

**THE WORLD'S
HIGHWAY. FROM THE
"CALCUTTA REVIEW"**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649323616

The world's highway. From the "Calcutta review" by Anonymous

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

ANONYMOUS

**THE WORLD'S
HIGHWAY. FROM THE
"CALCUTTA REVIEW"**

THE
WORLD'S HIGHWAY.

FROM THE "CALCUTTA REVIEW,"

FOR MARCH, 1856.

LONDON:
JOHN WEALE, 59, HIGH HOLBORN.
1856.

226.f. 46.

LONDON:
BRADBURY AND SPANG, PRINTERS, WHITECHAPEL.

THE WORLD'S HIGHWAY.

FOR an Englishman it is more dangerous to be before than behind the world. In the former case he has at least the advantage of sympathy. He is backed by one-half his fellowmen, and that half the highest in position, in character, and in that indefinable something which Englishmen call respectability. He has with him all the old, all the timid, a moiety of the wealthy, and a majority of the official world. His opponent stands alone. He is resisted not only by that *vis inertiae*, against which it is well that every projector should have to strive, but by some of the strongest peculiarities in the English character. His idea is apt to stand by itself, apparently unsupported by facts, and in ideas Englishmen profess to have but limited faith. He is usually deficient in practical details, for until the time for action has arrived, such details are simply burdensome, and the practical Englishman despises the deficiency. Above all, he is usually obscure. His own conviction is complete, and he forgets that he addresses men who are quoad his idea as ignorant as children. He makes up for his failure of expression by vehemence of language, and is fortunate if he is set down as a fanatic instead of a visionary.

This indisposition to enthusiasm has doubtless its ad-

vantages. It kills off fallacies. No scheme is ever accepted simply because it is new. It must also be practicable, and hundreds of crude ideas and pretty bubbles die out without any injury beyond the transfer of a little cash from the pockets of dupes to the hands of sharpers. Nothing not really based upon a fact can stand that tempest of ridicule, and hostile investigation. From politics to spirit-rapping, the new movement is invariably stripped bare of its vesture of charlatanerie. The form beneath may be beautiful, and if so, its beauty is acknowledged, but it is permitted no aid from dress or ornament. Or, to change the figure, we may say that every new project is flung into the crucible. The gold may be lost in the process of elimination, but at all events the dross is kicked into the dust-heap. But the temperament has also its disadvantages, and they are neither few nor unimportant. Everything waits too long. The process of inquiry is protracted till the time for action has passed, till the most efficient agency has disappeared from the scene. In politics we are at this very moment witnesses of such a blunder. The English public *has* a new idea as to the true result to be achieved by its great struggle. But the idea is so overloaded with oppressed nationalities, speechifying, Red Republicans, Kossuth, the Poles, Popery, Lord Dudley Stuart, Mr. Urquhart, and charlataneries without end, that it is inclined to reject it altogether. At all events, according to its wont, before acceptance it must strip it of the false. Meanwhile the time for acting on the time is escaping altogether.

It is, however, rather in the region of physical improvement than of politics that this singular idiosyncrasy is most completely developed. Every such scheme is compelled to pass through three several processes, each

testing its reality, but all consumptive alike of time and energy. The great project is first the thought of a single man, dimly expressed in conversation, briefly sketched in a still-born pamphlet, casually alluded to in a periodical. It is regarded by his friends as a harmless infatuation, or even watched with interest as evidence of the strange nooks and corners in an otherwise "well-regulated" mind. Soon opportunity favouring, or conviction becoming fanaticism, the thinker makes his thought apparent, urges it on the authorities, submits it to the Press, hurls it in the face of a half-indignant public. The thought is clothed, and the process of stripping instantly begins. Every ornament is first removed. All that is imaginative, all that has its origin in philanthropy is ruthlessly torn away. When the project at last stands bare, the attack on its existence is commenced. History and science are ransacked to prove that its execution is impossible. If the scheme is one for crossing the Atlantic, a great luminary of science proves that the coal must be expended, that the machinery must get red hot, that the distance is too great for any reasonable hope of safety. A great Peer pledges himself in Parliament to swallow the boiler of the first steamer which performs the feat. If it is a locomotive which is to run a little quicker than a horse, it is proved to a demonstration that the train must be smashed, that the wheels will go on whirring without motion to all eternity, that the passengers will be strangled by the atmosphere. A great Review laughs at the absurdity of the man who believes that men can be shot off rocket-fashion in safety. If it is a railway in India, the natives are too impassive to be moved, the white ants will eat the sleepers, the sun will kill all the engine-drivers. Sometimes the project contains in itself so small a residuum of

truth or practicability that it is abandoned. This has been the case for the present with balloon-travelling. The hundred projectors have not yet got the length of even a Joint-Stock Association. Sometimes, too, the English mind feels as by an instinct that the time is not yet ripe. The project comes too soon. The world is not ready. It was thus with the grand scheme of William Paterson, the one man of the seventeenth century who foresaw the commercial future of the world. His plan tried three times over, backed by a nation, and favoured by an aristocracy, was still crushed down under the remorseless ignorance of the British public. In all cases the pause at this stage is long, wearing out the souls of the thinkers, cruelly diminishing their chance of witnessing their creations live and move. Presently, however, the plan if it has fact beneath escapes from this stage. Men habituate their minds to its vastness till the difficulties seem to disappear. They hear that it has been accepted by a powerful journal, praised by a political leader, considered by a sober official person. The objections raked up have less and less of plausibility. The vehement language is transferred from the now confident and therefore quiet speculator to his angry because beaten adversaries. The goal is nearly won. The officials have long since given way. The public at last stands convinced. By a last brilliant stroke, the project is proved to be not only great but profitable. Capitalists step forward, and the new scheme, changed from a thought into a Joint-Stock Association, enters its final stage, which terminates only with its final success.

We have deemed these comments no unfitting introduction to the project, the history of which we purpose to narrate. It is the most perfect, as it will be the most splendid instance of the peculiar difficulties we have

endeavoured to describe. Devised by a single brain, it has run the gauntlet of ridicule, and steadily progressed towards the realisation, we firmly believe to be immediately in prospect. Before, however, we attempt to give a reason for our faith, we must analyse the materials upon which it is based. The scheme has been actively advancing for many years. It has, however, but seldom emerged into public notice. The author, immersed in other cares and believing the time not yet ripe, has contented himself with convincing half the statesmen of Europe. The war, however, has opened a new prospect. The officials have the path clear before them, and the time has at last arrived for bringing the project before the world in all its magnitude. That part of course it is not for us to play. We only desire to recount its history, and to prove to our own readers that the wild scheme is a practical effort, soon to become a realised undertaking. For this purpose we have employed without hesitation all the means placed at our disposal. They consist chiefly of a private diary, containing transcripts of a correspondence, extending over some years with some of the most illustrious statesmen in Europe. For the same reason we are compelled to give some papers almost entire, united only by so much of disquisition as may serve to make their meaning clear to ordinary readers. This course is obviously unavoidable where the opinions to be quoted are weighty, not in themselves, but from the position of those who utter them. It has, too, another advantage. It enables our readers not only to comprehend, but to dissect the scheme. It reveals to them all that secret machinery by which plans so vast must always be achieved, and shows more clearly than any narrative could do, the energy required to obtain that support in limine, which is