SINGAPORE DREAM

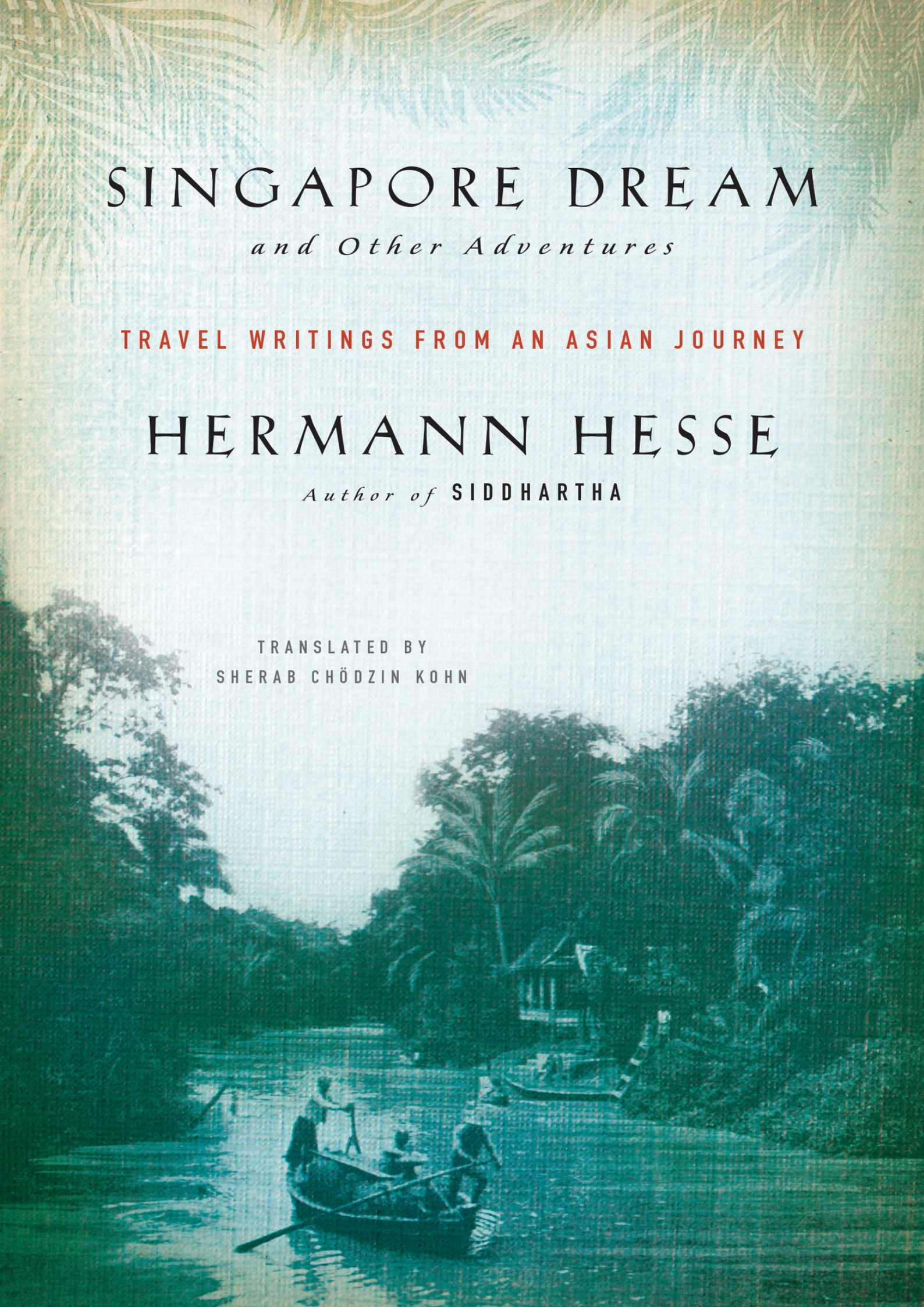
and Other Adventures

TRAVEL WRITINGS FROM AN ASIAN JOURNEY

HERMANN HESSE

Author of **SIDDHARTHA**

TRANSLATED BY
SHERAB CHÖDZIN KOHN



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SHAMBHALA
Boulder
2018

Shambhala Publications, Inc.
4720 Walnut Street
Boulder, Colorado 80301
www.shambhala.com

eBook design adapted from printed book design by Claudine Mansour Design
Cover design by Claudine Mansour Design
Cover art © akg-images/Pictures From History

ISBN: 9781611805895
eISBN 9780834841628
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Control Number: 2017046845

v5.3.1
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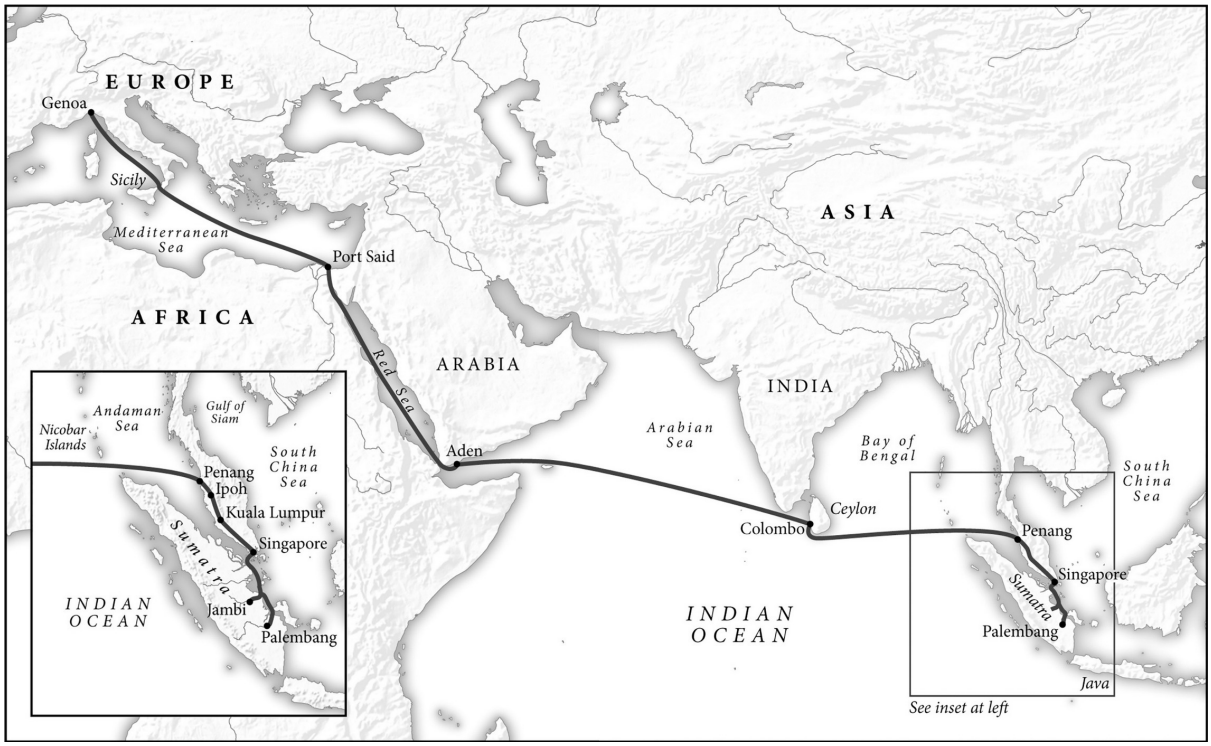

Hermann Hesse's Asian journey, 1911

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Singapore Dream and Other Adventures is like a message in a bottle set afloat in Southeast Asian waters in 1911. The messenger is Hermann Hesse. The message—twenty-one eyewitness reports, some poems, and a story—is his account of his voyage to Ceylon and the East Indies (as they were then called). This was Hesse's actual journey to the East, the experience that became the basis for *Siddhartha* and his other famous novels. By 1911, Asia had been divided among the European colonial powers and was being wrung for its wealth. By bleeding its colonies for trade, the West was stirring to new ways a perennial "Orient" that had remained essentially unchanged for centuries, perhaps millennia. In 1911 the last imperial dynasty of China was on the brink of collapse. An enormous Chinese diaspora was in place in the lands where Hesse traveled, as well as an Indian one of lesser size. These old peoples and the indigenous Malays were being turned into servant populations, in some places marshaled into masses of cheap or forced labor, referred to by their colonial masters as "coolies." Hesse arrived on a late swell of this massive sea change, rolling from West to East. As he traveled, he could see "modern" transformations kicking in as superficial layers of new over the old. He did not find the sight edifying.

Hermann Hesse was born in Germany in 1877. He won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1946, most of his major works having been published long before that. Yet for many English-language readers his name is associated with the countercultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, with hippies, LSD, Kerouac, and so on. In 1969 many a copy of Hesse's ninth novel *Siddhartha* (published 1922) might have been found lying about on couches in Haight-Ashbury or tucked into backpacks at Woodstock.

What did Hesse, a European writer of earlier decades, the scion of two generations of Protestant missionaries on both sides of his family,

have to do with the seekers of the dropout generation? It was Hesse's probing and intense descriptions of the struggle for authentic experience that reached them. Hesse's characters rejected expected solutions for their lives and undertook the search for a new personal truth. Through this, Hesse spoke directly to that at once lost and joyous generation. He mirrored their spiritual hunger and explained their discontent with what they saw as a dead-ended, materialistic world. Above all, he showed them the shape of the spiritual journey by supplying the form of a "journey to the East." Thus he at once confirmed their spiritual quest and gave it a place to go.

As happens with writers who touch a deep chord in human life, Hesse's name and influence have endured. For Hesse's legacy, it was never simply a matter of having caught the wave of a particular generation. His work did not belong to the counterculture revolution to begin with; it was only a passenger on that colorfully painted bus, and its relevance, its ability to touch and edify the reader, did not disappear when the bus drove on. Hesse's brilliance continues to stand out because of his inalienable need to find the real beyond the conventional in experience, the moment out of time. His pilgrim spirit looked to the wisdom of the East and many followed his lead.

In a certain way, the present book, translated here into English for the first time, conveys Hesse's essential qualities better than his novels do.[*] This is because in these accounts, Hesse himself is the main character. As he travels, we see directly through his eyes rather than those of a fictional character. Inevitably in novels, perceptions are molded and forced by plot. The character's thoughts are driven by the author's plan. In *Singapore Dream and Other Adventures,* the writer's pen is free of those constraints. We receive Hesse's immediate impressions, and he does not sugarcoat. The only slight torsion and drive in these narratives come from the pleasure Hesse gets out of telling a story, expressing authentic experience in an apt and catchy way. He does not falsify, because he is inherently unable. In fact, we feel sympathy for the man, for we see that he is helplessly captivated by his experience. His absolute need of authenticity is something for which he often suffered in his life, was often cast into psychological depths. But it was also this inalienable faithfulness of his engagement with things that caused him to keep growing as a man and a writer. And it is that quality, combined with his undeniable gifts as an entertainer, that continues to draw us into his writings today.

In 1911, with a couple of successful novels already under his belt, Hesse was invited by a friend of his, the painter Hans Sturzenegger, to accompany him to Singapore to visit Sturzenegger's brother, who was running the family business there. Hesse said yes. It was to be a tour of the islands of the East Indies on the way to Singapore, and of the west coast of India on the way home. Hesse was all but predestined for this journey. His parents and grandparents, both maternal and paternal, had established missions in India to "convert the heathen." His mother's father knew nine Indian languages. As a boy in his grandparental and parental households in Germany, Hesse found Indian artifacts and sacred texts—as specimens, as pagan memorabilia. In the end it did not matter that his family looked down upon these things from righteous Christian heights. Hesse's childhood world was pervaded by the aura of them. A seed was planted, even though it was not the one his family had intended. They wanted him to carry on the family's missionary tradition, but Hesse dropped out of his theological studies at the age of fourteen. In 1911 he was lured to the East on new grounds of his own.

Hesse and Sturzenegger embarked on their journey in September of that year. They took the train to Genoa where they boarded a ship. They sailed between Sicily and the toe of Italy, east to Port Said, through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea, and into the Indian Ocean. They made landfall in Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) on September 23, in just over two weeks. Hesse's missionary forebears, in the days before the Suez Canal opened in 1869, took over 150 days to reach India, enduring many hardships on the way (as we learn from "Robert Aghion," at the end of this book). The voyage was much easier in 1911, but there were still long days and nights at sea in the torrid heat. Hesse complained that in one ship, his tiny inferno of a cabin lay right over the engine room; the floor scorched his feet and the porthole was the size of a pocket-watch crystal.

They sailed again, after less than a day in Ceylon, and arrived at Penang Island, off the coast of the Malay Peninsula, four days later, where they were met by Sturzenegger's brother and bought their tropical suits. The tour of the Indies continued, and it is mainly of those travels that we have Hesse's marvelous account. But the plan to return by way of the west coast of India, where Hesse's mother's family had had their mission, had to be given up. Ill health (dysentery), the heat, and the toil of travel prevented the last leg of the trip. Hesse never reached India. From Penang, he continued on to Singapore, then

crossed to Sumatra, where he visited Jambi and Palembang, his farthest point of travel. Overall Hesse spent a bit over five weeks in what was then the Dutch East Indies. By November 11, he was back in Ceylon, and spent about three weeks there. On December 12, he landed again in Genoa. The entire trip had lasted about three months. It was shorter than expected, but it had provided Hesse with deep and formative impressions.

