a fine half-hour or hour. Nothing beyond that, so far as I could see. As a matter of fact, every five minutes of "fine weather" in London is worth recording in letters of gold.

Among other vagaries of the English weather it may be mentioned that you are sometimes overtaken by the shades of night at 5 P.M., not to catch a glimpse
of the approach of dawn till 8 A.M. In some of the winter months you have hardly any such thing as the day. It is all night, from week's end to week's end. In summer you are rushed into the light of day about 2 or 3 A.M., seeing the face of night seldom before 9 P.M.

It is a settled point among scientists that with his naked eyes no man can gaze at the noonday sun. I am prepared to confound these learned theorists. On the 1st of August, 1890, about 1 P.M. in the afternoon, I gazed at the London sun from the top of an omnibus standing near Hyde Park Corner. I take my oath on it, that to the best of my knowledge and belief I did gaze at the sun, did stare at him boldly, did, in fact, outstare him and make him retire behind the gathering clouds. This is a historical fact, and I record it, therefore, with all the pomp and circumstance befitting it. I give date, place and hour; which is more than most of our modern scientists do in announcing their discoveries of mares' nests.

The climate of a country reflects itself pretty clearly in the temper, habits and general surroundings of the people. This is a scientific truth, the force of which is brought home to my rude intelligence most vividly in England. The people seem to be as changeable and restless as the weather. They are always on the move. Watch them where you like, at home or abroad, they seem to be full of the question—what next? No amount of walking, riding, sight-seeing satisifies them—they will have something more, something, if possible, in another line. This is perhaps best seen during the holidays. I know not if many parents will be deterred from enjoying their holidays by illness at home amongst their children; I think the majority of children are not so deterred by the illness of their parents. This may look unnatural, but is not so in reality. It is mainly the climate, and the peculiar mode of life the people have to live in obedience to climatic influences, that make them so keen about everything. They are as keen about business as about pleasure. The wear and tear of life in England must be terrible. But if it were less hurried than it is, I believe life would be shorter still. It is inevitable, under these circumstances, that life should be a mad scramble, and that keen enjoyment and keen suffering should exist side by side in most places. In every department of business people want to make most money in the least time, and retire at once, to live as ladies and gentlemen. That a life so artificial blunts human instincts, and lowers the standard of public morality, goes without saying; but it is equally certain that the mode of life is forced upon the people. It is bound to be a life of extremes; with the happiness of the family and of the community often sacrificed at the altar of individual interest. Nowhere could the law of the survival of the fittest be more inercessible in its working than in this vortex of high-pressure civilization. People live in a whirlwind of excitement, making and unmaking their idols almost every day. They seem to be consumed by a mania for novelty; everything new serves to keep up the fever of excitement. To-day they will set up a fetish, anything absurd, fantastic, grotesque, and worship it with breathless enthusiasm. It matters little what the fetish represents to the moral sense of the worshippers.
So long as it is something unusual, they will bend the knee of fashion before it. To-morrow there must be a new sensation, to take the place of the old, pulled down with the same eagerness with which it was put up. In a word, the English seem to be as fickle as their weather. Frit about, poor butterflies of a brief season, and drink your fill of the poisoned nectar you so madly crave! I cannot blame you, though I will not join in your mad pursuit. Well it is for you that the weather is so capricious nine months out of twelve; otherwise, you might kill yourselves with sustained animation. And well is it, too, you make the best of your brief spell of sunshine; otherwise you might die of ennui.

