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Foreign Faces

V.S. Pritchett



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'I am,' writes Mr. Pritchett, 'an offensive traveller'-meaning not that he is rude to porters, but that his praise of a country has sometimes been taken by its inhabitants as abuse or ridicule.

Be that as it may, his book, which is based upon sojourns in Spain, Turkey, Persia, and the Iron Curtain countries, will delight every English reader. Pritchett's alert eye and relaxed manner, his flair for meeting new places and people without any warping preoccupations, produce the most felicitous results, particularly with the 'Peoples' Democracies', which most travellers approach with a bias to left or right. 'The Communist countries are like schools: the population is trained, and like schoolchildren have their own ways of getting round authority.' The low heels and low rents of Czechoslovakia; the high spirits and outspokenness of the Polish; Bulgaria, where the water is delicious and roses grow everywhere; Romania, so obdurate beneath its Latin surface-wherever he goes Pritchett unerringly picks out significant details, giving us the genius loci, sharing with us his curiosity about ways of life different from our own, imparting to us the warmth of his own response to them.

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