

IN LIGHTER VEIN
BY M. S. GILL

EUROPE ON 2 BOTTLES OF "ACHAAR"

If you are up at Cambridge you want to go somewhere for the vacation. The place is closed for six months in the year to allow people to study. Terms are meant for more serious pastimes!

A friend says we have holidays between holidays but I think it is not true. Another possible reason for the vacation is the avarice of the college bursers. They want to make more money.

And so the students are cleared at the end of term — literally pushed into the river Cam — and in come the American tourists or the fellows of the Royal Society of Plumbers and Masons for their annual tamasha.

The ostensible reason is the advancement of science but these chaps really beat it up. They drink by the Imperial gallon. And since the Dons are also invited to share a "wee" drop, every one is happy.

But to come back to the student, where does he go from the river? London is no longer the swinging city — not since the Maharishi took over; the other place (Oxford to the layman) is not worth the bother — at least to a Cambridge man and that just about sums up Mess. England.

Well, off he goes to a farm or factory or the lumber-jacks in Canada to earn a few pounds for the next term's bottle parties. Don't be shocked. These are innocent discussion groups where students get to the bottom of transcendental meditation and such like subjects. The wine is only to loosen the tongue a little. Moderation is the key-note of these occasions!

Foreign students are the ones who go on holidays. They have no option. Pushed out of college, unable to work, too far from home they must perforce have a holiday somewhere. Where? England one has had enough of. Scotland and Wales are no longer safe because of the reported Viet Cong type independence movements. And so one cannot really avoid De Gaulle's kingdom across the sea.

All students are poor — even Americans. Money is a problem. It may be possible to sneak out of town before creditors call bailiffs, but one still needs cash on the Continent. A Cambridge tie is unfortunately no substitute for the Barclays Bank credit card.

The Americans are methodical people. They make a thorough study of all the guides on cheap travel abroad. And since they live more outside than inside America their Research in this field is rather advanced. The

"Europe on five dollars a day." It is the American student's "Bible." It guides him unerringly through Europe.

Of course, there is an occasional hitch. Since the book sells a couple of million copies a year, there is the odd chance that when he has found the quaint little place on the left bank in Paris, with the best fish in town — Picasse's favourite — he may find a thousand countrymen queued up outside. Inside, he will probably run into a contingent of the American Daughters of the Revolution eating hot dogs!

But never mind the Yanks. It is the Indian student I am concerned with. What does he do? 'Europe on five Dollars' is of no use of him. He wants to do it in five annas a day. Not that he is short of money. Oh, no. He has pots of it. It is just that he wants to do his bit for the Fatherland by voluntarily abstaining from spending the vast amounts of foreign exchange sanctioned by our generous Reserve Bank (God bless their souls).

Self-denial is after all part of our rich heritage going back millions of years to the chap who first refused his dinner. Isn't it? Well, it is for such heroes that I put forward a few tentative suggestions.

If you have any idea of going on a holiday in Europe, bring a pair of shoes with an inch-thick sole of corrugated rubber guaranteed to give a mileage of 16,000 without retreading. It is best to do some training in India to build up the calf muscles before coming over. Otherwise your step may not be light and gay in the Paris spring.

When you sit a while in a park — to rest the shoes not the feet — people will crowd around to admire your footwear. Occasionally some old women may click her tongue and say "poor man, he must be tired." You are not tired. Are you? Just to show her up you jump and march away with a steady gait in search of the next monument that must be seen.

In Europe never eat in a restaurant. They are expensive no doubt but this is of no consideration to us Indian students. It is just that these people are out to pollute all good Indians. There is a conspiracy abroad to defile us.

The lamp chops are of course, pork or beef. But even if you ask for an omelette you are not safe. The cooking fat is an impartial mixture of pork and beef grease.

You think of the cartridges of 1891 and wish for a sword to draw.

Since you can't, you eat the omelette! But I have a suggestion. Bring a couple of bottles of achaar. They can even be bought in Cambridge. Bread cheese and achaar have been found by experience to make the best sandwiches in Europe.

Since some people have a tendency to eat more than their share of mango or gobi achaar it is best to carry one bottle of the worst mirch. When all other bottles have been finished by your greedy champions, open the mirch jar. It will still be half full at the end of the tour, and with luck they will all have piles or stomach ulcers.

The sandwiches should always be prepared secretly in the hotel room and smuggled out to be eaten in the park. Landladies in Europe are most unreasonable. They object to their rooms being left with rich aromas of eastern spices. I personally love the smell.