The air is no worse in London, I should think, than anywhere else, though appearances are certainly against the capital. But if the towns suffer from smoke and gas, they make up for it by improved sanitary arrangements. Country air in the country is certainly purer, but it is apt to be tainted by noxious vapours floating around. London can hold its own, however, in the matter of sulphurised hydrogen gas, escaping from street refuse of all kinds, and smelling very much like rotten eggs. But on the whole I am inclined to think that more people die in the metropolis from other causes than bad air. The incessant damp and cold, very injurious in themselves, do not allow of most of the houses being well ventilated. People generally live with the windows shut, day and night, and breathe the same air again and again. In some of the poorer quarters, where several of them have to occupy a room overnight, that is hardly fit to keep two in health and comfort and decency, the result can well be imagined. It is true that the sanitary arrangements for London itself are far from being perfect. I have seen dogs and cats and large birds lying dead on the pavements for two and three days, and I have seen some of the back slums reeking with filth. I have known riversides smelling horribly for weeks, with no one in or out of office anxious to abate the nuisance. All these, however, are preventable evils, and they will be prevented when there is less jotbery and more vigilance on the part of some of the departments. At any rate, such public nuisances are very rarely met with, chiefly in the poor districts. The air itself, on the whole, both in the country and in towns, is pure enough. Considering the climate and the habits of the people, it is wrong to abuse God's air for want, or neglect, of man's personal hygiene.

The Englishman's dress is perhaps as much under the influence of climate as his temper; it is capricious, but not ill-suited to his wants, though one would think it might be made more becoming in some particulars. The Englishwoman's dress is necessarily more complicated, but on the whole it suits her well, and is better suited to active outdoor movements than is the Indian lady's, as a rule. The tendency in this respect is markedly towards freedom. But it will be many years, I am afraid, before anything like real freedom is reached. The present cumbersome arrangement reminds one of the days of female slavery, when everything was done by their lords to keep women within sight. Englishwomen are advancing rapidly in every direction. But they seem to be slow to improve in the matter of dress. Can this be from their own desire to be easily
caught when outstripping the limits of womanly independence? Woman's instinct is said to be sounder than her reason. For my part, I am not ashamed of sympathizing with the movement for a simpler, cheaper, more rational system of dress. It would save many a milliner's bill, many an hour wasted on the daily toilet, many a gap in domestic harmony, and many a bonny English lass from descending to the grave before her time.

It takes no close observation to see what important part is played by silk, satin, and clean linen in the get-up of a daughter of Five. At times you hardly recognize the same person differently dressed. No wonder women give so much of their time to the toilet. So long as dressing is not overdone, at the expense of more serious duties, I do not see why they should be grudged a pleasure that spreads gladness all round. Dressing is an art; it takes something of genius to dress well. Simplicity is, of course, the supreme test—just enough of art to aid the work of nature. Most efforts to hide positive defects are vain; to supply them artificially is ridiculous. And, after all, it needs a soul within to set off personal attraction. A dressed-up carcass can be shown by any butcher in the street. On the whole, I think the English lady is more clever at dressing than her Indian sister; firstly, because she is always improving, and secondly, because she knows better how to make a little go a long way.

The weather in England imposes an amount of clothing, and the manner in which it is to be used, to which I could never reconcile myself. Oh! those horrible, abominable braces, and the ponderous, mum-derous overcoat! How I have revolted against their use, in spite of the doctor’s vehement protests! A small, spare man, I have often been weighed down by coat and overcoat, and I do believe those so-called elastic braces have made me shorter by at least half an inch. Surely it is not the dry cold of England that makes one shrink lengthwise from five feet two to barely one and a half?

For me the most pleasing dress is that used by the lady-nurse, of some dark material with snow-white linen tucked under the chin and running round the neck. One feels as if he would like to be ill, just a little, to bask in the sunshine of this bright and healing presence. Health and innocence follow thee, good sister!

The construction of London suggests serious thoughts to a stranger. What with railways under ground, running through the bowels of the earth; railways, tramways, omnibuses, and smaller vehicles working above ground, the city appears to have been perforated from end to end. Some of the latest improvements of science, when seen in a working condition, strike one dumb; the whole thing looks like a train laid for the destruction of the town. They could hardly have managed it better if they wanted London to be blown up into atoms. As it is, any passing shock of earthquake, or perhaps a flash of lightning or peal of thunder might send the more incoherent parts flying about in the air. This is the impression left upon my mind: I dare say the Londoner knows better. Anyhow, it is hopeless to stem the tide of this modern civilization. If it shortens life, does it not make it more enjoyable?
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.
This artificial civilization of the West, dominated by
King Coal and Emperor Iron, and typified as Kaliyuga
by the wire men of the East, has its price, which is paid
every day in disease and death, in accident and crime.
These go to propitiate the Moloch of high pressure,
moral progress, and a daily record of them is to be
found in newspapers recking with realistic sensationalism.

