

The Journals Of Honoria Lawrence: India Observed, 1837-1854

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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

THE JOURNALS OF HONORIA LAWRENCE: INDIA OBSERVED 1837-1854. Edited by JOHN LAWRENCE and AUDREY WOODIWISS. pp. 253, 8 plates. London, etc.: Hodder and Stoughton, [1980]. £10.95.

The journals of Honoria, wife of Sir Henry Lawrence of the Panjab and Lucknow, have long been known. They were used by Sir Herbert Edwardes when he was preparing his biography of Lawrence and were quarried in a historical romance by the prolific British Indian novelist Maud Diver. The publication of this selection adds a minor classic to Indo-British literature of the first half of the 19th century, comparable in literary quality to the Hon. Emily Eden's *Up the country* and Mrs. Fanny Parks' *Wanderings of a pilgrim in search of the picturesque*, written by a British lady of equal intelligence but with a very different outlook.

Honoria Lawrence was the daughter of a clergyman of the Church of Ireland. Brought up by an uncle apart from her numerous brothers and sisters, she had a comparatively solitary childhood and youth, in which she acquired the seriousness and sturdiness of character which distinguished her in later life. She met her cousin Henry Lawrence during two brief periods when she was 18 and 19 years old. She sailed to India to marry him nearly a decade later, and accompanied him through most of the remaining 18 years of her life upon his postings in the then North-West Province, Nepal, the Panjab, Kashmir, and Rajputana. She was spared the heroism and tragedy of the siege of Lucknow, as she died in 1854.

Of this selection, the major portion is from journals written for the eyes of her husband and eldest son, and they were intended to establish the closest possible communion with them. They are the record of a woman of intense and somewhat evangelical Christian convictions. Honoria was devoid of the light-hearted frivolity, the tendency to gossip, and the occasional amiable malice of Emily Eden and Fanny Parks. She had little taste for the social round of the larger Indian stations. Her judgements on those with whom she came into social contact were often severe. "I cannot help feeling that at heart he must be a ruffian", she wrote of the military adventurer Harlan (p. 103). "That miserable being, Mrs. J., whom I last saw two years ago in her youth and beauty! Now an outcast, a harlot, an actress" (p. 112). She reproached herself for her own failings. "Since our marriage I discover in myself an impatience and irritability which I did not formerly give way to" (p. 69). She did not hesitate to confide to her husband, whom she loved and served with an elevated devotion, her opinion of his deficiencies. "... We were surely intended, in sympathy and faithfulness to speak to one another with perfect openness. One word more darling, I do think that you are not aware of the way in which you habitually speak to those around you. Their provokingness I fully feel, but dearest, do you recollect that you scarcely ever address a man without an abusive epithet" (p. 97). The last remark, made in the second year of their marriage, makes one think that the character of this Victorian hero may have changed considerably under the influence of his wife. She tended her children with equal devotion, but did not spare the rod. "Just give me one more whipping and then I will say it", her four-year-old first-born repeated to her (p. 118). It is difficult to parallel these intimate details in any other published account of British life in India.

When compared to Miss Eden and Mrs. Parks, Lady Lawrence may appear lacking in humour and sociability. There are indeed a few parties of conversation or correspondence in the letters which she wrote to friends, but they are lacking in mirth. Her powers of observation were formidable, her care and compassion for the Indian poor considerable (though she considered their lot better than that of the Irish peasantry), and her temperament, in spite of occasional illness, grief, depression, or fretfulness, resilient and joyful in a way which made her an admirable companion for her husband in the years spent touring under canvas or in solitary outposts in Nepal and Kashmir. Moral arrogance was combined with a humility in performing practical tasks. She was an exception among British women of her class in presiding over the cookery in her own kitchen. Her "great delight" was "an out-of-doors life" (p. 207).

The denunciation of heathen idolatry which finds a place in her earlier journals mellows to a later deprecation of "superstition", which she recognizes also prevailed in the European

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