Through and amid the thin layers of colonial influence, Hesse saw the perennial East. What is now a lost world for us was still on view. Hesse wrote as he traveled, thinking perhaps to earn a little money from the newspapers back home, but also because writing was his job, his trade. Besides, as he tells us, it was the only thing that would ease the ennui of heat, insects, and endless hours with nothing to do. In Sumatra, he writes of the ancient city of Palembang (now a commercial hub of two million, replete with skyscrapers). It was then a town of Malays and Chinese, built on stilts, a miracle of a place, a place of incomparable beauty from noon to midnight when it was covered with tidal waters and all its vibrant commerce was afloat throughout the town on colorful junks and rafts; and from midnight to noon, it was a stinking, fetid, malarial swamp, covered with fermenting slime. Hesse travails with the heat and insects in the single “European” hotel; he thinks on the ruins of Italy among the overgrown Chinese and Islamic mausolea in the jungle outskirts of the town; Alexander the Great is reputed to be buried here. He is harried and nearly attacked by a tribe of monkeys in the bayous of the nearby rainforest. In Singapore he tells us of falling asleep in a primitive movie house in the Chinese quarter among the Chinese men with their long queues. In his dream, he sees his father and is deeply moved, but the vision shifts to a missionary being attacked by “gigantic coolies,” who “made both his eyes hang out of their sockets like sausages, and when he tried to pull them back in they prevented him from doing so by tying knots in them.” He sees a beautiful American woman, naked but for a great green snake.

And this gives way to an unforgettable vision of Asia:

> Asia was not an area of the world but rather a very specific but mysterious place somewhere between India and China. That is where the various peoples and their teachings and their religions had come from, there lay the roots of all humanity and the source of all life; there stood the images of the gods and the tables of the Law. Oh, how had I been able to forget that, even for a moment!? I had

been on my way to that Asia for such a long time already.

This dream image tells us perhaps all we need to know about Hesse's archetypal vision of Asia and the East. Spiritual penetrations come again, during a nocturnal thunderstorm deep in the Sumatran jungle, as he writes of his discovery of himself as a detached and timeless watcher of things. The outsider quality he feels among the colonizing expatriates is epitomized as he tells us of a dice game played for drinks in a grotesque European social club in a jungle village, where the only salve for Hesse's revulsion and alienation is the sight of a huge gorgeous moth fluttering around a bare light bulb. We are told of rock temples with gigantic recumbent buddhas. Hesse is led in an opiate delirium through the dark chambers and passages of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, where he experiences veneration but decries the degeneration of "pure, beautiful Buddhism" into primitive idolatry. Throughout his journey, he describes the Malays, the Indians, the Chinese, and the Singhalese: their physical beauty, their character and their mores, and their responses to the colonizing Europeans.

At the end of his travel account, in the only piece of fiction here, he tells us the story of a naive young man who, like Hesse himself, is fascinated by butterflies and the wonders of nature, and, as Hesse himself might have been, is sent to India as a missionary to convert the heathen. Never could we hope to find a more vivid depiction of the unprepared Western mind's encounter with the actual, the real culture of India—and in this tale, with a beautiful woman of the "subject" population. Here a love affair with an astonishing twist lays the paradoxes of the colonial period with its "white man's burden" directly upon the reader's soul, as Hesse is so good at doing.

All of this comes to us from a world whose belief in itself, in its civilization, was firmly intact, from the moment just before the First World War cracked and buckled the world's way of seeing itself. Because of Hesse's naturally profound and authentic touch, exposure to this past worldview causes the reader to reflect doubly—not only do we see the outlook of that day versus our own current outlook, but with Hesse, we also reflect on the strange and questionable nature of outlooks altogether. Perhaps that is the real message in the bottle.

—Sherab Chödzin Kohn
Boulder, Colorado

* There is only one piece of fiction in this book, “Robert Aghion,” the longish short story that concludes it. This story, and one or two of the poems, are also, to my knowledge, the only parts of this “message in a bottle” that have reached the English reader before now. A partial translation of “Robert Aghion” was published in 1972 by the late Ralph Manheim, whose wide-ranging translations from Céline to Heidegger are always to be appreciated.

PART ONE

SKETCHES

and

ESSAYS

NIGHT IN THE SUEZ CANAL

For two hours now the ship has been under siege by mosquitoes. It's very hot, and the bright and cheerful mood of the Mediterranean Sea has vanished with astonishing rapidity. Many of the people are simply afraid of the infamous heat of the Red Sea. Most of them are returning home after short vacations and visits or are traveling out here for the first time, but for all of them their homeland now begins to fade from existence—with the heat, the sand, the early sunrises, and the mosquitoes, the East takes hold of them. None of them like it, even though, and maybe because, out here is where some of them earn their money. Only in the second-class restaurant, a few young Germans sit and tipple; most of the passengers are already in their cabins. The Egyptian quarantine official, who has accompanied our ship from Port Said, paces irritably back and forth.

I try to sleep. I lie on the bed in my tiny cabin. Above me the electric fan hums and whirs, the hot dark-blue night looms beyond the little round porthole, the mosquitoes whine. Since Genoa, no night on board has been this still. For hours, the only noise has been the soft rolling of a railroad train from Cairo that appeared atop the long, desolate bank, slid through the ghostly surroundings, and magically disappeared among the reeds in the vast barren landscape.

Before sleep can take me, I am frightened by the engine going suddenly silent. We are dead in the water. I get dressed and go up on deck. All around is an unimaginable silence. From the direction of Sinai shines the waning moon; pale sand dunes show up dead and lusterless in the passing beams of distant searchlights; in the endless black strip of water flash lurid, poisonous reflections; under the heavy, dull moon, a hundred lakes, bogs, pools, and reedy ponds flicker yellow and lifeless out on the sad flatland. Our ship is no longer running; it makes not a peep. It is motionless in the desert, spellstruck but full of reassuring reality.

On the poop deck I run into a small, elegant Chinese man from Shanghai. Upright, he leans on the rail and follows the searchlight with his dark, clever eyes. His pleasant smile is there, as ever. He knows the entire I Ching by heart, he has passed all the Chinese examinations and also some English ones. Now his clear and fluent English floats out over the moonlit water as he compliments me on the beautiful landscapes of Germany and Switzerland. It never occurs to him to laud China, but when he says something in praise of Europe, he says it, however politely, with such superiority that it sounds like a big brother being kind to his little brother and congratulating him on his strong arms. We all know that at this very time in China the great revolution that might cost the emperor his head has newly broken out, and our little fine man from Shanghai surely knows more about it than we do, and it is quite possibly no coincidence that he is presently en route. But he is quiet and untroubled like a mountain summit in the sun, and in his polite, inscrutable, radiant way, turns aside all awkward questions with a winning good cheer that confuses us all and charms me.

On the bank, a light white spot appears. It is a white dog. It runs a little way along the shore and sticks its skinny neck way out to look over at us. But it does not bark. For a little while it looks at us in diffident silence, then sniffs the murky water and trots away without a sound, following the perfectly straight line of the shore.

The Chinese fellow is talking about European languages. He praises the convenience of English, the euphony of French, and apologetically laments that he knows only a little German and has learned no Italian at all. He smiles and cheerily follows the movements of ship lights with his moist, shrewd eyes.

Meanwhile, two big steamers move past us, slowly and with infinite care. Our ship is moored to the shore. The great canal is precious and fragile and is protected like gold.

An English functionary from Ceylon comes over to us. We stand there for a long time looking down into the dead water. The moon is already setting. I have the feeling that it has already been years that I’ve been away from home. Nothing here speaks to me, nothing is near and dear, nothing consoles me but our good ship. Its few boards, metal fittings, and lights are all I have, and it makes me uneasy now that after so many days the familiar heartbeat of the engine is no longer to be heard and felt.

The Chinese talks to the English functionary about rubber prices,

and repeatedly I hear the English word *rubber,* which ten days ago I did not yet know and which now I am completely accustomed to. It is the ruling word in the East. His talk is business-like, pleasant, and polite, and he smiles continuously in the pale electric light, like a buddha.

The moon has completed its arc. It sinks and goes down behind the gray rubbish heaps, and with it, the hundred cool, malevolent flashing lights from the bogs and lakes also disappear. The night looms thick and black, sharply cut by the beams of searchlights, which are just as eerie and soundless and endlessly straight as the dreadful canal itself.

EVENING IN ASIA

Evening arrival on the island of Penang. In the Eastern and Oriental Hotel (the nicest European hotel I encountered in peninsular Indochina[*1]) I am shown to a princely apartment of four rooms. Beyond the veranda, the brownish-green sea slaps against the wall, and in the red sand stand the evening trees, large and venerable. The russet and yellow sails of the many junks, shaped like strong-sinewed dragon wings, glow in the dying light of day, and behind them lies the white sand beach of Penang proper, the blue Siamese mountains, and all the tiny, thickly wooded coral isles of the gorgeous bay.

After weeks of comfortless living in the frighteningly narrow cabin of the ship, first off I spent a good hour enjoying the spaciousness of my rooms. I tried the comfortable curved-back lounge chair in the airy sitting room, where immediately a small Chinese man with a philosopher's eyes and a diplomat's hands soundlessly served me tea and bananas. I bathed in the bathroom and completed my toilet in the dressing room. Then in the handsome dining room, to the sound of quite good chamber music, I partook for the first time, with mild disappointment, of the bad cuisine of English-Indian hotels. In the meantime, a deep black starless night had fallen, the large unknown trees rustled pleasantly in the warmish, heavy wind, and everywhere large unknown beetles, cicadas, and bee flies sang, buzzed, and shrieked loudly with the shrill, headstrong voices of young birds.

Without a hat and in light slippers, I stepped out into the broad street, beckoned a rickshaw man over, climbed with a happy feeling of adventure into his light conveyance, and cold-bloodedly uttered my first Malay words, which the nimble, strong coolie understood as little of as I did of his. He did what every rickshaw man does in this situation —smiled at me warmly with his fine, kindly, childish, bottomless Asiatic smile, turned around, and happily trotted off.

And soon we reached the inner city, where street for street, plaza for

plaza, house for house, everything glowed with an astonishing, inexhaustible, intense, and yet fairly noiseless life. Everywhere were the Chinese, the secret masters of the East; everywhere were Chinese shops, Chinese stalls, Chinese artisans, Chinese hotels and clubs, Chinese teahouses and brothels. And here and there in between was a street full of Malays or Klings[*2]—white turbans on dark-bearded heads; glowing brown, manly shoulders; the still faces of women abundantly adorned with gold jewelry fleetingly caught in the torchlight, laughing or howling dark brown children with fat bellies and wonderfully beautiful eyes.

I visited a Chinese theater. There the men sat quietly smoking, the women quietly sipping tea. On her high gallery, on perilously shaky boards, the tea lady moved athletically back and forth with her huge copper kettle. On the spacious stage sat a group of musicians who accompanied the drama, artfully marking its cadences. With every emphatic stride of the hero sounded an emphatic beat of the soft-toned wooden drum. In olden costumes, an old play was being presented, of which I understood but little and saw no more than a tenth of, since the play is long and continues on for days and nights. In it, everything was measured, studied, ordered in accordance with ancient, sacred laws, and carried out with rhythmic, stylized ceremony. Every gesture was exact and performed with calm devotion, each studied movement was prescribed and full of meaning and accompanied by expressive music. In Europe there is not one opera house in which the music and the movements of the figures on stage go together so faultlessly, so precisely, and with such marvelous harmony as here on this wooden stage. A beautiful, simple melody returned frequently, a short, monotonous tune in a minor key, which in spite of all my efforts I was unable to imprint on my mind, though later I heard it a thousand times again. It was not, as I thought, always the same sequence of notes, but rather it was the Chinese fundamental melody, whose innumerable variations we are to some extent incapable of perceiving, since the Chinese scale has much more finely differentiated tones than ours does. What disturbs us in this music is the all too abundant use of bass drum and gong. However, aside from that, the music is so fine and—in the evening, heard from the veranda of a house where a celebration is going on—sounds so full of *joie de vivre,* and is often so passionate, so voluptuous, as only the best of our music at home can be. There was nothing European and foreign in the whole theater, apart from the primitive electric lighting. An ancient, thoroughly stylized art was

continuing here along its ancient sacred way.

Unfortunately, after that I let myself be persuaded to visit a Malay theater. On show here were lurid, mad, grotesquely ugly sets, painted by the Chinese Shek Mai, who had successfully tuned into the ape instincts of the Malays. It was a parody of all the worst of European art. It lent the whole theater such an air of ludicrous drollery and hopelessness that after a short period of forcing oneself to laugh, it became intolerable. In shoddy costumes, Malay mimes acted, sang, and danced the story of Ali Baba in a kind of variety-show style. Here as later on, everywhere I saw the poor Malays—lovable, feeble children—hopelessly hung up on the basest European influences. They acted and sang with superficial skill, with Neapolitan-style heavy-handedness, sometimes improvising; and with it all a modern mechanical harmonium was playing.

As I left the inner city, the buzz and glow of activity continued in the streets behind me as they would for much of the night. And in the hotel, for his solitary nocturnal pleasure, an Englishman was playing a quartet of Bavarian yodelers on his gramophone.

[*1] Malaysia.—Trans.

[*2] A Dravidian, probably of Tamil origin, of the seaports of Southeast Asia and Malaysia.—Trans.

GOING FOR A RIDE

There's nothing more lovely than going for a ride in Singapore when the weather is good. You call for a rickshaw, you take your seat inside, and from that point on, besides the usual view, you have the calming sight of the coolie who's pulling you, his back bouncing up and down to the cadence of his swaying trot. It is a very nice, naked, golden brown Chinese back, and below it is a pair of naked, strong, athletically developed legs of the same color, with between them, wash-faded bathing shorts of blue linen, the color of which goes exquisitely well with the yellow body and the brown street and with the whole city and with the air and with the world. For the street sights being aesthetically pleasing and harmonious to look upon, we must be thankful to the Chinese, who understand how to dress and how to carry themselves, and whose thousand-headed throng—in blue, white, and black—fills the streets. Among them, walking proudly and with heroic bearing, are tall Tamils and other Indians, with scrawny, dark brown limbs, every one of whom, at first glance, looks like a dethroned raja. But on the whole they are no better than the Malays, who with the kind of gullibility characteristic of black Africans, fall for every imported article on offer and dress like housemaids on a Sunday. You also see dark, noble-looking people walking along in exactly the same screamingly lurid, mercilessly colorful outfits, a bit like what fanciful shop assistants might wear to one of our costume balls at home—veritable caricatures of traditional costumes! The clever merchants from our Western countries have rendered silk and linen expendable; they have dyed wool and printed cotton in much louder colors than ever seen before in Asia, in a way that is more Indian, more joyous, wilder, and more toxic; the good Indians, along with the Malays, have become grateful customers and wrap their bronze hips in this cheap, garish cloth from Europe. The figures of ten such Indians are enough to create a chromatic disturbance in a busy street and give it an inauthentic "Oriental" look. But they do not dominate here, no matter

how regally they may strut or how much parrot-like color they may emit, for they are surrounded and smothered and quietly covered up by the discreet yellow folk from China, who teem densely and industriously in a hundred streets; by the uniform, ant-like Chinese, none of whom is inclined to indulge in loud colors or dress himself up in the guise of a king or clown; rather an endless swarm of them in blue, black, and white fills and dominates the entire city of Singapore.

