

INDIA AND THE FUTURE. By WILLIAM ARCHER. Alfred A. Knopf.

MR. ARCHER has been through India, I should judge for as much as six weeks, with a typewriter and a provincial third-rate mind. Edmund Burke said

"This multitude of men does not consist of an abject and barbarous population. . . . (They are) a people for ages civilized and cultivated; cultivated by all the arts of polished life while we were yet in the woods."

This obvious fact is not obvious to Mr. Archer. Like the clever journalist he is, he has documented himself with so many facts that he does not tell us that Indians are negroes, who throw their children to crocodiles, but on every page one can feel that he cherishes this view in his pate. His method of investigating India is the method of Count Smorltork; but Count Smorltork was a gentleman. His point of view is so ignorant and so bourgeois, that I am forced to quote passages, lest it should not be believed that any biped could print such rotteness.

"This senseless reduplication to infinity of one mincing, prancing figure produces an indescribably nightmare-like effect; and what can be said for it, from the point of view either of art or of religion, I, for my part, cannot conceive. Who the figures represent I am not sure; . . ."

"Yes, the horror—that is the only word for it. I do not mean that nowadays any particular horrors are perpetrated in the grim recesses of these giant fanes. I do not know that at any time they were the scenes of great cruelty or other abominations, though certainly they present the completest *mise-en-scene* for such excesses. What I do know is that, from the cornerstone to the coping of the highest *gopura*, they are the product of gloomy, perverted, morbidly overwrought imaginations, revelling in the most extravagant features of the most monstrous of all mythologies."

This is all that Mr. Archer gets from the greatest

temple, both from an artistic and religious standpoint, that is alive to-day. And in order that he may write himself down an ass for all to see, he is stupid enough to publish photographs of temples, whose beauty would, one thinks, be evident even to the bovine readers to whom he doubtless appeals.

Mr. Archer's arrogance is equal to his ignorance.

"And on every hand, in its swarming courts and alcoves, you see the lowest fetichism intent in its groveling rites."

How does this animal know what the people were doing? He could not speak a word of their language. He was seeing them for the first time, and his criticisms are just as valuable as would be those of a savage who dropped in on a telephone exchange. The wretched creature keeps on, page after page.

"Barbarian, barbarism, barbarous—I am sorry to harp so much on these words. But they express the essence of the situation."

"There never was a 'great civilization' in India . . ."

With the monuments of Indian civilization actually intact, yet the oldest of them in ruins a thousand years, two thousand years, three thousand years, who knows, before the savages of England wore clothes, it is only natural that this poor blind, globe-trotting hag should fail to understand Caste. He utterly ignores the fact that it is the caste system which has preserved Indian civilization. Constantly conquered, India absorbs her conquerors.

When the fool gets on to the spirituality, he is funnier than ever. On page 59, he gives a curiously imperfect account of the names of Hindu sacred writings, and apologizes for himself in the following note:

"I trust there is no gross error in this paragraph; but very confusing explanations are given of the nomenclature of this literature."

He then proceeds to criticise the contents of those books! It is incredible that any one can be such an ass as to write the stuff that one finds in this book. Page

after page of misstatement and misunderstanding. He is even unable to see a thing like the good manners of the natives. In all the time I was in India I do not recall a single instance of bad manners, except on the part of Babus who had learned them from low-class Europeans, like William Archer.

When he comes to talk of art and culture, it gets worse, if anything.

"Remember—it is certainly not irrelevant—that India is the most tropical country that ever possessed any art of importance."

This person has never heard of Cambodia, Yucatan, Peru, Egypt, West Africa, Java. His art criticism is beneath the depth of Upper Tooting.

"Can any unprejudiced observer deny that even these exceptionally favourable specimens of Indian workmanship are marred by the gravest effects of conventionality in form, of overcrowding in composition, of excess in ornament? In a few seated female figures, viewed from behind, there is a certain natural grace, but most of the women who swarm all over the reliefs are the product of a morbid convention which gives them enormous breasts, wasp waists, and atrophied legs, and places them in attitudes suggestive of a violent dislocation of the hipjoint. Whether such figures were actually cultivated at the period, I do not know; but even if this could be proved, the sculptures could only be regarded as conventional exaggerations of an unhealthy fashion."

"Finally, and coming back to the Buddha-figures in particular, what are we to say of the marvellous spirituality of expression often attributed to them? It is to me, I own, far from apparent. The drooped eyelids, and the immobile pose do, indeed, express the idea of contemplation; but I am at a loss to find anything spiritual in the smooth, insipid faces."

Pig-mindedness can hardly go further. And yet:

"In the Indian epics, the poets are always trying to outdo themselves and each other in their search for the

marvellous, whether in virtue, prowess, gorgeousness, wickedness, demoniacal fury, or mere numerical extravagance. They are constantly creating records in exaggeration, which are as constantly broken. What wonder that a people habituated from childhood to these orgies of unbridled fancy should suffer from a certain slackening of imaginative fibre, an insensitiveness to normal and wholesome stimulation? It is that insensitiveness which seems to me to account for all that is worst in Indian art. It is that insensitiveness which will have to be corrected before India can hope to make the best of her intellectual gifts in a world in which, though all may be illusory, the God-made illusion of Nature must in the end prevail over the man-made illusions of mythology and metaphysics."

I am perfectly in accord with the political conclusion of this book. He was doubtless paid to write it in this interest. However, I had no idea that Mr. William Archer was such an unpleasant thing. The publisher says that he was born at Perth, Scotland. Perhaps, he was one of the famous—twin brothers of Perth, who were—ready to exhibit a positive Wassermann—to the eyes from their birth. Said Bill to his brother, "Well, thanks to our mother, we're the rottenest beggars on earth."