

THREE YEARS' RECORDING TRIP IN EUROPE AND ASIA

Many Interesting Incidents and Impressions Set Forth in Greatest Recording Expedition Ever Made – Oriental Artists Hitherto Unknown Introduced to People of the World.

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My next adventure was at Merv on the Russian Turkestan-Afghan frontier. It was during the period of the return of Halley's Comet. I was in the position where was obtained the nearest and finest view, namely, the center of Central Asia. I had gone out at two in the morning when it was first expected but was a little disappointed in not—as I thought—seeing it, when I was suddenly accosted by a sentry who demanded my reason for walking in his direction. When I replied “*I am endeavoring to find the comet,*” he smiled— as I did myself at such a ridiculous answer—but he said, pointing to the way I had come, “*There is the tail of the comet as plain as I am before you; surrender your passport.*” I replied that my passport was at the hotel, which he was pleased to accept and bade me appear at the police chief's house in the morning. There is no fear of running away or leaving the town, for permission has to be granted by the police and furthermore I was the only foreigner in the town with the exception of a French astronomer who had arrived to take photographs of the comet. In the morning I satisfactorily explained my wandering and was forgiven. The tail of the comet was so enormous at Merv that its enormity was the reason I had failed to realize it was actually the comet. On returning to the stable they called the “*Hotel Europe*” in Merv, I met the astronomer who pointed out the huge flare of light to me. The light I had seen previously, but in curious foolishness had imagined it to be the reflection from Merv station rising into the night, and now remembered that such a light could not emanate from a station where there were only oil lamps. Later the comet appeared in the sky and it was beautifully clear with a resplendent tail. I saw it every night for three weeks.

Two days after the comet incident I was arrested whilst taking or endeavoring to take a snapshot of the Himalayas Mountains, which could just be seen in the distance. This arrest was far more serious, for I was put in a cell and learnt I was accused of espionage and was arrested in the act of taking photographs of the fortifications and lines of the Russian troops on the frontier. I also learned that I had been shadowed ever since the affair [*with the* ~~de~~ comet. My camera was confiscated and the films developed, two were of artists and three local views—one the hotel, the main street, and the last [*of the Himalaya Mountains*]. The films had taken two days to print and in spite of numerous threats and repeated asseverations of my innocence I was detained in the filthy cell for two days. On the night of the second day I was released with profuse apologies. It appeared they had ransacked my belongings at the hotel, and discovering nothing incriminating were compelled to release me. The chief of police was also fearing I should acquaint the nearest Consul and was profuse with his apologies. I, however, never regained my camera until I left the town, and then they had sent word to Bokhara of my arrival there, for on alighting from the train, my camera was again confiscated until my departure. I was, however, able to take a few views of the old town with the camera of our agent.

By the administering of a moderate bribe I was able to persuade the official at Bokhara not to communicate with Samarkand to have my camera confiscated, and I was thus able to secure a number of interesting photographs. Of the artists there is little to write, their singing was really not singing, but cat calls, crying, yelling, chokings, what you will, but certainly not singing. The artists, in Turkestan were always over fifty, whilst in Bokhara the youngest artist was seventy-four and, on account of his being so young, he was not a seller from the talker's point of view. The most popular artists were between eighty and ninety. Imagine the poor recorder trying to make a record of the choking of an old man of ninety, sufficiently loud to be commercial.

In the tour I had recorded 951 titles. The cost of the tour, including traveling expenses, personal expenses, artists' fees, freight—in fact, all money spent appertaining to the recording—was just under \$15,000. Artists' fees in that part of the world are not yet ballooned to the extent they are in Europe and America. Cossack choirs would ride two days into Vladikavkaz, stay a night in the town, and two days return journey, for the sum of \$50—for twenty-four titles, eight men,

or, six men and a woman, the latter playing the harmonium as the only accompaniment.

Whilst in Merv and Samarkand we secured artists for six dollars for four songs. Such money to those Cossacks of the mountains and the Tekints of Merv is enormous, for they are known to live on the equivalent to six dollars a year.