We must also be grateful to the Chinese for the long, calm, prosperous, regular streets, where one house after another stands blue and humble in its quiet blue row, and each one supports and yet yields to its neighbors, at least in as refined and discreet a manner as in Paris. But the English must be thanked for the broad, beautiful, clean, and commodious roads, the gracious garden suburbs, and the magnificent trees they planted, which are perhaps the most beautiful in all Singapore.

Right along the sea, in the midst of showy, pretentious buildings, broad and beautiful athletic fields, very empty and pale and improbably large in the merciless midday sun, lies the mighty Esplanade, a princely broad avenue whose old magnificent trees make of it an always cool, always shady, giant's hall of foliage and branches. It is lovely to ride through here in the early morning, when the fierce sun burns down at an angle over the shining sea and the numberless ships and sails and rocking boats, and beyond the sea and the ships and the islands, along the whole horizon, white morning clouds soar in fantastic forms of towers and giant trees. And it is lovely at noon, when all around everything seethes and broods in the heat. At that time leaving behind that blinding blaze and entering the dark coolness of the trees is no different from stepping from a midday summer marketplace into a holy, cool cathedral with its dark vaults. But in the evening, the angular light is full of gold and warmth, a fragrant wind blows off the sea, relieved and recovering human beings move about with pleasure in white clothes, play ball on green, flat fields, whose lawns glow in the evening light with a jewel-like green. And at night, you ride along the Esplanade as though in a magic cavern; in the small gaps in the foliage, the stars twinkle with a greenish light, and swarms of fireflies glow with the same cool fire; and on the sea floats the ships' mysterious city of lights with its thousand red eyes.

The garden streets of the outer city are endless. There you continuously ride along smooth, fine, highly maintained roads, and

everywhere other silent roads branch off and lead through green realms of trees and gardens to quiet, airy country houses, every one of which arouses homesickness and seems to harbor happiness, and over you and around you the wonderful forest landscape breathes calmness and life. It goes on for hours, a park without end with trees that remind you of oaks, beeches, birch, and ash, but which all look a little alien and fairy tale–like, and are bigger, taller, and more luxuriant than our trees.

Suddenly you are again among houses, you pass by workshops, shops, through the earnest hive-like life of the Chinese. Gilded porcelain and bright yellow brassware glow in the shop windows, fat Indian merchants sit on low shop tables between heaps of silk cloth or stand leaning near display cases full of diamonds and green jet. The frenetic street life pleasantly recalls that of Italian towns, but completely lacks the mad screaming and yelling with which, there, every lad selling matches hawks his trifling wares.

You come back again to low houses among trees, semicountry suburban air, and suddenly you are moving beneath coconut palms. Low huts, roofed with palm leaves, goats, naked children—a Malayan village stretches as far as the eye can see, with thousands upon thousands of palm trees, severe and bare, with pale green daylight flickering through them from above.

And hardly has your eye become accustomed to that and hardly has your consciousness pleasurably registered the contrast between the linearly stylized world of the palms and the leafier, softer, less orderly park landscape, when everything totters and falls apart: your frightened regard pitches into an uncanny vastness, and you have come to the sea. An entirely new, stiller, and vaster sea lies before you, with flat palmy beaches and few boats, and within its arc the blue hilly silhouettes of many islands. Above this, dwarfing it all, towers the huge form of a Chinese sail, which with its hundred finely set ribs, pokes into the sky like the wing of a dragon.

VISUAL PLEASURES

If from the fumes of the bottle my boy is just opening were to arise a towering genie and offer to fulfill three wishes of mine, without having to think it over, I would say: Let me be healthy, enjoy the company of a beautiful young lover, and have ten thousand dollars at my disposal.

Immediately I would order a rickshaw with an extra rickshaw coolie to carry my packages, and drive into the city with the first few thousand dollars loose in my pocket. I would pay no attention to the begging children, who would crowd around me and, to the horror of my beautiful companion, cry out, "O father, my father!" On the other hand, I would give a dollar to the little eleven-year-old Chinese girl who carries out her on-the-fly peddling in front of the hotel every day. She is, as I said, eleven years old, and by her size and looks you would think she was even younger and more of a child. Even so, she has already been doing her street peddling for six years. She told me that herself, but I would not state this as a fact if an old Singaporean fellow had not confirmed it. The little slip of a girl has the sweet childish face that pretty Chinese women often hold on to into their later years, but she has clever, cool eyes and is perhaps the most optimistic and smartest Chinese child in all of Singapore. She must be that, because for years five people have been living from her work, and her mother goes as often as she can on Sundays to Johor for her amusement. The little one wears a marvelous queue, black, wide pants, and a faded blue blouse, and the most seasoned world traveler could never succeed, through any amount of dickering and joking, in puncturing her composure for even an instant. Unfortunately she still has very little capital and still no market overview, but that will come, and perhaps too it is purely on account of her cleverness that it is precisely in children's toys that she deals and will deal for as long as her look of a frail little child and her smooth child's face suggestively support this trade. Later she will deal in articles that well-to-do young gentlemen need and then she will marry and begin trading in porcelain, bronzes,

and antiquities. And finally she will end up only speculating and lending money, and she will spend half her fortune building an insanely luxurious villa, where in many too many rooms many too many lamps burn, and where the immense house altar will glitter with gold.

So she will have her dollar, and after she has pocketed it without surprise and without much thanks, we will be off in the direction of the high street. First I would call a halt in a side street at the shop of the best rattan weaver and order one lounge chair each for me and my lover, the best work made from the most flawless and most flexible material, each chair comfortably fitted to our respective body sizes, complete with a little tea set, a small bookcase, a cigarette holder, and for fun, a beautiful, finely woven birdcage.

In the high street we would first stop by an Indian jeweler's. These people have too strong a connection with Europe and rarely are still capable of fashioning their articles as naively and finely as formerly. They work following English and French designs and order their materials from Idar and Pforzheim,* but their stones are mostly beauties, and with painstaking patience I would be sure to find at least a fine gold armband set with rubies and a thin, delicate necklace made with pale bluish moonstones. We have plenty of time for sure, and whatever else might be said about the merchants of Asia, their time and patience and courtesy are measureless, and you can comfortably browse around in a shop for two hours, asking about all the wares and their prices, without having to buy a thing.

Laughing, we would then go into a Chinese store, which in front has tin chests and toothbrushes; in the next room, playthings and paper wares; in the next, bronzes and ivory carvings; and in the back room, old deities and vases. Here the style of the European operetta penetrates as far as the middle of the shop; farther back there are imitations and fakes, but the forms are authentic, and they express everything a Chinese is capable of feeling, from steely dignity to the mad pleasures of the wildest grotesqueries. Here we would buy an iron elephant with its trunk raised, two or three porcelain plates with green and blue dragons or peacocks, and an old tea service, sepia and gold, with family or warrior scenes from olden times.

Then we would go into one of the Japanese shops. Here the level of swindling is at its highest, so we would buy neither silver nor porcelain, neither pictures nor wood carvings, but rather a host of little

playful things of no value. Whimsical shelves made from the thinnest wood, small fragrant wooden boxes with lovely inlaid ornamentation that can be opened only by a secret finger lever, and wooden and bone puzzles of refined and innovative design: balls that when picked up fall apart into thirty pieces and that take a week on vacation to put back together again; and small figures of people and animals and that can be had here for fifty cents and whose simplicity and expressiveness all the German artisans put together could not achieve.

And then it would be the turn of the Javanese and Tamil shops. Old batik sarongs with patterns of birds and leaves, scrollwork and triangles; sarongs of rich, heavy gold brocade from southern Sumatra with the saturated glow of sunset; and kerchiefs and scarves of Chinese and Indian silk, lots of golden yellows, reddish browns, and curry greens; and little stiff women's shoes, needlepointed and arched like a Japanese wooden bridge, embroidered with silver and pearls. And for myself, I want a sarong and brown sarong pants, and to go with that, a green velvet cap and a sporty, jacket-length dressing gown of thin yellow silk. Then we'd look at the needlework, of which I know nothing and therefore which I find costs the most; and then the ivory carvings: elephants and temples, buddhas and idols, coat buttons and cane handles; also entire elephant tusks and dice and toys, figurines and boxes.

We must not forget also to ride over to the Chinese quarter and then climb, far beyond it, to the North Bridge Road, where the places of business of junk and antique dealers, shop after shop, are located. There, beside boots and sailor's pocket watches, you find discarded men's clothing and brass tobacco pipes, beautiful old bronze bowls and vases, sometimes also old porcelain, if you have the time and patience. But in any case, hanging and lying about there in glass cases, mysteriously glowing from the corners of the shop, are the most beautiful Chinese jewelry pieces: simple old finger rings of gold or silver with simple and beautifully set stones or pearls; thin gold chains of every sort, all made from bright, joyfully cheerful Chinese gold; and thicker chains with yellow gold fish hanging from them; a grotesque, tail-wagging fish with a thousand delicate scales and protuberant, staring opal eyes; bracelets cut in one piece from gold or milky, bright green jet; brooches made from old Chinese gold coins, everything a bit tarnished and old, and everything of the same wonderfully precise, whimsical, and playful workmanship.

Coins of money are regarded unquestioningly here, as among all naive folk, as valuable adornments. The Germans of the Black Forest used to, and still do today, wear silver taler pieces as jacket buttons; in Siam silver tikals are used for the same purpose. I myself wear tikal buttons on my white jacket. Chinese and Siamese gold coins with their beautiful, decorative script are seen everywhere in the form of brooches or cuff links, and here in a shop I once saw a whole collection of cheap, modern brooches made from the gold coins of various countries. Among them was one with an old German twenty-pfennig piece, one of those thin, tiny silver pieces that have long since been discontinued and have disappeared. (In Swabia in the old days, people would say, for example, at the bakery when they had to pay with a couple of those twenty-pfennig pieces, “But that is really a stupid coin; you keep losing them, because they’re just too small!” To which the baker replied without fail, “Oh, if I just had enough of them, they wouldn’t be too small for me!”)

And after I had bought all that stuff and was broke and my lover had left me, then I would still from time to time go to those shopping streets. I would stand before the displays and peek through the shop windows, smell the fine woods, feel the fine weaves, and practice my skills on the hundreds of puzzles and curious gadgetry, and with all that I would enjoy the visual pleasure that the East has to offer and that only the East has the ability to provide. Everything that can be bought for money here in Asia is a dubious deal, from lodging to food, from servants to currency exchange, but nevertheless all around the richness and art of Asia shines inexhaustible: though it may be beset from all sides, stolen, undercut, violated, maybe already seriously weakened, and maybe already fighting for its life, even so it is still richer and more multifaceted than anything we in the West could even dream of. Everywhere treasures are on display, and all of that belongs to anyone who knows how to take visual pleasure in it, because whether I spend a hundred dollars or ten thousand, what I get for all my money is still only a single handsome item, which I soon enough might find disappointing. And so of that great tableau of heaped treasures, of all the great, colorful gleam and glitter of the Asian bazaar, all I can bring home with me to the West is a glowing reflected image in my memory. So if later at home I were to unpack a chest full of Chinese and Indian things, or ten chests, it would be like I had brought home a bottle or twenty bottles of water from the ocean. Even if I were to bring home a hundred tons of it, it would still not be the

ocean.

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[*] Cities in India and Germany known for jewelry.—Trans.

THE CLOWN

In Singapore, once again I went to a Malay theater. I certainly did not do so with the hope of learning something of the art and folkways of the Malays or of being able to pursue any other kind of valuable study, but just the way, in an easygoing close-of-day mood, of an idle evening in a foreign seaport after dinner and coffee, one gets the urge to go see a show.

The very accomplished actors, one of which had to play a European, put on a modern play, the story of a marriage in Batavia* that the playwright had dramatized on the basis of newspaper and court reports. The sung parts were accompanied by an old piano, three violins, a bass, a horn, and a clarinet, and were movingly funny. Among the players was a marvelous beautiful Malay woman, almost certainly a Javanese, who carried herself with captivating noblesse.

The most noteworthy player, however, was a slender young actress in the bizarre role of a female clown. This very sensitive, superintelligent woman, infinitely superior to all the others, was clothed in a black sack, wore a pale-blond wig of coarse hemp over her black hair, and had her face smeared with chalk with a big black splotch on her right cheek. In this fantastically ugly beggar's getup, this high-strung, supple person moved about playing a minor part that had only a very cursory relationship to the play but kept her always onstage, for her role was that of a vulgar clown. She grinned and ate bananas in an ape-like manner, she got in the way of the other players and the orchestra, interrupted the action with pranks, or accompanied it with mute parodying mimes. Then she sat on the floor for ten minutes in apathetic indifference, with her arms crossed and gazing with an indifferent, morbid, cold, superior stare into space, or peering at us onlookers in the front row with an air of cool criticism. In her aloof apartness, she no longer looked grotesque but tragic instead, with her narrow, glowing red mouth indifferently unmoving, tired of all the

laughing, the cool eyes gazing sadly out of the weirdly painted face, alone and hopeless. One might have chosen to speak to her either as to a Shakespearean fool or as to Hamlet. Until the gesture of one of the actors aroused her—then she stood up, full of life, and parodied this gesture exerting the least possible effort but with such devastatingly hopeless, abject exaggeration that the actor had to have been driven to despair.

