

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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Amongst the Hindus the burning of the bodies is the rite, and can be viewed by all who desire, with the exception of women who are not allowed. At one of these, (we will call them crematoriums) it is revolting to a white to hear the relatives bargaining with the authorities over the wood for the burning. It is possible to buy one shilling's worth to burn a poor Indian or £500 for a rich; the latter is usually burned with the finest satin wood.

The Parsi custom which is followed and carried out principally in Bombay is unique. They will not defile the elements, fire, water and air. They, therefore, have large towers termed "*Towers of Silence*," which is best described as a large grid surrounded by a high circular wall. Onto this grid the Parsi priests place the bodies of the dead, after which they clap their hands as a signal to the vultures, who are consistently perched on the periphery to commence their task. A body is in this way consumed and the bones only remain, in less than half an hour. The skeleton dries in the sun and the rain carries the dust away by means of a large drain which is in the center of the grid. The whole thing may appear particularly nauseous to the average white, but it is nevertheless extremely—I might say—scrupulously clean.

No one is permitted to view the consuming of the flesh by the evil-looking vultures. The only disconcerting part of the whole procedure is that on divers' occasions the vultures are known to drop a finger or ear onto the roads in the approximate vicinity.

The sight, too, of the vultures sitting in a position of ardent expectancy on the towers, waiting for the next signal to devour their "*human meal*," is, to say the least, a most sickening perspective.

I encountered many instances of asceticism during the tour. In Bangalore a man—a Mahratta—had sat in one position in the road for five years. He was paralyzed, but continued to sit on. Food was brought him by numerous native Samaritans who also washed and cared for him—a strange sight indeed to the average white.

En route to Bombay I met a man who had not spoken for sixteen years. In another part near Poona I saw a man hanging head downward from a tree. He was in the habit of doing this extremely idiotic performance every day for over an hour. In Bombay one of the artists was a man who had voluntarily lost the use of one arm, not having attempted to use or lift it for a dozen years.

There are several fanatical ascetics who never leave the banks of the sacred river Ganges. Should the river rise (it often does) he allows himself to drown, believing in his purblind faith, that the water was sent for him to enter Heaven.

I visited Benares (the sacred town) to record several priests, but the temples and mosques were in such disgusting surroundings I left after a stay of *two hours*!!

It was amazing in Bokhara and Turkestan to see the people drinking the same water that they wash in, but here in Benares on the banks of the Ganges the scenes are even more revolting. Men, women and children of all castes, diseases and ages, bathe, wash, wash clothes, natives having teeth extracted expectorate, barbers empty their lather—in short, the river is used for every possible purpose. In one part the natives are drinking the water which obviously contains the dregs of other natives' bodies. At the same time the gnats are busy burning the bodies of Hindus, whilst in other parts dead bodies are thrown into the river. Having arrived to record voices not "*smells*," it can be understood I did not stay long. The sickening sight of the burning bodies, the pestilential vapors arising from the filth of the river, the unforgettable stench from the multitudinous natives under a hot August Indian sun, intermingled with the filth which bespattered the banks from the numerous animals, including the sacred cows, was all incomprehensibly horrible and incomparably disgusting. When I read of the fearful number of fatalities through plague and cholera, I am not surprised, but am amazed that the

number is not greatly multiplied. The British authorities do their utmost (with careful tact and diplomacy not to aggravate the superstitious religious feelings and customs of the natives) to sanitize the surroundings, but to attempt to clear the whole area and thus cleanse the vicinity would be inviting another mutiny. When one realizes that there are one hundred and fifty different languages and castes in India, two hundred and ninety millions of people, the work and organization of the handful of British can be better understood and appreciated.

In India I had recorded 850 titles. The cost of all expenses, including personal expenses, was approximately \$17,000. The cost per record being considerably higher than in Turkestan, this being through the greater population, the popularity of the artists, with a corresponding increase of fees.