The look presented by the average street in London
is a dull monoton of ugliness, unrelieved by variety
of construction or colour. At first sight one would
think the people had no eye for the picturesque. But
would not the best-assorted colors be out of place in a
wilderness of fog and sleet and mud? The exterior of
houses in London is bound to be unattractive.

Jerry building is another eyesore to the lover of art
and safety. But safety is inconsistent with the hurried
life of sale and barter that obtains here, and for art
you have the inside of houses, picture galleries, museums,
parks, &c. The parks are the pride and glory of
London. They are extensive, wonderfully well kept,
and easy of access for the neighbouring population. Big
and small, the parks and greens of London count by
the hundred. And what a blessing they are to the
millions, ill-fed and housed in miserable hovels!

If the outside of houses is generally uninteresting, it
is quite the reverse with the inside in well-to-do
quarters. Everything there bespeaks the latest ap-
plication of art and science, to make life more enjoyable
to-day than it was yesterday. That is the genius of
the people. The drawing-room is generally well
adorned with cheap, but by no means inartistic, knick-
knacks. Even the poor middle classes know how to live
in some sort of what they call style. Let the English-
man alone to make a home for himself. A race that
could conquer such a climate, and carve the utmost
comforts of life out of it, deserves dominion over all the
elements of nature and freaks of fortune.

In no respect, perhaps, does the average Englishman
show himself so slow of imagination and wanting in
taste as with respect to his daily food. He eats what
his father ate before him. Bread-and-ham or cheese;
an egg by way of variety, with black tea or coffee;
these seem to form his breakfast twenty-five days out of
the month. His lunch may be a mere apology; and
for dinner he will have beef or pork, or fish with an odd
potato or a slice of cabbage, all boiled separate. He
may have roast beef now and then, or a little fish. He
is a heavy eater, and enjoys the meat or cheese that
appears to a stranger to be hardly fit to look at. He
may have soup and German sausages, if he can afford
them; pudding, custard, pie, and other side-dishes on a
holiday. The better informed and better-to-do class
seem to have borrowed French dishes, and imported
French cooks. Indian dishes, rice and curry, for in-
stance, with chutneys and condiments, are struggling
into favour. But as a rule the Englishman's dinner is
plain and monotonous to a degree. The cook knows
nothing of proportion in seasoning his food; knows
little of variety, and has a rough, slovenly touch. The
cookery is often worse than the materials, which may
be seen any day hung up at the shops; carcasses of large
animals and small, beef, veal, pork, mutton, ducks,
geese, rabbits, chickens, all dressed and ready for use. The sight is invariably unpleasant, and the smell is at times overpowering if one happens to be near the shops. It is an exhibition of barbarism, not unlikely to develop the brute instincts in man. I wish the people could be induced to go in more for vegetables and fruit, for grain, pulse, and other cereals. There would be less alcoholic drink necessary in that case, and a marked improvement both in their habits and appearance. A beginning seems to have been made in this direction by vegetarian hotels and restaurants. But what little I have seen of their culinary out-turn is far from satisfactory. Not until they learn how to draw the people by a variety of well-seasoned dishes will they compete successfully with "the roast beef of Old England." Why don't they employ Indian cooks for a time? Anglo-Indian ladies ought to set the example to their sisters.

The English are heavy eaters as a rule. I have never had a regular dinner with friends while in England, being unaccustomed both to their hours and their dishes. But I have had to put in an appearance at lunch or breakfast, to catch a friend about to leave town. On one such occasion I see a company of poets, philosophers, and fanatics at table, presided over by a young lady, the daughter of the house. I sit there, wiping my forehead (they do the eating, I the perspiring), as I see slices of beef disappearing, with vegetables, mustard, etc. I am pressed to join, but pretend to make a horrid protest. The host then asks me slyly what I think of the food and their mode of eating? I reply instinctively, "It is horrible." The reply sets the gentleman roaring, and my hostess blushing. But I could not help saying what I feel. How can a little stomach hold such an enormous lunch? Even women and children take large quantities. What vitality those people have, to be sure! The waste of vitality in their climate, and under their conditions of life, must be equally enormous, and it has, of course, to be replaced.