But this genius of a woman was only a clown. She could not sing Italian arias like her fellow actresses, she wore the black cloth of humiliation, and her name appeared neither on the English nor the Malay playbill.

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[*] Present-day Jakarta.—Trans.

ARCHITECTURE

Large and magnificent buildings are really nowhere to be seen in the Malayan world. Its few princes are rather modest, and the Malays have never felt the need to vent their energy in orgies of building temples or other cultural edifices. The style of Buddhist and Hindu temples has been taken over from mainland India with little variation. The mosques are without originality, ranging from mostly completely styleless, modern principal mosques to small Mohammedan village churches with towers made from four rough-hewn tree trunks. The climate here destroys all work of human hands very quickly. The houses are not made for stability and durability but rather out of a present need for shade, cool, and shelter from rain.

The flat terrain of the Malayan countries is for the most part swampy and rife with the air of fever. One must beware of snakes and predators; that is why today, as for many thousands of years, the most prevalent type of building is constructed on stilts. The floors of the buildings rest on tree trunks driven into the ground or simply on sawed-off living trees. They are as high as two and a half meters off the ground, to which they are connected by one or two light wooden sets of stairs, which in order to give protection from snakes and other animals are made as steep as possible and are sometimes very hard to climb. The floors are not rarely made of boards but, most of the time, simply from a layer of loose poles. In all houses the floors are covered with clean, beautiful bast mats. They are covered by a simple pitched roof, whose front beams often, as in farmhouses of Lower Saxony, protrude crosswise. The frame of the roof is made of bamboo poles and is thickly covered with palm leaves, and thus the roofs are light, cooling, and very watertight. Several times I have lain through the night under such leaf roofs in the virgin forest in raging rainstorms and not gotten wet. Of late, however, a lot of wood-shingle roofs are also to be seen, even in the country.

That is the typical residential house of Indochina. In many places, though, there are houses with the roofs elegantly curved in the Chinese manner and ornamented with horn. A striking unique property of Malay houses is the way they are structured to give individual character to every room by setting each of them at a different level; starting at the entrance and moving back, each room is set two or three handbreadths higher than the one before it.

In the cities, wherever dry and solid ground has been found, the stilted structures fall away. Here the Chinese type of street architecture is dominant, and Malay fisherman's houses and farmhouses are relegated to the suburbs. The Chinese streets, the old as well as the new, are invariably composed of connected rows of small houses of two, or rarely three, stories. The ground floor is the workshop or shop; the upper story, when the shutters are not closed, have open rooms with lightly latticed windows giving on the street, which gives them an excellent airy quality. The buildings are colorfully plastered, mostly in light blue, which in the strong light of the tropics looks cool and dignified. The front rooms on the upper floor rest on pillars, and this results in a colonnade on both sides of every street, which is delightful to look at and filled with sights of everyday domestic life. The rich Chinese, of course, have country houses in fancy residential districts, luxurious and for the most part exhibiting European influence. Around these villas are quiet, formal, sunny gardens where every plant is elevated and isolated in its own vase.

The Europeans have now entirely redesigned all the cities, and that has brought lots of hygiene and convenience but little beauty. Of all the European buildings out here, only the bungalows that have been built in the well-to-do residential suburbs are beautiful. They are fresh, livable, and look charming in their luxuriant park landscape. These bungalows are beautiful because they have perforce been adapted to the needs of the climate and therefore have had to retain the general qualities of the archetypal Malay house. Everything else that the whites have built, and are building here, would have been quite nicely suited to a German railroad station avenue of the eighties.

The English do a great deal for their colonies. The layout of many business streets, harbors, residential areas, and park suburbs is exemplary and often stunningly generous, and this goes as well for the way they have built streets, conveyed water, and provided lighting. But they too were incapable of building beautiful houses, with the

exception of the aforementioned bungalow type. And now phony marble, corrugated metal sheeting, and the influences of the recent design-school renaissance are taking over and have even contaminated the designs of the modern and wealthy among the indigenous builders. Japanese dentists and Chinese usurers build houses for themselves that would fit in perfectly on the most tasteless streets of German midsize towns. Bridges, fountains, and monuments are similar. The worst, however, are the churches. Coming upon a church from an exquisite, still palm forest; from a broad, handsome street in the Malay quarter; or from a deep-blue, discreetly uniform Chinese street, and seeing it in its otherwise vacant square, seeing its out-of-place and wayward English Gothic style proclaiming the inadequacy of the West, certainly figures among the great displeasures of an Asian journey, worse than filth and fever. For in this case one feels deep down that one is co-responsible. And these things are all, like a German post-office building, as solidly built as they are ugly. A Malay house that was finished just yesterday will in three months be as pleasingly weathered and as thoroughly and harmoniously matched with its surroundings as it will be in fifty years. But a Dutch residential palace, an English church, or a French Catholic schoolhouse will not be able to please our eyes until its guilt-laden existence comes to an end and it has returned its constituent parts back to nature.

SINGAPORE DREAM

In the morning I had chased butterflies on the byways, overgrown with grass and overhung with foliage, that run among the European gardens. In the white heat of noon I returned to the city on foot, and I passed the afternoon walking about, visiting shops, and doing my shopping in the beautiful, lively, teeming streets of Singapore. Now I was sitting in the high, pillared salon of the hotel eating supper with my traveling companion. The large wings of the fan were whirring industriously in the heights, the white-linen clad Chinese boys were gliding through the hall with silent composure purveying the bad English-Indian food, and the electric light was glittering on the small ice cubes floating in the whisky glasses. I sat facing my friend, tired and not hungry, sipped my cold drink, peeled golden yellow bananas, and called rather too soon for coffee and cigars.

The others had decided to go see a film, something for which my eyes, strained already from laboring in full sun, were not eager. However, in the end I went along, just to have the evening taken care of. We walked out of the hotel bareheaded and in light evening shoes and strolled through the teeming streets in the cooled-down, blue evening air. In quiet side streets, in the light of storm lanterns, hundreds of Chinese coolies sat at long, rough wooden tables and cheerily and politely ate their mysterious and complex dishes, which cost practically nothing and are full of unknown spices. The intense scent of dried fish and warm coconut oil floated through the night lit by a thousand flickering candles; calls and shouts in dark Eastern languages echoed out of blue arch-covered alleys; pretty made-up Chinese girls sat in front of lightly barred doors, behind which rich, golden house altars dimly glittered.

From the dark wooden gallery in the movie house, we looked over the heads of innumerable Chinese with long queues at the glaring rectangle of light where a Parisian gambler's tale, the theft of the *Mona*

Lisa, and scenes from Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*[*] flitted by like ghosts, all with the same harsh vividness, the ghost-like quality being doubled by the atmosphere of unreality or awkward implausibility that all these Western things take on in a Chinese and Malay environment.

My attention soon went slack, my gaze hung distractedly in the twilight of the high room, and my thoughts fell to pieces and lay lifeless like the limbs of a marionette that was not in use at the moment and had been laid aside. I let my head sink onto my propped-up hands and was immediately at the mercy of all the moods of my thought-weary and image-sated brain.

At first I was surrounded by a soft murmuring twilight that I felt good in and that I felt no need to think about. Then gradually I began to notice that I was lying on the deck of a ship, it was night, and only a few oil lanterns were burning. Aside from me, many other sleepers were lying there, body to body, each stretched out on the deck on his travel blanket or on a bast mat.

A man who was lying next to me seemed not to be asleep. His face was familiar to me, though I didn't know his name. He moved, propping himself on his elbows, took rimless golden spectacles from his eyes, and began to clean them meticulously with a soft little flannel cloth. Then I recognized him—it was my father.

"Where are we going?" I asked sleepily.

He kept cleaning his delicate spectacles without looking up and quietly said, "We're going to Asia."

We spoke Malay mixed with English, and this English reminded me that my childhood was long past, because back then my parents told each other all their secrets in English, and I could understand nothing of them.

"We're going to Asia," my father repeated, and then all of a sudden I again knew everything. Yes, we were going to Asia, and Asia was not an area of the world but rather a very specific but mysterious place somewhere between India and China. That is where the various peoples and their teachings and their religions had come from, there lay the roots of all humanity and the source of all life, there stood the images of the gods and the tables of the law. Oh, how had I been able to forget that, even for a moment! I had been on my way to that Asia for such a long time already, I and many men and women, friends and strangers.

Softly I sang our traveling song to myself: "We're going to Asia!" And

I thought of the golden dragons, the venerable Bodhi Tree, and the sacred snake.

My father looked at me in a kindly way and said, “I am not teaching you, I am just reminding you.” And in saying that, he was no longer my father, his face smiled for just a second with exactly the same expression with which our leader, the guru, smiles in dreams; and in the same moment the smile dissolved, and the face was round and still like a lotus blossom and exactly resembled a golden likeness of the Buddha, the Perfect One; and it smiled again and it was the mellow, sad smile of the Savior.

The person who had been lying next to me and had smiled was no longer there. It was daytime, and all the sleepers had gotten up. Distraught, I also pulled myself to my feet and wandered around on the weird ship among strange people, and I saw islands on the dark blue sea with wild, shining chalk cliffs and islands with tall windblown palms and deep blue volcanic mountains. Cunning, brown-skinned Arabs and Malays were standing with their thin arms crossed on their breasts. They were bowing to the ground and performing the appropriate prayers.

“I saw my father,” I shouted out loud. “My father is on the ship!”

An old English officer in a flowered Japanese morning gown looked at me with shining bright-blue eyes and said, “Your father is here and is there, and is in you and outside you, your father is everywhere.”

I gave him my hand and told him that I was traveling to Asia in order to see the sacred tree and the snake, and in order to return to the source of life from which everything began and which signified the eternal unity of appearances.

But a merchant eagerly took hold of me and claimed my attention. He was an English-speaking Singhalese. He pulled a small cloth bundle out of a little basket, which he untied and out of which small and large moonstones appeared.

“Nice moonstones, sir,” he whispered conspiratorially, and when I tried forcefully to pull myself away from him, someone laid a hand lightly on my arm and said, “Give me a few stones, they’re really beauties.” The voice immediately captured my heart as a mother captures her runaway child. I turned around eagerly and greeted Miss Wells from America. It was inconceivable that I had so completely forgotten her.

“Oh, Miss Wells,” I called out joyfully, “Miss Annie Wells, are you

here too?”

“Won’t you give me a moonstone, German?”

I quickly reached into my pocket and pulled out the long, knit coin purse that I had gotten from my grandfather and that as a boy I had lost on my first trip to Italy. I was glad to have it back again, and I shook a bunch of silver Singhalese rupees out of it. But my traveling companion, the painter, who I hadn’t realized was still there and was standing next to me, said with a smile, “You can wear them as buttons; here they’re not worth a penny.”

Puzzled, I asked him where he had come from and if he had really gotten over his malaria. He shrugged his shoulders and said, “Modern European painters should all be sent to the tropics so they can wean themselves from their orange-ish palettes. Here is just the place where you can get much closer to the darker palette of nature.”

It was obvious, and I emphatically agreed. But the beautiful Miss Wells in the meantime had gotten lost in the crowd. Anxiously, I made my way farther around the huge ship, but did not have the courage to force myself past a group of missionary people who were sitting in a circle that blocked the entire width of the deck. They were singing a pious song and I quickly joined in, since I knew it from home:

Darunter das Herze sich naget und plaget
Und dennoch kein wahres Vergnügen erjaget
(Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving,
No true lasting happiness ever deriving…)

I found myself in agreement with that, and the heavy-hearted, pathetic melody put me in a sad mood. I thought of the beautiful American woman and of our destination, Asia, and found so much cause for uncertainty and care that I asked the missionary how things really stood: Was his faith truly a good one and would it be any good for a man like me?

“Look,” I said, hungry for consolation, “I’m a writer and a butterfly collector—”

“You’re mistaken,” said the missionary.

I repeated my explanation. But whatever I said, he responded with the same answer: “You’re mistaken,” accompanied by a bright, childish, modestly triumphant smile.

Confused, I got away from him. I saw that I was not going to accomplish anything there, and I decided to drop everything and look for my father, who would certainly help me. Again I saw the face of the serious English officer and thought I heard his words: “You father is here and he is there, and he is in you and outside of you.” I understood that this was a warning, and I squatted down and began to chasten myself and to seek my father within me.

I remained still that way and tried to think. But it was hard, the whole world seemed to have been gathered on this ship in order to torment me. Also it was terribly hot, and I would gladly have given my grandfather’s knit purse for a cold whisky and soda.

From the moment I became aware of it, this satanic heat seemed to swell and grow like a horrible, unbearably piercing sound. People lost all trace of composure. They swilled greedily out of straw-covered bottles like wolves, they tried in the most bizarre ways to make themselves comfortable, and all around me the most uncontrolled, meaningless actions were occurring. The whole ship was obviously on the brink of insanity.

The friendly missionary, with whom I had been unable to come to an understanding, had fallen into the hands of two gigantic Chinese coolies who were toying with him in the most shameless ways. Through some hideous trick of authentic Chinese mechanics, they were able, with a nudge, to make him stick his booted foot into his own mouth. With another kind of nudge, they made both his eyes hang out of their sockets like sausages, and when he tried to pull them back in, they prevented him from doing so by tying knots in them.

This was grotesque and ugly but it affected me less than I would have thought, in any case less than gazing at the view afforded me by Miss Wells, for she had taken off all her clothes and wore over her amazingly buxom nakedness not a thing on her body but a marvelous, brown-green snake, which had coiled itself around her.

In despair, I closed my eyes. I had the feeling that our ship was spiraling rapidly down into a glowering, hellish maw.

