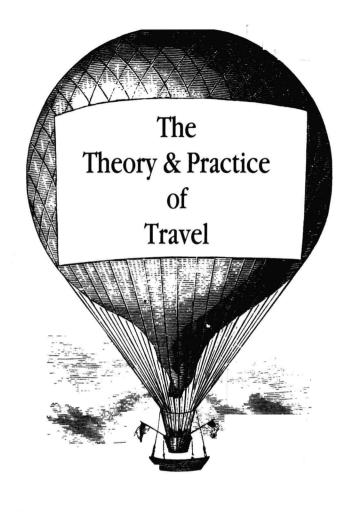
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Illustrated with cartoons by Alex Graham

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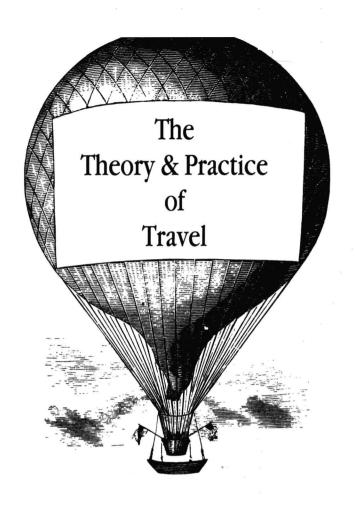
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The Theory & Practice of Travel

By the same author:

THERE IS A HAPPY LAND
BILLY LIAR
JUBB
THE BUCKET SHOP
THE PASSING OF THE THIRD-FLOOR BUCK
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MONDAYS, THURSDAYS
RHUBARB, RHUBARB
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MRS POOTER'S DIARY
THINKS
THE COLLECTED LETTERS OF A NOBODY

THE THEORY & PRACTICE OF LUNCH
WATERHOUSE AT LARGE
OUR SONG





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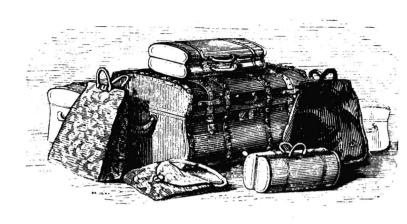
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独新西流

For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



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ARMCHAIR TRAVELLER



25 Excuses for Staying Put

ou could be bumped off the flight –
That's if the airline computer has ever heard of you.

The air traffic controllers at Barcelona could be on

strike.

The luggage tags for Geneva (GVA) and Guatemala (GUA) are dangerously similar – who knows where your bags might end up?

Isn't the House of Commons holding some kind of

enquiry into air safety?

And according to what you've read in the papers, we're about due for another hijack.

Someone might plant drugs on you.

Wasn't there something on the news about freak hurricanes on the way?

The neighbours went there last year and didn't

think much of it.

The world out there is crawling with clever handbag thieves.

The may seem quiet at the moment, but don't you remember when there were students hurling cobbles and the riot police using tear gas?

The courier might not be there to meet you at the

other end -

And even if she is, you'll spend the next two weeks worrying in case she doesn't turn up with the airport minibus when it's time to come home.

You could arrive to find a message that the cat's

gone missing.

Maybe your room will still have the builders in.

When the hotel takes your passport, you may

never get it back again.

Inflamed by the foreign temperature, your partner could fall foolishly and passionately in love with a gigolo/adventuress.

You could be in for a bad case of Gyppy Tummy.

You could get lost and not be able to remember the name of your hotel.

The way their coaches drive, it's surprising even more of them don't plunge over a ravine while negotiating a hairpin bend at speed.



Maybe your room will still have the builders in

A bite from one of the insects they have over there

could turn into something really nasty.

And don't you remember that film So Long at the Fair, where Jean Simmons's brother gets cholera so the concierge and her husband brick up his room and swear blind they've never set eyes on him?

Don't they throw you into the stinking jail first and ask questions afterwards if you get involved in even the slightest car accident in some of these countries?

What if the brigands who ambush you and threaten to cut off your ear won't accept American Express?

Then there's always rabies.

On the other hand . . .

Passport & Credentials

I have been a traveller since the age of three, when I toddled off down the street to find out what lay around the corner. That adventure, while short and ultimately unpleasant (my curiosity was rewarded with a scolding), encapsulates the purpose of travel so far as I am concerned. It is to reach the rainbow's end. Whether it leads me to a crock of gold or a cowpat is not wholly material. The object is to be somewhere else, to see what it's like.

From that early exercise in wanderlust, I have remained a happy victim of the travel bug. As a schoolboy my favourite expedition was through a storm drain at the edge of the park, leading out into a housing development of no interest even to those who lived in it. No matter: I was somewhere else, and that made it an Alice in Wonderland expedition.