In Europe, outside Russia, I met with no unusual incidents. In Russia, on the other hand, I was often in trouble with the police and in every case over passports.

In Europe I had recorded in the numerous languages 2,790 titles, the cost of which being so varied it is difficult to state definitely, but taking the small fees with the large, I should say the records had cost for artists' fees alone \$82,000. The bands and accompaniments another \$14,000. In Europe it is necessary to pay all sorts of prices, from \$5 to a \$1,000 per title. To record 4,600 titles it will be seen what tremendous expense is entailed, which is not generally understood, or for that matter believed, by many talking machine men. I had used or handled during the three years I refer to 13,000 odd waxes, including master records (for manufacture) spoiled, and those used for trials. The waxes were packed in large cases, each containing but twenty-four, and all were sent from Paris. The amount, therefore, spent in freight alone can be imagined, each case weighing one and a half hundredweight. I had met, bargained, harangued with a heterogenous crowd of fully 14,000 persons, and incalculable languages, whilst actually recording 11,000 artists. Traveled for the talker over 53,000 miles. My diaphragms had cut 472 miles of sound waves. The cost of the 4,600 records and all expenses appertaining to same had cost the company \$123,000. To listen for four hours continuously every day and go through every record would occupy one whole year and eight weeks. The amount of records sold of these titles would reach a figure (for the combined countries) of well over 11,000,000 and they will still sell. These figures in no way compare in average and national comparison of popularity of

the talker with the United States. If all the countries of Europe and Asia were as keen and as enthusiastic over the talking machine as America the sale would have reached nearer the twenty million mark by this.

I am, however, sanguine that Russia will eventually outdo the United States as regards the number of records sold yearly. At present the population of Russia is in a state of emancipation, which is slowly but surely making progress. There is a musical population of something like two hundred millions. The great majority are at present illiterate and still the yearly sales of the combined talking companies reach any number over ten millions per year. There is still room (and ample, at that) for talkers in Russia. Especially with the phone-cut record, which Pathé Frères held a monopoly on, but which is extremely flimsy. One only has to consult the consular reports to learn the coming boom in Russia for all trades and professions, and after three years' experience, I can corroborate the statements of the numerous consuls and emphasize the opportunity that awaits the talker in Russia.

The present business in Russia is tremendous and the Gramophone Co. of London is the first, with an enormous output, with the Pathéphone and Sirena companies second and third.

In India there are so many atmospheric difficulties, scores of castes, necessitating the printing and catalog of innumerable languages, that business is intricate and comparatively small.

Even here there is room for talkers especially for commercial men who are willing to thoroughly enter into the almost insuperable difficulties of the country and people. All the present companies are content to jog along just securing a balance on the right side. There are many ways and means of increasing business in India, but the majority of the organizers unconsciously drift into a channel (after two or three years) of initiative lethargy. The country is also invariably divided into two large districts with two managers, whereas there is room and, in fact, it is imperative to have at least a half dozen men with respective bunches of provinces. It must be borne in mind that there is in India a population of nearly 306,000,000.

Of Turkestan there is little business and that is firmly held by the Gramophone Co.

I found the talker in every corner I visited, but in the oddest corners no cylinders, all discs. The cylinder business is dead or dying in England, France, Germany, Russia and all Eastern countries.

I often chanced across other recorders in my perigrations and in one case the coincidence happened that the Gramophone Co.'s first recorder, Fred Gaisberg, of the United States, accompanied me round from Warsaw to Moscow, St. Petersburg and back to Warsaw, afterwards to Berlin. Needless to add we fraternized. I think he had traveled two to every one mile of mine. In Berlin I met Bill Hayes, of the Edison, the man who first taught me the art of recording.

It is my earnest desire to record in the United States and should I do so, perhaps the editor will allow me the space to write my humble opinion of the American artists as compared with the artists of other nationalities.

I conclude my articles waving my hand across the sea to that great American who, through his invention, made my experience possible and whose name in Europe is so honored.

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