Then I heard, coming as a comfort to the heart like the sound of a bell, a wanderer lost in the mist intoning with many voices a joyous song, and I immediately began to sing along. It was the sacred song, “We’re going to Asia,” and all human languages could be heard in it, all weary human longing, and the inner need and wild yearning of all creatures. I felt myself loved by my father and mother, led by my guru,

purified by Buddha, and saved by the Savior, and if what came now was death or beatitude, I simply could not care which.

I got up and opened my eyes. They were all there around me—my father, my friend, the Englishman, the guru, and everyone, all the human faces I had ever laid eyes on. They looked straight ahead with an awestruck, beautiful gaze, and I looked too, and before us a grove grew that was thousands of years old, and from the heaven-high twilight of the treetops came the rustling sound of eternity. Deep in the night of the holy shadow shone the golden glow of a primevally ancient temple gate.

Then we all fell on our knees, our longing was stilled, our journey was at an end. We closed our eyes, and my body toiled its way up out of its profound torpor. My forehead lay on the edge of the wooden railing, below me palely glimmered the shaved heads of the Chinese spectators; the stage was dark, and a murmuring echo of applause could be heard in the big projection room.

We got up and left. It was excruciatingly hot and there was a pervasive odor of coconut oil. But outside, the night wind off the sea, the flickering lights of the harbor, and the faint light of the stars came to greet us.

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[*] *Intrigue and Love,* a play by Friedrich Schiller.

THE CROSSING

From Singapore I traveled on a small Dutch coastal steamer, which crossed the equator past southern Sumatra. The trip started with baggage problems on the wharf and then nearly turned into a catastrophe right at the beginning; hardly had the little motorboat that was to take us and our trunks to board the *Brouwer* shoved off from the wharf when a somewhat larger boat, racing along, hit us broadside so hard that we fell all over each other and we thought we were about to have to swim. But against all the laws of probability, it fell out that the aggressor boat was the one that took the damage, and it had to limp away with a big hole in its bow.

On the *Brouwer,* the three of us were the only passengers in first class, so we had the ship to ourselves like a private yacht. The small stern deck was fitted out for us with Dutch coziness and comfort. There was a white-cloth covered table with grandfather armchairs; next to that were four of those Asian reclining chairs, which can never be praised too much, that have wooden stools to put your legs up on; and then there were two naively styled and solid sofas with red-striped slipcovers. The entire service staff was Malay, and immediately we were served our first meal by three attentive, skillful, handsome Javanese. It was a sumptuous rice dish, rich in content, which after the awful, pretentious meals in the Indochinese inns, I received with gratitude. In the hotels of the Straits and the Malay States, one is always served by Chinese boys who serve almost as badly and uncaringly as waiters in a mediocre European hotel. By contrast, the Javanese looked after our welfare with the indulgent dutifulness of good nurses. They circled around us with constant attention and responded to our every need smilingly and without haste. They served us the meal, offering us their best, offering it with modest gestures; they attentively refilled our glasses after every swallow, distributed the remainder of our shared bottle among the three of us with caring justice, sheltered us from the sun and the wind, were instantly ready

with a burning match the moment a cigar was brought out, and their bearing and movements manifested neither reluctant servitude nor craven submissiveness, but rather joyous service and devoted goodwill.

Three Chinese lay midship playing cards without speaking but they laid out their good cards with exactly the same passionately optimistic sense of triumph and discarded their bad ones with exactly the same air of resignation and disgust that one sees in Swabian soldiers, Bavarian hunters, and Prussian sailors. A Malay family from Tonkal lay on their bast travel mat: a grandfather, the two parents, and four children. The children had it good—they looked well cared for and wore necklaces and silver anklets. At sunset, the grandfather found himself some free space, bowed down, knelt, and came back to his feet—performing the rites of evening prayer with slow dignity. His aged back bent and stretched in precise cadence, his red turban and his pointed gray beard stood out sharply in the failing light of dusk. We sat down with the two officers to a real Dutch supper. The stars came out, the sea darkened to deep black, and the jagged silhouettes of the small mountainous islands we passed were just barely to be sensed rather than seen. We had fallen silent and happily would have gone to bed, but it was much too hot. We all sat quietly and soaked in our relentlessly dripping sweat.

We ordered whisky and almost the instant we called for it, one of the young lads who had long been asleep on the deck jumped up and ran to get us the liquor and some soda water.

Through the sweltering night we sailed past a hundred islands, sometimes greeted by lighthouses. We nipped at our lukewarm drinks, smoked Dutch cigars, and breathed slowly and almost reluctantly under the hot black heavens. Now and then we spoke a few words—about the ship, about Sumatra, about crocodiles, about malaria—but saying nothing of importance. Every now and then one of us stood up, went to the railing, flicked his ashes in the water, and tried to see if anything was visible out there in the dark. And then we parted, and each went his own way to lie down on the deck or in a cabin, and the sweat kept pouring down over us, and for this night we were all travel weary and in ill humor.

But in the morning, already beyond the equator, we sailed into the broad, coffee-brown mouth of one of Sumatra's great rivers.

PELAIANG

The European who travels to the Malayan islands for other than business reasons, even if he has no hope of ever attaining it, constantly has as the background of his imaginations and desires the landscape and the primitive paradisiacal innocence of a Van Zanten island.[*1] Pure romantics may occasionally actually find this paradise and for a time, captivated by the good-natured childlike quality of most Malays, may believe themselves to be participating in an exquisite primordial state of being.

I have never experienced the unalloyed pleasure of such a self-deception, but I did indeed run across a kampong,[*2] remote from the world, where for a time I was a guest in the primeval forest. This was a place where I felt good and at home, and which in my memory crystallizes and expresses the whole forest-and-river world of Sumatra. This small kampong with a hundred inhabitants is called Pelaiang and is located two days' travel upriver from Jambi in the interior of the still little-known Jambi district, which was just recently pacified and is composed mainly of virgin primeval forest.

There four of us, plus our Chinese cook, Gomok, lived in a bamboo hut, whose roof and walls were made of woven palm leaves, and which stood on high stilts. There we hung two and a half meters in the air in our yellow, gracefully woven cage and lived as we pleased. The two businessmen appraised the fortune in ironwood that the forest contained, the painter clambered around on the riverbank with his box of watercolors and got upset with the Malay women, of which particularly the most beautiful one would not allow herself to be drawn or even looked at close up. And I let myself be motivated by the time of day and the weather and walked around in the endless forest world as though in a fabulous picture book. Each one of us went his own way and dealt in his own way with the mosquitoes, the mild storms, the primeval forest, the Malays, and with the eternal, oppressive, muggy

heat. In the evening, however, which in the tropics comes all too early, we would always all come together and sit and lie on the veranda near the table and the lamps. Outside the storm rains roared or the insect chorus of the primeval forest that looked in at us through our window holes blared. By then we'd had our fill of the wilderness; we wanted to be comfortable and forget about the burdensome hygiene required by the tropics. We wanted to be happy and know nothing about the world, and so we lay about or sat about and drew upon our four big chests full of bottles of soda water, whisky, red wine, white wine, sherry, and Bremen Schlüssel beer. And then we would go to sleep under mosquito nets on our good mattresses on the floor, each with as a talisman his wool waistband, or we lay still and listened to the rain as it clattered down in pellets or ran with a tender tuneful sound over our leaf roof—until in the early morning the hornbills began their song and the monkeys greeted the day with their mad howling.

Then I would walk past the six or seven huts into the forest, protected from the leeches and snakes by the same loden-cloth gaiters that I wear in the winter in Grisons,[*3] and immediately the tough, thick bush, more alien and isolating than any sea, would swallow me and wall me off from the world. Little, silent, beautiful squirrels skittered away before me, black ones with white bellies and red forelegs; and large birds gazed at me hostilely through staring jungle eyes; and soon monkeys of many different families appeared, racing with wild glee up and down through the tangle of green branches, through which no trace of sky could be seen, or crouching high in the branches and hooting madly in long, extended, painful sequences of notes. Sometimes one of the huge, shimmering butterflies, celestial in its beauty, fluttered down near me and began doing its work among the small plants on the forest floor. Foot-long millipedes raced in blind haste through the undergrowth, and everywhere mighty ants moved in thick, dark convoys—gray, brown, red, black—each ant headed toward its convoy's common goal. Thick, rotting tree trunks lay about, overgrown by myriad forms of ferns and thin, tough brambles. Here nature seethes unceasingly in all its terrifying fertility, in a raging, extravagant fever of life that numbs and almost horrifies me, and with a northerner's sensibilities I turn gratefully to every appearance that, in the midst of this suffocating riot of creation, singles itself out clearly as an individual form. Here and there one finds amid the dense confusion, rising above it victoriously, a single gigantic tree of incredible strength and tallness, in whose crown a thousand beasts

could live and nest, and from whose princely heights, still and nobly straight, hang lianas, thick as trees.

Starting just recently, humans have also been working in this forest. The Dutch Jambi Company has won the first major timber concession in this still completely untouched and unworked region and is beginning to log it for ironwood. I had myself taken one day to a place where, recently, large trunks had been cut down and trimmed, and I watched the arduous toil for a while. Trunks twenty meters in length, heavy as iron, were being dragged up on ropes and chains by singing and panting hordes of coolies with winches and levers out of deep, primeval, dark, swampy forest ravines, then hauled, held, supported, and again dragged a little farther on wooden rollers and primitive sledges, over swamps and through brambles, through thickets, and thick, wet weeds, meter by meter, every hour a little bit farther. A small branch of this wood that I experimentally tried to pick up proved to be so heavy that with both arms and all my strength I could not lift it. Because of its weight, this wood is infinitely difficult to transport. In this country there are still no railroads. The only road is the river, and ironwood does not float.

It was great and remarkable to see all this, but it is no pleasure to watch the labor of men when it is still a burden, a curse, abject servitude. These poor Malays will never run such projects as bosses and entrepreneurs as Europeans, Chinese, and Japanese may do, but will always be only woodchoppers, porters, and sawyers, and what they earn from that will all go back to the foreign entrepreneurs for beer and tobacco, watch chains, and Sunday hats.

Untouched by its miniscule enemies, who are there to suck on its riches, the primeval forest stands ever there. On the riverbank, the crocodiles are sunning themselves; inexhaustible in the wet heat the vegetation continues to thrive; and in places where the natives have cleared a small area to plant rice, in two years high-grown bush will be back again, and in six years there will again be tall forest.

Before we sailed away, we submerged our empty flasks in the brown river. Our mattresses were rolled in bast matting and taken onto the boat. Then from the deck we watched our yellow bamboo hut standing on the dark edge of the eternal forest become smaller, until at the first curve of the river, it passed entirely from sight.

[*1] An obscure reference to a book about life on a tropical isle. See Laurids Bruun, *Van Zanten's*

Happy Days (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922).—Trans.

[*2] Village.—Trans.

[*3] Swiss canton.—Trans.

SOCIETY

You could call it a big kampong or small new town on one of the beautiful broad rivers of southern Sumatra. Three or four years ago, there was still war here, but now only about a hundred Dutch soldiers are left in town. Now and again they carry out an ornamental exercise in order to show any possibly rebellious locals that they are here and are paying attention. From what one sees of the indigenes, they are a mixture of original Malays and Javanese, shaded and modified by a score of less harmonious influences and hybridizations. One sees Javanese day workers mowing grass with swords, a handful every quarter of an hour, and carrying a water jar across the street is a morning's work for a man. Most of the work is done by women, and next come the Chinese, who here as elsewhere find their way immediately to the smallest budding settlements and take on whatever has to be done in the way of pioneer work. They keep shops, they do shipping, they buy rubber, and sell rice, fish, and German beer. The few Europeans here also work. There is an ironwood enterprise run by a Swiss who is very savvy about the local conditions here. The other whites without exception are Dutch functionaries.

I went to see the governor and the inspector general and had bestowed upon me with great ceremony a large document that hitherto I had no idea I needed, which was a residence permit for Dutch East India.

Before arriving in this town, I had been rambling around in the bush, doing battle with the mosquitoes, thorns, and swamp grass. But as soon as I got here, I was invited to take part in "society." Thus in the evening I went to the "club" at the invitation of the inspector general, who was a refined and tenderly sensitive man, of which since Multatuli[*] there have been many here.

The market street, which was the main street of the town, was already dark. The Malays were leaning against the fence, holding their

children in their arms. The Chinese were tinkering about noiselessly in the lit-up backs of their shops. About halfway down the street was a lighted wooden house that was the club; and when I went in I found two-thirds of the local Europeans assembled there. Four of them were at the billiards table, three older men and a woman sat on rocking chairs in front of the windows that gave on the river, turning their back to society and calmly breathing and enjoying in silence the somewhat cooled-down air of the evening hours. The rest of the company were sitting in the middle of the room around a big table and playing cards. I sat down with them and was warmly greeted. After the people learned with disappointment that I did not play cards, I was invited to join in a game of dice. They were playing for a round of drinks, and everyone ordered theirs—whisky, bitters and Bols, gin and sherry, vermouth and anise—in the most adventurous combinations. The dice game was as complicated and demanding of wit as any you might find being played on ships and in lighthouses where people have plenty of time.

So we sat there, ten men and two women, in the harsh light of two light bulbs from seven till nine thirty and vigorously shot dice, always playing for a round of drinks. At one point I looked up and around in the room and saw a huge moth fluttering around the bulbs, bigger than the palm of my hand, with yellow and green patterns on a black background. I resolved to catch it later and take it home so I would end up getting something out of this evening after all, and so I was consoled and cheered up every now and then by catching a glimpse, from the midst of this circle of smokers and dice players, of this magnificent moth, which was as ill-suited to this society of smokers and drinkers as the Dutch are to the primeval forest.

The last round was lost by a poor lieutenant, whose salary could not have been more than two hundred guilders a month at the most. He was loudly laughed at, a continuation of the loud laughing and merrymaking that had never ceased over these last long hours. I got to my feet to take my leave. We all shook hands with each other, and they all expressed their great regret that I was leaving now just as the fun was getting under way.

