

Seing the world

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SEEING THE WORLD.

**"Wem Gott will rechte Gunst erweisen
Den schickt er in die weite Welt."**

Walter Bachmann, Swiss-born Freeman of the City of London, is no stranger to readers of the "Swiss Observer". He is a remarkable, protean figure and his versatility is astounding — master baker, pastry-cook, expert in cookery and catering, author and publisher, holder of several gold medals awarded for his professional writings, and a great traveller.

The latest of his books, privately published under the title *Round Voyage to the Far East*, is an account of a sea trip from London to India, Ceylon, Malaya, Japan and Hong Kong, a voyage of more than 24,000 sea miles, undertaken during December 1957 and January and February 1958.

It is a neatly produced, well printed and lavishly illustrated volume of some 150 pages and represents the transcript of a diary in which the daily happenings are recorded. Much of it is gastronomic, which is not surprising considering the author's professional background. Moreover, Mr. Bachmann is unashamedly epicurian and fond of the good things of life. He does not travel steerage or work his passage; his voyage, like those he has described in his previous travel books, was an expensive luxury trip, something quite beyond the ken of ordinary mortals.

But succulent meals, elaborate menus and choice wines are not the only subjects of Mr. Bachmann's daily jottings. Endowed with a questing and receptive mind and steeped in a philosophy all his own, there is little that escapes his notice. The diary teems with detail of every kind and with comments and reflections that are typical of his genial — yet at times critical — personality. This is what he wrote in Japan:

"I had hoped to see some geisha girls, but this is not quite so simple as one may think. . . . it would have cost our party a minimum of £36 for the evening up to 11 p.m. to have the services of the geisha girls to look after and entertain us. In any case at 11 p.m. the geisha girls go home and what is more they go home alone."

In Bombay the travellers had a shock: They found the city in the grip of strict prohibition and were reduced to drinking orange juice and soda water, "quite a contrast", he writes, "to our two bottles of wine per meal on board ship". (Not to mention cocktails and appetisers.)

There is an interesting account of the Parsee method of disposing of their dead. These are exposed to the vultures in the Tower of Silence. Another, less macabre, spectacle in Bombay was that of the Indian snake-charmers plying their trade.

In Colombo, Penang and Singapore Mr. Bachmann met many important people and was shown the sights. But, of all the ports he visited, Hong Kong, the "Pearl of the Far East", was the one he fell in love with. There he was sumptuously entertained, and indulged, among other treats, in an orgy of shopping, spending £100 in a couple of hours on silks and ivories.

The great cities of Japan also gave him a warm welcome. His description of what he saw there under the guidance of a native cicerone is most interesting. Needless to say, food and drink again figure largely in his account and he did not fail to sample Sake, the potent national beverage. What he found the geisha girls to be is mentioned earlier.

Finally, the home voyage via Marseilles and Rotterdam is described in the concluding chapters.

This is by far the best of Mr. Bachmann's travel books. Apart from the ubiquitous gastronomic detail with which it is somewhat overloaded — no disparagement is intended — the casual reader will find it entertaining and instructive reading.

Happy is the man who, wishing to see the world in comfort, possesses the leisure, the means and the energy to do so, and who has the ability to record his impressions as Mr. Bachmann has done.

J.J.F.S.

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