It is not only the quantity, but the manner of eating as well, that puzzles and sometimes frightens me. Men and women eat freely at shops, in the street, train, bus, or railway carriage. There is an absence of delicacy and deliberation about the matter, at which the grave Oriental may well lift his eyebrows. Bismillah! How these Firanghis do eat! Oysters seem to be the ambrosia of adult invalids, as sponge cakes are supposed to be that of children in trouble. Nor is it a pleasant sight to see women devouring pork, bacon, beef, ham at restaurants, with the usual accompaniments. Many of them send for these things every day for dinner. I suppose it is easier and cheaper perhaps to do so. But how much better for themselves and their families if they knew how to cook a simple meal at home? The existence of so many hotels, restaurants, and tea-shops seem to me to be destructive of the home life of the people. It may destroy the very idea of home, if it does not also dry up the spring of family affection.

Water is about the last thing the average Britisher thinks of for a beverage. Ale and beer and stout are the A B C of his alphabet of bibacity. He may wash a dinner down with tea, coffee, or other non-intoxicants. But have these as an aid to digestion and a fillip to the spirits? No. Never. He must have something strong, you know. As a race, the British are hard
drinkers, partly because they are heavy eaters; and they can stand much. The majority of respectable householders ought to know where to draw the line; but I doubt if all of them can do this. Mr. and Mrs. John Bull take a drop because it is so cold; then because they are so tired, or grieved, or disappointed. The habit grows on many till the victims are reduced to a state verging on lunacy. It is idle to expect self-control even in the majority of what are called moderate drinkers, unless they have some vital interest at stake, or are guided by high ideals of life. For idlers, or those that are fickle in character, the first glass is generally the first step to ruin. A good deal also depends upon the nature of the drink consumed in a country. The light sweet wines of the South, or a medicinal dose of something stronger, may do no harm to all constitutions alike, though it is extremely doubtful if they do real good in nine cases out of ten. This is my opinion, based on the experience of several years. There may be temperaments and occupations that need an occasional stimulus in the shape of wine or brandy mingled with semi-liquid food. But even in these cases alcohol is, I think, best avoided.

From drink to drunkenness is an easy transition, especially in a climate like that of Great Britain. What "beastliness" there is in drunkenness! It beggars description and defies all justification. People can hardly realize what a drunkard is, unless they have seen one in the streets of London or Glasgow—a sight saddening enough to make angels weep. What a desecration of the human form divine! The creature looks more like a seasoned cask of liquor, with the fumes escaping at the top. And he is a hundred times more noxious than the cask of liquor. The Continent appears to me to be almost free from this degree of drunkenness. India is quite sober, compared to England, in spite of her bhang, ganja, opium; in spite of her toddy, mowra, her Shiraazi or Cashmiri wines, which are like milk beside the fire-waters of England. The drunkenness that debases, brutalizes, and maddens, seems to be peculiar to the British soil. Is it due to climate? I hardly think so. Paris, for instance, does not differ much in climate from London, and yet it presents a most favourable contrast. Is it occupation, food, personal habits? All these, probably, and other causes, including climate perhaps, account for the phenomenal bibulousness of the Briton. Beer, ale, porter, stout, brandy, whisky, gin; these and other products of the distillery of Satan, sanctioned, and in a manner patronized by the state, spread their fumes over the land, poisoning men, women, and children. The evil prevails most, I should think, in mining and manufacturing districts, where the victims are often to be pitied than blamed. They have a hard life of it, their ignorance rivalling the squalor of their surroundings. A habitual drunkard amongst them, or in the back slums of London or Glasgow, is but little less than a brute. What talk, what dress, what general demeanour amongst men and women! Some of the worst crimes in these places, including violence and murder, are due more to this one cause than several others put together; as also the vice and suffering amongst a large number of those who disgrace the civilization of England, day and night. And who could