The giant moth had flown into the bulb a number of times and had burnt itself. I looked for it for a while and found it, apparently not very damaged, dead on the floor. As I picked it up, I saw that its body was already half gone and swarming with those tiny gray dwarf ants that

one finds out here in the sugar, in one's shoes and socks, in one's cigar case, and in one's bed, and over whose savage greed for booty one learns to patiently shrug one's shoulders, as one does over the cruelty of the Chinese, the deceit of the Japanese, the stealing of the Malays, and the other greater and lesser evils of the East.

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[*] Eduard Douwes Dekker (March 2, 1820–February 19, 1887), better known by his pen name Multatuli (from Latin *multa tuli,* "I have carried much"), was a Dutch writer famous for his satirical novel *Max Havelaar* (1860), which denounced the abuses of colonialism in the Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia).—Trans.

NIGHT ON DECK

The second evening of a trip on a small Chinese paddle steamer up the Batang Hari River. A handsome young Javanese, a master tailor, who for a half day had been clattering away at his Singer sewing machine, was my neighbor on deck. He packed up his machine and unpacked his mattress, slowly and thoroughly performed all the rites of his Mohammedan evening prayer, and lay down. He took a devotional book printed in Arabic out of his waistband, read in it, chanted a few pages out of it to himself in a low voice, and went to sleep. Even as he was dozing off, he carefully returned the little book to his belt for safekeeping. Behind him, under the smoking lantern, three Chinese were playing cards, and near them a Malay woman lay on her bast mat with her four sleeping children. One of the children lay in faint red light, a very beautiful young girl with long hair, nine or ten years old. As yet she wore no earrings, but she had thick silver bangles on her lovely ankles and wrists, and on the second toe of each foot she wore a gold ring. As for the rest, everyone was sleeping or half asleep, nestled against the deck in the soft, cozy, animal-like, elastic manner of the nature folk; one was also sleeping in sitting or squatting position (on the soles of both feet); and among them a group of men was chatting softly. Back behind the stern, the great wheel murmured like a mill wheel, and out there was thick, black darkness, through which, from time to time, a short-lived rain of sparks flew out of the oven of the wood-burning engine, which made the darkness seem even darker.

I stayed awake for another hour, trying to read my notes by the faint light and to keep myself isolated mentally from the stink that surrounded me. The coconut and citronella oil with which the natives cook and which unfortunately they also rub into their bodies, has a disgusting, murky, viscous odor, and during my entire sojourn in the East, this odor represented the only point at which my humanity turned away in earnest aversion from the humanity of the natives.

I laid out my mattress on the deck, brushed my teeth with soda water, pulled out my pocket watch, took my daily dose of quinine, and hid my key and purse under my pillow. Then I put two chairs on either side of the head end of my mattress so as not to get my nose walked on during the night, unhurriedly undressed, slipped into my nightshirt, and lay down. Now the Chinese also gave over playing cards and hung a linen jacket over the lantern, and we all took our rest to the monotonous sound of the ship's engine, in a darkness that was nearly as thick and impenetrable and heavy as the thick, horrid smell of coconut oil. From time to time, sailors passed noisily among us; sometimes, in the middle of the pitch-black wilderness they blew hefty blasts on the harsh-sounding steam whistle. Since after two hours I had not yet found sleep, I got up and made my way to the forward deck where in total darkness the steersman stood and with mysterious certainty steered us farther into the night, which was equally black and impenetrable in every direction. He must have had the night vision of a tiger, and it was fairly eerie watching him turn the wheel, knowing that we were moving through the narrow navigable channel of a river running with a hundred fickle curves through the primeval forest, and where I, making every possible effort, could see not a glimmer or a shadow from the shore. The captain was squatting nearby, asleep.

I lay down again. It was very hot, and on my side of the ship there was no movement in the air. Time and again, I threw off the travel blanket with which I had been protecting my bare feet, and time and again the bites of the mosquitoes forced me to cover them up again. Then finally, around midnight, I did fall asleep, and I had the feeling I had been asleep for a long time when the repeated howling of the ship's whistle woke me up. But it was only one thirty. Here and there frightened sleepers were staggering to their feet, but most of them immediately sank back down and remained quiet; others got up and took the cloth off the lantern, the light of which revealed heaps of sleepers all around. The whistle shrieked again, the engine stopped, the ship turned. Going to the railing, I suddenly saw land, a raft, and reed hut right next to us. With a slight bump we docked. We were out of fuel and had to take on wood.

In the dim light, down the "royal stairway" from the high bank climbed two dark men with smoking torches. Their torches were made from twisted dry leaves soaked in tree resin. On the raft were heaped big piles of cut wood, and now began the loading of the wood, which I watched and especially listened to for two hours. By the light of the

torches the sailors and the wood coolies stood in two lines, and one piece of wood after the other went from hand to hand, in total several thousand, and piece by piece were counted in a loud chant by the supplier. With his soft, slow, beautiful Malay voice, he chanted in free, wonderfully solemn melodies with ceaseless variations, keeping up the count of the pieces of wood amid the darkness of the night and the flowing of the river: *ampat—lima! lima—anam! anam—tujoh!* Thus he worked and chanted in an even cadence and with the same tone for two hours, and with each new hundred he gave a melodic shout of joy. Then he chanted further, sometimes sleepy and lamenting, sometimes hopeful and consoling, always the same basic melody with small, capricious inflections and variations to suit the mood. This is the way that the workers and countryfolk here all sing when they are underway in a small dugout and night falls; then they become fearful and infinitely in need of comforting, then they fear the crocodile and the ghosts of the dead who are abroad over the river at night; and then you hear them sing with devotion and ardor, with pain and hope, unconsciously, the way the bamboo sings in the night wind.

I lay quiet and dozed as the engine began to turn over again. Now it was raining and occasionally a dozen lukewarm drops sprayed in over me. I wanted to pull my blanket back up over my knees but I was just too tired, and now I fell asleep.

When I next opened my eyes, it was to a bleak, cool, misty morning. My nightshirt was soaked through, and I was freezing. Sleepily I reached for the damp travel blanket and pulled it over me. As in doing that I turned my head, I saw someone was standing over me. I looked up to see standing there with her small, brown, ring-adorned feet next to my head, the lovely long-haired Malay child. She held her hands behind her back and observed me attentively with her beautiful, calm eyes and matter-of-fact interest, as though in my sleep she might somehow be able to figure out what kind of an animal the white man really is. At that moment I had exactly the same feeling as when during a mountain journey, one wakes up in the hay and sees the curious eyes of a goat or a calf upon one. The girl gazed at me for a while directly in the eyes; when I got up, she walked off back to her mother.

There was already life on deck; only a few people were still sleeping, one of whom had curled himself up into a ball like a dog in a cold night. The others were rolling up their bast mats, pulling their sarongs up around their waists, tying on their headcloths or turbans, and

gazing, clueless and sober, into the wet morning.

NIGHT IN THE FOREST

Just before sunset, we had come back from an excursion in a small boat, tired from the wet heat and the hours of splattering about on the broad brown river with the eternal forest on both sides. We had encountered the small Chinese steamer that sails up the Batang Hari every week and that was on its way home back to Jambi. We had shot a few pigeons and hornbills, photographed a bamboo hut that stood alone in a clearing as a vestige of the previous year's rice planting, in which an old Malay with his wife lived unconcerned by the siege of the returning jungle. We had caught a couple of large green butterflies and in the end had to hurry up in order to get back by nightfall.

As we docked and clambered stiff from long, cramped sitting over the little landing raft in front of our hut, the hazy sun was setting over the forest, the river reflected it murkily back, and the shore was already dark, giving the impression that the forest was crashing in on both sides with the desire to overwhelm that narrow lane of light.

Before the arrival of night and the crocodiles, there was still time to pour a few buckets of river water over our heads, put on a fresh shirt, and have a seat on our large veranda, where the fat, benevolent Chinese already had our evening meal ready. I looked up. It had already grown dark, and our hut, with its faintly lit veranda, stood beautiful and broad between the primeval forest and the steep riverbank, with its soft palm-leaf roof barely outlined against the dark sky. Only in the tropics can one know what night is—how beautiful and alien and menacing it is with its deep, saturated darkness, its heavy black curtain, all the more unfathomable and sinister because the tropical midday is so much more bright and flamboyant than our northern one.

We sat around the large, unbudgeable oaken table, ate little fish in oil and zwieback, and drank, choosing from among the good, hefty, undiscovered drinks of Dutch Indochina. We had little to say to each

other. The three of us had been together for days and days, and we were tired, and despite our baths, already hot and sweaty. Out in the darkness around us the hundred thousand large-winged insects gave voice, their sounds glassy and shrill, or deep and darkly humming, louder than a string orchestra. We helped the Chinese clear the table, leaving only the bottles. The weak lamps cast a dull light on the woven wall and out into the open night. The rifles leaned against the entrance, with the butterfly nets next to them. One of us lay down in the reclining chair under the hanging lamp and tried to read a book from Tauschnitz;* another began to polish the rifles, and I folded little cones out of newspaper to hold the butterflies.

Fairly early, it was only ten o'clock, we said goodnight to each other and went inside. I threw off my clothes and in the dark quickly slipped under the high mosquito net, stretched out on my good, soft mattress, and sank into the blurry, weary state of half sleep that is the way I have been spending my nights for a long time now. It was not necessary to shut my eyes—only with great effort and willpower was I able to make out the rectangle of the open window hole. Outside, it was hardly a shade lighter than it was between the bamboo walls and bast mats, but one could feel wild nature fermenting and cooking out there in its relentless prurient ardor of creation. One heard a hundred animals and breathed the herbaceous odor of opulent growth. Here life is worth little; nature does not coddle and has no need to save. But we whites are safely beyond the reach of all that—we have our bamboo hut and pretty much our own little kampong with nearly a hundred Malays, who are obliged to help us bleed the eternal primeval forest—and here for the last short while, for the first time since world began, through the thick growth the sound is heard of axe blows and the hustle and bustle of work. Three years ago here, in savage, vile campaigns, the aborigines were shot down—the shy, dark Kubu could not hold out as long as the sly, cruel Achi of the north. The souls of the murdered peoples hover at night over the river, but they are only feared by their brothers, and we whites stride in calm and lordly fashion through the wilderness and give out cold orders in our broken Malay and watch the dark primevally ancient ironwood trees fall without emotion. We need them to build our shipyards.

Amid dull half-thoughts, I dozed off and hung suspended between dream and reality for weary, muggy hours. I was a child and I was crying, and a mother rocked me and hummed, but she was singing in Malay, and when I opened my leaden eyes and tried to see her, the face

turned out to be the millennially ancient countenance of the primeval forest that hung over me and whispered to me. Yes, here I was in the heart of nature; here the world was no whit different than it had been a hundred thousand years ago. We have been able to nail wire lines onto the slopes of Gaurishankar and spoil the Eskimo's fish hunt with motorboats, but it will be a long time before we prevail against the primeval forest. There malaria consumes our people, rust consumes our nails and guns; there peoples were rotted out and disappeared, and out of the depths of the carrion heap new ethnic mixtures quickly arose, lusty and not to be killed off.

A powerful shock suddenly awoke me. Straight out of my sleep I leapt up and fell back down. I stood up again, now awake. The mosquito net was in pieces. A wild, white, frighteningly harsh light struck me with blinding effect, and only after a few moments did I realize that it was light from many lightning flashes following one another without pause. The thunder resounded afterward in a rhythmic panting. The air was strangely in motion and full of electricity, which I could feel vibrating in my fingertips.

In a daze I staggered to the window, which in the light of the lightning flashes wavered about in my vision, causing its outlines to flicker and shift like the row of windows in a swiftly passing train. Out there, two paces away, the forest looked back at me, an agitated sea of forms, tangled branches, myriads of leaves and vines billowing, desperately defending itself, subjugated by the lightning and rudely wounded to its quivering heart, crashing about and furious. I stood at the window and stared out at the chaos, blinded and deafened, and felt with overly heightened senses the raging life of the earth gushing forth and wasting itself. I stood in the midst of it with my European brain and sensibilities to which the mad uproar failed to submit. I watched in a state of curiosity and thought of all the many nights and days of my life, of all the many, many hours in which, as presently, I have stood somewhere upon the earth and observed strange things and phenomena, driven and drawn by the same intoxication with watching as I felt now. It did not for a moment seem strange that I was standing in the south of the primeval marshland forest of Sumatra watching a tropical nocturnal storm. I also at no time felt a feeling of danger, but rather I felt a foreshadowing—I saw myself a hundred times again, in places very far from here, standing alone and filled with inquisitiveness, watching, wonderstruck, something incomprehensible that spoke to that which is incomprehensible and beyond concept in

myself, to which it was akin. As a little boy, exactly with the same sense of being caught up in watching but detached from all responsibility, I had seen animals die or the chrysalises of butterflies break open. With the same feeling, I had looked into the eyes of dying persons and into the calyxes of flowers—not with the desire to explain these things, but only with the need to be there and, yes, not to miss any of these rare moments in which the great voice spoke to me and in which I and my life and sensibilities disappeared and were of no worth, because they became merely a thin, superficial overtone of the deep thunder or the even deeper silence of inconceivable occurrence.

The moment had arrived, the rare, long-awaited moment, and I stood and saw the primeval forest forget its mystery in the white light of a thousand lightning bolts and shudder with the fear of death. What spoke to me there was exactly the same thing as I had heard tens or hundreds of times in my life—at the sight of an abyss in the mountains, sailing through a storm at sea, at the onrush of a powerful downdraft on a ski slope—something I cannot express and nevertheless must strive again and again to experience.

And suddenly it was all over. And that was more wondrous and uncanny than all the clamor of the storm. No more lightning, no more thunder, only dense, nameless darkness and the crashing down of a wild, voracious, suicidally angry rain. All around, nothing besides that deep, raking hiss and the ruttish odor of the churned-up forest floor, and such a profound fatigue and sleepiness that I fell asleep on my feet and tumbled onto my mattress and did not reawaken until, with the yellow forest sunrise, came the echoing, hundred-voiced bellowing of the apes.