As a young estate agent's clerk whose rent-collecting duties each Monday took up rather less of the working day than my employers imagined, I would take myself off on bus rides to the nearby mill towns – Huddersfield, Halifax, Dewsbury, to eat sticky buns in milk bars identical to the one back home in Leeds. But I wasn't back home, that was the point: I was elsewhere, where the air was headier, the soot sootier, and the buns stickier.

And sometimes I would take the tram to the Leeds and Bradford boundary, marked by a hundred yards of cinder track where the Leeds tram system left off and the Bradford system began. Walking across that crunching no-man's-land was for me like crossing through Checkpoint Charlie – and indeed when I did come to cross through Checkpoint Charlie for the first time it reminded me of nothing so much as the Leeds–Bradford tram interchange, where the feeling of entering foreign territory was so overwhelming that I would feel let down not to find frontier posts and passport control.

So it was as an already seasoned traveller that, in those days of conscription, I signed up in the RAF with every hope of getting my knees brown in Malaysia or at the very least my feet cold in West Germany. In the event, the farthest I got was Bridgnorth, Shropshire, and I never saw an aeroplane on the ground in my whole two years before the windsock. Still, I did travel to faraway places: to Lancashire, North Yorkshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire; and each hamlet or market town encountered was ringed on my mental map as another spot been to. I had a yearning to be posted to Middle Wallop just to say I'd been there, but it was not to be.

I did, however, realise another ambition, and that was to see London. I saw London three or four times. as a matter of fact, staying at the Union Jack Club in Waterloo for a few coppers a night. I came to regard myself as something of a cosmopolitan. While I didn't claim to know the capital like the back of my hand, I knew how to get about - you caught the tube. If it wasn't on the tube, you didn't go. But the three parts of London I most wanted to see, because I had read about them in novels, eluded me - Mayfair, Chelsea and Soho. None of them was on the tube map, and Chelsea and Soho didn't even figure on the Monopoly board. Not caring to accost strangers with the question, 'Excuse me, could you direct me to Soho?', I was reduced to aimless wanderings in search of these exotic locations. In a fog thicker than any London pea-souper, I was nevertheless in my element, drinking in the sights and sounds and smells of the capital; but it was not until I settled in it that I learned that Soho was not, as I had imagined, somewhere in the East End. (I think I had it mixed up with Limehouse.)

I had pined for London: now, living there, I pined to be abroad. Luckily my chosen trade of journalism was one with reasonable expectations in this direction. The first place beyond these shores I was despatched to was Dublin. Not *quite* abroad – but I was so eager for Eire to be in foreign parts that when addressing my postcards home I painstakingly copied out the Gaelic form for England, as one puts *Angleterre* when writing from France. But soon I was to get my first real foreign assignment: to the island of Bornholm in the Baltic, reached by ferry from

Copenhagen. I can still conjure up the sweet smell of woodsmoke from the herring-curing plant; I drank it in like a Bisto kid. Yes, this was foreign ground all right. I was so enchanted by the foreignness of it all—the strange coins, the traffic driving on the right, the comic opera policemen, Copenhagen's yellow single-decker trams, and the taste of cold lager and aquavit, that the story I had come for (dissidents escaping from Poland by pedalo) seemed rather dull in comparison, and it was with some reluctance that I abandoned my café table overlooking the square to chase it up.

My first visa was for Spain. I was enormously proud of it and kept ogling it all the way to Madrid. After that, as my passport began to fill up with rubber-stamped oblongs and squares and triangles (what a shame most European countries don't stamp your passport any more), I began to fancy myself a globetrotter. The gaudy stickers on my typewriter case – Cyprus, Jordan, Israel, West Africa, as well as just about every European country – proclaimed to the world that I was a much-travelled foreign correspondent. I was yet to learn that proper travellers don't festoon their luggage with labels announcing where they've been (they have much more subtle ways of doing that – see Vanity Cases).

But once you start to trot the globe you begin to realise what a very large globe your earthshrinker exercises are trying to encompass. The more places I got to, the more places it seemed I hadn't been to.

One of these blanks on my map was the United States, the first foreign land I had ever longed to visit as a globestruck boy. Not, as you might assume, because my imagination was fired by cowboy and gangster films and shots of Harold Lloyd clinging to the flagpoles of skyscrapers. I was seized with a burning desire to cross the Atlantic from the moment when, at the age of ten or eleven, there fell into my hands an American comic book containing a mouthwatering advertisement for a caramelised confection known as Turtles, so called because they were fashioned in the shape and size of terrapins. To one confined to a diet of aniseed balls and sherbet dabs—