HALDANE AT 125

Go East, Old Man

Professor J. B. S. Haldane says he may take Indian citizenship “if the Indian Republic will have me.”

Here, where the act weighs less than the good will,
And tarnished fames are touched with a new light,
And the mere fact of coming east can still
Confer a cachet on the convertite,

I, an old man needing a new respect,
Full of an ageing spleen and finding now
Hostility less galling than neglect
And dead bays tetchy on a balding brow,

Have travelled eastwards, resolute to savour
That spiritual respite I have sought
Since I abandoned intellect in favour
Of other less exacting modes of thought.

So, hardly flattering hosts too quickly swayed
And courteous to refuse my proffered hand,
I leave a west whose ways I have betrayed
To woo an east I do not understand.

P. M. Hubbard

(legend on next page)
The cartoon on the reverse of J. B. S. Haldane by Ronald Searle appeared in 1955 in Punch, a well-known magazine of satire and humour published from London. A poem by P. M. Hubbard titled ‘Go East, Old Man. Professor J. B. S. Haldane says he may take Indian citizenship “if the Indian Republic will have me”’ appeared below it. Besides the cartoon itself, there are two features of interest. The date is worth noting; it shows that already by 1955 Haldane was serious about the possibility of migrating to India. The poem’s sarcastic, even hostile, tone points to the reactions evoked among some members of the public by the idea of his move. (Haldane is referred to as ‘an old man…full of an ageing spleen’ who has ‘abandoned intellect in favour of other less exacting modes of thought’.) Hubbard’s reaction may have been particularly strong; he had been a member of the (British) Indian Civil Service and was the last District Commissioner in Punjab before Indian independence in 1947 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._M._Hubbard). See the Haldane biography by Ronald Clark for further context. The cartoon is reproduced with the permission of Punch; thanks are due to Sarah Wilmot for bringing it to our attention.