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[*] Tauschnitz was a Leipzig publishing house of the time.—Trans.

PALEMBANG

Palembang is a city built on stilts of about seventy-five thousand inhabitants in the southeast of Sumatra, located on the marshy shore of a large river, which has received from superficial travelers the highly unsuitable name of the Malay Venice, which says nothing more than that the city lies on the water and its main traffic is on the water.

Palembang stands in water from noon until midnight, and from midnight until noon in swamp—in a gray viscous filth that stinks phenomenally. The sight of it and its odor pursued me for a week after my departure, even out into the open sea, as a light fog of repulsion and feverishness. In the meantime, through this fog I experienced this beautiful, remarkable city as an exciting adventure.

The river and the hundred still, canal-like side streams, on the banks of which Palembang lies, all flow in the opposite direction in the morning from the direction they flow in at night, for the whole utterly flat area lies only two meters above the level of the sea, which is seventy or eighty kilometers away, and whose high tide comes all the way up here every day, reversing the current of the rivers, turning the swamps to seas, the dirt city into a magnificent fairy-tale scene and making the whole area livable.

During this time of high tide—which changes day by day and during my time here began at midday—the thousand stilt-built edifices are reflected gently and enchantingly in the brownish, faintly stirring water, and a hundred sleek, painterly small sailboats swarm past each other on even the smallest canal with quiet nimbleness and astonishing skill. Naked children and veiled women bathe at the foot of the steep wooden stairways that lead down from every house to the water, and the lanterns of the ornamental-looking Chinese shops, afloat on rafts, carve wonderful cutouts of Asian evening and aquatic life out of the darkness.

At ebb tide, however, the same city becomes a half-black gutter. The

little houseboats sit canted and skewed on the dead swamp, brown people bathe innocently in a mush of water, sludge, market garbage, and dung. The whole scene looks dull and lackluster under the merciless heat of the sky, and the stench is unspeakable.

However, I should not do the indigenes injustice. They can do nothing about the fact that their river has no gradient and therefore no clean water, that the garbage from cooking and the excrement from the privies remain standing around the houses, and that the savage sun causes the sludge to putrefy so quickly. As much as it sometimes horrifies the foreigner to behold the level of hygiene prevailing here, as proudly as he may feel of his superiority over the Malays, renouncing bathing for days and brushing his teeth with soda water, nevertheless the fact remains that the East Asians are much cleaner than the Europeans, and that we have learned our very modern European cleanliness from the Indians and the Malays. This modern cleanliness, which begins with requiring a daily bath, comes from England and it came to England under the influence of the many Anglo-Indians and other people who returned home to England from the tropics, and those people had learned bathing, frequent mouth rinsing, and all these many skills of cleanliness from the natives of India, Ceylon, and the Malayan world. I have seen simple women of the folk here clean their teeth with fine wooden picks and rinse their mouths with fresh water after every meal, which among us is done by only 5 or 10 percent of the population. And in Württemburg and Baden I know farmers enough who bathe at the very most two or three times a year, whereas the Malays and Chinese bathe at least once a day or more. And they have been doing it for a very long time—at least we already find such cleanliness practices described as being a matter of course in very ancient Chinese books. For example, in the *Lieh-Tzu,* we find: “When he arrived at the inn and was finished with washing, mouth-rinsing, drying off, and combing….”

In Palembang, in this unique city, yeloton and rubber, wool and rattan, fish and ivory, pepper, coffee, wood resin, native weaving and needlework are sold. Imports are imitation sarong fabric from England and Switzerland, beer from Munich and Bremen, German and English knits, sterilized milk from Mecklenburg and Holland, canned fruit from Lensburg and California. In the Dutch bookshop you can buy translations of the most trashy literature in all languages but you cannot find Multatuli’s *Havelaar*. For the use of the whites, the most out-of-the-way gift articles from European smalltown stores can be

found, whereas the natives are served by Japanese junk stores with cheap rubbish from Germany and America. A thousand meters from here, tigers prey on goats and elephants root about wrecking telegraph poles. Above the swampy land swarm magnificent waterbirds, herons, and eagles, and under the canals, invisible and silent, for hundreds of miles, raw petroleum flows continuously in iron pipes toward the refineries in the city. I bought an old Chinese silk shawl here for one and a half times the sum the merchant was charging for a box containing a gross of European steel springs. And strangely enough, the cost of living in the tax-free English ports of Penang and Singapore or Colombo is twice as high as it is here, where the extremely high Dutch taxes, which cripple commerce, as does the Dutch colonial administration altogether, pretty much give the impression of shortsighted exploitation of the natives. On the other hand, the Dutch-Indian rijsttafel, while not marvelous, is nevertheless in the worst of cases paradisiacal when compared with the cuisine the English serve in the expensive, palatial hotels of their colonies. It is a pity, because the English would be the number one people on the earth if they did not lack two elementary gifts that a people of culture surely cannot do without: a sense of fine cuisine and a sense of music. With regard to these two elements, in the English colonies the lowest expectations are in order. Everything else is first class.

The local people here have that frightful groveling servility that the European officials and merchants like so much but which some of us occasionally find upsetting. At the same time, however, the subservient Malay is extremely apt at adopting European comforts, pleasures, and upper-class manners. The coolie on account of whose hardship in his servitude you felt so deeply sorry for an hour ago, you may soon encounter proud in his white suit (which perhaps belongs to you but has been rented to him by your laundry man), on a rented bicycle (ten cents an hour), or as a habitué with lordly airs in yellow shoes and a burning cigarette entering the billiard hall. After that he returns to his hut, puts his sarong back on, makes himself comfortable, and brushes his teeth with canal water on the wooden steps on the bank, exactly in the same spot where, just a minute ago, he relieved his bodily needs.

A FAIRY TALE ON THE WATER

I would like to take the trip I took yesterday again sometime with a woman I love—out of Palembang in a small, narrow boat.

Our tippy little boat had a draft of no more than a hand's breadth and could therefore float in even the smallest of runlets. Toward evening when we still had the tide, we went up a small brown side stream, where among the huts on stilts, the usual innocent, busy life was going on—net fishing of every kind, at which the Malays, as they are at bird catching and rowing, are true masters; multitudes of naked screaming children; small-time merchants on rafts with their soda water and syrup; sellers of Korans and tiny Mohammedan devotional pamphlets softly hawking their wares; and boys swimming. One seldom sees people fighting or arguing here, one never sees drunks, and the traveler from the West feels shame that this stands out to him.

We moved along in a leisurely fashion. The stream became narrow and shallow, the huts fell by the wayside, and we were surrounded by swamp and bush, green and still. Trees grew here and there on the bank and in the water itself. Gradually, unnoticeably, they became more numerous, stretched myriads of stilt roots out toward us, and above us, getting more and more dense, hung a green vaulted network of foliage and branches. Soon no tree could be picked out individually, every one of them being hung with roots, aerial roots, branches, twigs, creepers, all tangled and woven into each other, all embraced and bound together by hundreds of ferns, lianas, and other parasitic plants.

In this silent wilderness from time to time dazzlingly colored kingfishers, of which many nested here, flew by; or gray, darting snipes; or black-and-white magpies, the fat blackbird-like songbirds of the primeval forest. Otherwise, no sound was to be heard and there was no other life besides the fervent growing, breathing, and interweaving of the dense vaulting trees. The stream, often hardly wider than our boat, took another capricious turn every moment, any

sense of measure or distance we had completely disappeared, and we moved in rapt silence into a tangled, green eternity, roofed over by densely intermingled trees, hemmed in by large-leafed water plants. We sat there mute and amazed, and none of us could conceive of when or how this spell could ever be broken. I have no idea whether it lasted a half hour, an hour, or two hours.

But it was unexpectedly broken by a wild, multivoiced bellowing over our heads and by a great waving about in the crowns of the trees, and suddenly we were being goggled at by a family of large, gray monkeys, who had been insulted and shaken up by our intrusion. We remained there motionless, and the animals began to play and chase each other again; and then a second family appeared, and then another, until above us the thick vegetation was teeming with big, long-tailed, gray monkeys. From time to time they looked back down at us, angry and suspicious. They snorted wrathfully and growled like dogs on a chain, and as well over a hundred of the animals were sitting over us and were beginning again to snort, and the ones nearest us to bare their teeth, our friend from Palembang gave us a warning sign with his finger. We kept warily still and were careful not to so much as brush against a branch, for to have been throttled by a tribe of monkeys in a jungle swamp an hour from Palembang would have seemed to all of us, perhaps not disgraceful, but nevertheless an ungentlemanly and inglorious end.

Cautiously our Malay dipped his short, light oar into the water, and holding still and ducking down, we carefully headed back beneath the monkeys and the many trees, then back past the huts and the houses, and by the time we had reached the main river again the sun had already gone down and out of the swiftly falling night from both sides of the mighty waters we saw the magical city aglow with its thousand small faint lights.

THE GRAVES OF PALEMBANG

On that beautiful morning I went out beyond the edges of the city immediately after breakfast and stayed out for two or three hours in order to breathe some pure air, see some green, and catch the occasional butterfly. All the cities, even the big ones such as Singapore, are surrounded by villages, hamlets, farms, and the most primitive of rural life, which then melts away silently without any clear boundaries into the fertile green wilderness. You start out in the humming big streets with commercial buildings, trucks, hawking merchants, and cigarette-smoking street urchins, then you turn onto a quiet side street where you find bright, friendly bungalows standing alone far from the street in their gardens, and then unexpectedly you find yourself, wonderfully awakened, fully in the country—you are the object of the snorts of pasturing goats or cows, or you hear in the wild woods the sounds of monkeys leaping.

In Palembang my promenades mostly led past the fish market, past the gruesome sight of living fish of every kind lying about and massive heaps of lopped-off fish heads then past the houses and warehouses of major merchants, then as far as an old mosque, the whole way parallel to the river. Then I would make a right-angle turn toward the interior, and this is where the typical mixture of villages and the wilderness of the bush begins. Small, beautiful cows graze everywhere, crossing the road through traffic in a very carefree and trusting manner. At some hours the traffic on the road is very heavy with pedestrians, porters, lots of bicycles, horse-drawn carts, and even already some automobiles. Ten meters from there, in the heavy bush, you are in the primeval wilderness, surrounded by squirrels and birds in multitudes, growled at by monkeys, and from time to time terrified by monstrous, sometimes poisonous millipedes and scorpions. A person with forest skills can also often find tiger spoor here.

But you cannot go a hundred meters in any direction without

running into graves. Overgrown and forgotten lie the graves of Malays and Arabs, quite similar to our own, the new ones adorned with wilted bundles of grass that are laid on them on Fridays by the Mohammedans. Sometimes a small grave site is surrounded by a wall with portals shaped with exquisite arches and finely profiled pillars. High grass has grown around them and they are overhung by gigantic trees. Shady and lonely in their romantic state of neglect, they are as beautiful and noble as a lovely, still corner of some Italian ruin.

Among them you often find a Chinese grave, huge and with large golden characters glowing on the pillars, a walled-in semicircular terrace on a slope five, ten, or twenty meters in diameter, depending on the importance and wealth of the buried person, with blue and gold inscriptions in the beautifully upswept walls—the whole thing precious and ceremonious and beautiful like all Chinese work, though perhaps a bit cool and vacant—and everywhere, to the right and left and all around as well as in the air above, is the dense tangle of bush and trees that has shot up.

A number of the Mohammedan grave sites are said to be those of early sultans, and those have portals in their walls that are as beautiful and elegantly proportioned as the best of anything we have from the Renaissance. It is astounding to find such a thing in Sumatra, but even more astounding is the vague old Palembang legend that claims Alexander the Great is buried here. He came as far as this place, so it says, and here he died. This reminded me of a conversation a friend of mine had in Italy with a fisherman at Lake Trasimeno. The fisherman told him horrendous tales of the bloody battle fought there long ago by the great general Hannibal. And when my friend questioned him further concerning who Hannibal had fought that battle against, the man became uncertain but then stated rather firmly that it had been Garibaldi instead.

I spent many a wondrous and beautiful hour by the graves of Palembang, alone in the densely intertwining green bush, with purple emperor butterflies fluttering about, listening to the many cries of the forest beasts and the wild fantastic songs of the great insects. I sat resting, exhausted by the heat, on the low walls of the Chinese graves, which are so large and so solidly and richly built, but nonetheless are soon overtaken, overmastered, and overmantled by the savage life and growth of this earth. I was visited and observed by black-and-white goats and small, gentle, red-brown cows, eyed by monkeys taking their

rest, or ringed by shy and curious Malay children. I knew but few of the trees and animals that I saw around me by name, I was unable to read the Chinese inscriptions, and could exchange only a few words with the children, but nowhere in foreign lands have I felt so little like a foreigner and so completely enfolded by the self-existing naturalness of life's clear river as I did here.

THE *MARAS*

Anyone who has been in Palembang for a while and lived on the rear side of the Hotel Nieukerk that gives onto a darkish little canal, who has been plagued by the stench and the mosquitoes without possibility of bathing in pure water—such a person eventually falls prey to an ardent longing for departure, for anywhere else at all, and begins to count the hours till the next ship leaves. Having been a month without mail, feverish with sleeplessness, fatigued by the life of this unique city, worn out by the heat and a lack of baths, I had booked myself a place on the Chinese steamer *Maras,* which was supposed to arrive on Friday and then leave for Singapore sometime on Saturday. And now I lay in a state of hope under the mosquito net and waited for Friday morning. It had already been a good while since I'd had anything to read. My big trunk was in Singapore, week after week no news arrived from home; I could find nothing to do but wander around in the city every day until I was tired and then lie and wait for many hours, leaf through my notebook, and learn Malay vocabulary. But now the possibility of a ship had appeared on the horizon, and I would be able to leave in two or three days. And soon, as our experiences of consolation have taught us, everything unpleasant in those days would wither away and vanish from my memory and only the many gay, happy experiences would remain.