At the same time it is well to mention that two Persian artists cost the equivalent to seventy-five dollars per song. A Czart in Bokhara cost us six hundred dollars for ten titles. These, and two others, were the only exceptions, the rest being very cheap.

I will now speak of my Indian tour from all points. Just before leaving Calcutta for Madras I received the following letter, which was evidently written with the assistance of a letter-writer, from my boy:

Dear Sir:—I beg respectfully requested to inform your Honor to have your kind notice before your favorable consideration. Sir, I beg respectfully to know from to your honour that you have no time to speak for with me therefore I let you know your honour by the application that you have very quickly notice to leave Calcutta; therefore I wanted to know from to your honour about my salary and for my warm clothes, if your honour wanted to engage me for up country you will have to pay me ten rupees for the farm clothes and eight annas for to food and return to MY Calcutta. "

It is our generally rule in the Thos. Cook and son if your honour not believe me you can required in the Thos. Cook yourself. I have the honour to be Sir, your honour's most obedient servant.

(Sgd) MUCKBEEL HASSAIM.

He was asking. for money to buy warm clothes if it was my intention to travel in the North of India, (which is extremely cold for a southern boy) eight annas per day for food and sustenance above his stipend; which was thirty rupees per month (a lot of money for him, considering it costs but two or four annas a day for all he desires even allowing for extravagance). He wears very little clothing and he is also able to receive certain commission from the tradesmen when he is buying goods for you. This boy was my third. The first I had to send off through belonging to a caste which did not allow him to clean up anything I might inadvertently spill. My second boy I afterwards discovered to be a Jain. In this

caste it is against their religion to kill an insect or any live thing, be it insect, microbe or animal. One day I observed a small green insect crawling up the wall of my room and ordered the boy to kill it (I was dressing for dinner at the time). To my surprise, he knelt in supplication and told me that he was a Jain and could kill not any living thing. I told him to fetch the hotel boy, which he did, and then I dismissed him. I had vague ideas of being somewhere in the wilds of India with a boy who wouldn't kill an animal, or pick up birds whilst out shooting, or being attacked by some animal or other, and the boy looking on and praying, instead of killing.

This third boy, however, although he had many castes (what I term, blemishes), he was tactful with; it and should I ask him to perform any task which was irrelevant to his religion he would say, "*Yes sir, I will do it at once,*" and going outside, would get one of the hotel attendants of a different caste to do the necessary act. A strange example of caste idiosyncrasies was the following: The company in India one day sent out several men with circulars which were to be delivered amongst the native population of Calcutta (nearly a million). It was discovered, however, that one man had in one or two streets merely dropped a packet of circulars at the top of the street and in such a prominent part and with evident care that an inquiry was held, and the twelve men asked which of the number had so discarded the circulars. A man immediately stepped forward and explained that he being a Brahman (the highest caste in India) it was not for him to deliver circulars at the doors of such inferior castes as the (here he mentioned one or two of the lowest castes) but he assured us that the circulars would be collected nevertheless. What is more, they were. The inferior castes appreciate the superior class of the Brahman and whether he be a circular man or a millionaire he is respected the same. Caste has so many varieties and customs that I shall not attempt to dwell on them but give one more incidents of caste and religion which came my way in the country of nearly three hundred million natives. In Madras I witnessed the funeral of a Mahratta. My notice was attracted to the jocund clash of metal instruments, bells and tum-tums, loud laughter and singing. I observed coming towards me a small procession of men who appeared more or less intoxicated. In the center of the throng was what appeared to be a large box of flowers but on its nearer approach was in reality the dead figure of a man, uncovered, sitting upright in a coffin or box of flowers. It was the caste custom to bury their dead. in this fashion – old men sitting upright, young men lying

Covered with flowers, the women as unceremoniously as possible. It is, however, almost a universal custom throughout India to attend the funeral of an Indian with great hilarity, songs, music, and, in fact, to have a good time. Walking one night through the native quarter nearest my hotel, I was attracted by loud drum beating and the voices of men. I observed on the first floor of one of the houses a party of eight or nine men, seated in a circle, all holding and beating drums. They were also singing and throwing their heads to and fro to the regular rhythm of the chant. I learned they were singing the entrance of a friend, who had just died, into Heaven.

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