However, Friday morning and also Friday afternoon came and went without the *Maras* arriving, and also I spent the night from Friday to Saturday listening for many long hours for the whistle of an incoming ship; and all of Saturday went by as well. It was not until Sunday morning that the news came that it was finally here, and if it was not raining too much, it would perhaps depart tomorrow.

On Sunday I was on the river from morning until evening. I had joined a crocodile hunt and was sitting in a small boat with a heavy old Dutch military rifle on my knees, my eyes burning from the heat and

the reflection of the sun on the water, waiting in ambush. But on days like that, a person has no luck. We never had a chance to take a shot and we had to be happy, since the water level was so high, that we even got to see a few crocodiles.

In any case, my ship was leaving tomorrow, and after that as far as I was concerned all the crocodiles in Sumatra could ——! When we got back to the city, I learned that the *Maras* would maybe be leaving early tomorrow morning, or maybe also in the afternoon or in the evening, and I packed my suitcase with anticipatory thoroughness and love. The *Maras*, which did not leave in the morning, also did not leave in the afternoon, but I was told that I could go aboard in the evening and that I had better be on board by ten o'clock at the latest if I did not want to be left behind.

In order to be sure it would not leave without me, I set out for the ship at nine o'clock, moving through the dense night (in Europe we have no idea of real nocturnal darkness!), and groping over alien boats and sleeping oar coolies in the lanternless darkness, I sought and found a pathway for myself and my baggage to the unlit drop-down stairway and pulled my way hopefully upward. The ship was heavily loaded. The holds were all full of yeloton and wool, yet there remained twenty or more boats loaded with rattan by the ship, and the loading was still going on. A hundred coolies swarmed over the overfull dark deck, where I had to climb over boxes and beams, and when the coolies came near one of the few lanterns, their naked yellow sweat-covered bodies glowed warmly out of the shadowy tumult.

A Dutch captain appeared and I was given a cabin, but it was as hot as a steam bath, and as I took my boots off, I immediately discovered the reason. The floor was so hot from the neighboring furnace rooms that it was painful on the soles of my feet. The porthole was just slightly bigger than the crystal of a pocket watch. By way of compensation, there was an electric ventilator and an electric light, but these had not functioned for years, and the room was lit by a small, smutty oil lamp.

The departure was expected and promised from one hour to the next. Until one o'clock I sat stiff from fatigue on a chair on the upper deck and stared in a daze out of my swollen eyes down at the ship. Then I went into the cabin and lay down, listened to the perspiration falling in heavy drops from my down-hanging hand onto the floor, got up again and smoked a cigar outside in the rain among the coolies,

wandered around through the dark ship, stumbled over sleeping bodies, overturned a cage with live monkeys in it, bumped into the corners of boxes, and found myself at dawn broken and exhausted once more on the upper deck.

I had never in my life drunk Bordeaux and smoked strong Indian cigars at six o'clock in the morning, but today I did, and now I can already keep my eyes open again almost without pain or effort.

Now as I write these notes, the ship is moving. It has been traveling for an hour, since noon, and I would gladly do something else besides writing if that were not the only thing left I can do. The cabin is impossible; there is only one chair available for me on deck. I stop writing, and here comes the captain, who wants to draw me into conversation. He is a likable fellow and has his wife with him on board. They live on the upper deck in the captain's cabin. He has an unbelievable stamp collection and a mangy Chinese dog, which unfortunately is disloyal and stays close to me. And his wife has five young cats and ten or eleven songbirds in cages. In addition, we have four live monkeys on board (the same ones whose cage I overturned in the night), of which the smallest is quite tame and allows me to hold and stroke it. Unfortunately they stink like the devil.

We are sailing slowly downriver and will reach the sea by evening, and we will be in Singapore in maybe thirty-two hours.

Evening postscript: I take everything back. When I stopped writing, I was not bothered by anybody, quite to the contrary I was invited to a very good midday meal. Afterward, the captain's wife set up a field cot for me forward on the upper deck, where I could rest for a couple of hours. Then everything began to look better. The Chinese dog, I now think, is not mangy; he only has some hair loss on the rear end like all dogs in the tropics, which is a pity because judging from the rest of him, before that happened he must have been a quite handsome, reddish blond little guy. The porthole in my cabin is now as big as the crystal of a modest wall clock—the pocket watch was an exaggeration.

I thoroughly soaped up and then poured river water over myself—the first fresh bath in ten days! Now I can see out of my eyes again without straining. It is five in the afternoon and already starting to get dark. We have arrived in the broad river mouth and before us lies the bright yellow of the shallow sea. The pilot who was doing the steering

can leave us soon. Across from us, beautiful with its long high mountain chains, all deep blue, lies Bangka Island.

Postscript, ten in the evening: The dog is mangy after all. Touching him has already cost me two of my precious mercury pills. In addition to him, the cats, the dogs, and the monkeys, there are two armadillos, a porcupine, and a beautiful young jaguar on board, all live. They are shut up in cages, but they get much more air than I do in my cabin. The evening meal was quite pleasant and sociable. The captain has a big, heavy, functioning gramophone, on which in honor of my presence he played *Die Dollarprinzessin*[*] and Caruso. All Europeans in the tropics have gramophones, and thus already before my return to Singapore I had been soaked in the atmosphere of operettas, which since I first set foot on the Lloyd company ship in Genoa has shown itself to be characteristic of European life in the East.

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[*] *The Dollar Princess,* a still popular operetta by Leo Fall.—Trans.

KANDY PROMENADE

The famous city Kandy lies in an oppressively narrow valley on a miserable, artificial lake. Apart from its ancient temple and its, of course, marvelous trees, it has no merits, but it does boast all the problems and deficiencies of a small foreign city that has been systematically spoiled by excessively wealthy English people. By way of compensation, however, leading from Kandy in all directions into the marvelous surrounding landscape are the most beautiful walking paths in the world. Unfortunately I saw only half of these despite a long stay there, since the rainy season was late, and Kandy lay constantly under gray, rainy, overcast skies and thick fog, like a valley in the Black Forest in late autumn.

In a light downpour one afternoon, I took a stroll along bucolic Malabar Street where I was able to enjoy the pleasurable sight of the half-naked Singhalese youth. I did indeed feel a kind of atavistic ease and home-like feeling—which to my disappointment I had never experienced in relation to typical tropical landscapes—at the sight of the carefree primitive nature folk. Such folk flourish and thrive here in India in a much more beautiful and convincing fashion than they do, for example, in Italy, where we usually look to find the “innocence of the South.” In particular, what is totally absent here in the East is the unbridled pomposity and joy in violent noisemaking with which in the Mediterranean coastal towns every newspaperboy and match seller proclaims himself as the noisy center of the universe. The Indians, Malays, and Chinese fill the countless streets of their populous cities with an intense, colorful, vigorous life, which, however, proceeds with an almost ant-like noiselessness, and in that way puts to shame all of our southern European towns. Especially the Singhalese, as otherwise unremarkable as they may be, all go through their simple, mild, monotonous lives with a lovable gentleness and quiet, deer-like dignity that is not to be found in the West.

In front of every hut, as though floating between the wall of the house and the edge of the street, was a very small, naive garden. In all of them bloomed a few roses as well as a small tree with “temple flowers,” and before every threshold a couple of handsome, dark brown, longhaired or else oddly shaven-headed children gamboled about, the smallest completely naked, but with amulets on their chests and their wrists, and ankles adorned with silver bangles. What struck me as contrasting with the Malay children was that they are without shyness toward foreigners and even coquettishly seek to draw our attention. They learn the beggar’s call of *money* as their first English word, frequently even before they learn Singhalese. The girls are often wonderfully beautiful, and all the children without exception have beautiful eyes.

A steep side road disappearing into the thick, tangled greenery attracted me, and I climbed up through a ravine amazingly lush with vegetation, which had the odor of ferment of a greenhouse. Thereabout on countless tiny terraces were marshy rice paddies, in the mire of which naked laborers and gray water buffalo toiled at plows.

All of a sudden, after a final precipitous decline in the path, I was standing over the bank of the Mahaweli. There the beautiful mountain river, swollen by rain, streamed in a rapid descent through a narrow passage between banks of dark primeval stone. Small wild rock islands and large boulders, black and shining like polished bronze, stood out from the brownish foaming water.

At a broader part of the rocky bank, a raft-like ferry was just landing. An old blind man was led onto the shore, and with a patient face and yellow withered hands, off which the rainwater ran into his clothes, began groping his way up the steep bank. Quickly I climbed onto the small raft and was taken across the river amid the reddish rocky landscape of the shoreland. On the other side, I climbed over stone steps on a path through more jungle darkness, once again passing by huts and terraced rice paddies. The people had just harvested and now without a pause were again plowing the swampy ground so they could immediately sow it once more; for in this good climate and in this primeval mud, harvest after harvest is brought in, year after year. In the spattering rain, the narrow valley with its red earth and boundlessly opulent growth gave off an odor of hot fertility, as though everywhere the soft mud was seething with mysterious primal creation.

Two miles farther up there was supposed to be a Buddhist rock temple, the oldest and holiest in Ceylon, and soon I saw the little monastery and the small vegetable garden the monks have worked into the mountain slope. Now the temple appeared, in front of which the hollows in the rock floor were full of rainwater. There was a run-down vestibule with arches of naked stone from recent times; the whole of the place seeming neglected, dark, and grim. A young boy ran and fetched a priest for me and the first door of the shrine was opened. Two tiny wax candle stubs in the hand of the priest flickered erratically, incapable of lighting the black, silent rooms. Only the gray, simple head of the priest floated in the faint, red luminescence, which here and there awakened a fragment of the ancient painting on the wall. I wanted to look at the walls, so we now moved the two weak, sooty little lights along them and down to the floor—inch by inch, as though the huge fresco were a stamp collection. In ancient primitive contours, faint yellow and red in color, emerged countless, lovely, delightful, and also humorous figures from the legend of the Buddha. There was the Buddha leaving his ancestral home, the Buddha under the Bodhi Tree, the Buddha with his disciples Ananda and Kaundinya, and so on. Unbidden, the thought of Assisi came to my mind, where in the great empty upper church the walls are covered with Francesco Giotto's fresco of the legend of St. Francis. This was in exactly the same spirit, only here everything was small and ornamental, and in the drawings and the small images, though there was indeed culture and life, there was no personality.

But now the old man opened the innermost door. Here it was completely dark—in the rear of this space the rock cave ended. There was something uncanny in the air in here, and when we came closer with our candles, from the play of their faint glow and the shadows, waveringly a gigantic form emerged, bigger than the circle of our dim light; after a while, with a shiver I recognized the recumbent head of a colossal Buddha. The face of the image shone pale and huge. Our little bit of light allowed us barely to sense the shoulders and arms; the rest was lost in the darkness. I had to walk back and forth a great deal, urging the priest along and working with the two candles, before I was able dimly to see the entire figure. The lying Buddha I thus gained a glimpse of was forty-two feet long, covering the wall of the cave with his gigantic body. The top of the rock wall rested on his left shoulder, and if he had stood up, he would have filled the entire mountain.

And here too, unsought, a similar experience of mine came to mind.

Years ago I had gone into a small Gothic chapel in an Alsatian village, where the weak light, faintly colored, barely penetrated through the painted, dusty windowpanes, and looking up I saw with a great shock of fear a huge carved Christ hanging over me—on the Cross, with grim red wounds and a bloody forehead.

We have come a long way, and it is very good that we—a very small fraction of humanity—no longer have utter need of either one of these two, either the bloody Cross or the smoothly smiling Buddha. We must go further in overcoming them and the other gods and learn to do without them. But it would also be very good if one day our children, who have grown up without gods, should again find the courage and the joy and the energy of the soul to erect such clear, huge, unambivalent monuments and symbols of their inner life.

KANDY DIARY

It is evening. I am lying in my hotel room. For the last few days I have been living on red wine and opium, and my intestines must possess either tremendous life force or desperate, fearless courage, because despite everything they still give me no peace. This evening neither my courage nor my force are quite sufficient to allow me to get up and move around. In addition, the rains are here, and outside drenched, pitch-dark night reigns, even though evening is only just beginning. I must somehow pull myself out of my current frame of mind, so I will try to note down what I saw two hours ago.

It was about six o'clock and already almost night. The rain was pouring down. I had gotten out of bed and gone out, weak from lying about and fasting, numbed by the opiates with which I have been fighting my dysentery. Without thinking much about it, I turned in the darkness down the road to the temple and after a while found myself standing over the dark water at the entrance to the ancient holy site, where beautiful, luminous Buddhism has developed into a truly curious form of idol worship, compared to which even Spanish Catholicism seems quite spiritual. A dream-like, muffled music came to my ears. Here and there knelt dark worshipers, bowing to the ground and murmuring. A sweet strong fragrance of flowers came over me, with stupefying effect. Through the temple gate I saw into night-dark rooms in which many scattered thin tapers burned like so many mind-fuddling will-o'-the-wisps.

A guide had taken hold of me and pushed me forward; two youths in white clothes with kind, gentle-eyed Singhalese faces, each with two burning little candles in his hands, hurried over to help guide me. Walking ahead of me, their bodies bent low, they painstakingly lit each little stair and every protruding pillar that I might bump into, and, my senses benumbed, I got caught up in the adventure as though I was entering a treasure cave in an Arabic fairy tale.

A brass bowl was held up to me and a donation for entry into the temple was requested. I put a rupee in the bowl and walked on, the candle bearers before me. White, sweet-smelling temple flowers were offered to me. I took a few and gave the purveyor some money. I then laid the blossoms in various niches and before various images as offerings. Following the guide, as the darkness before my eyes danced with a hundred little golden points of candlelight, I moved past small stone lions, many images of lotus flowers, and carved and painted pillars. Next, climbing a dark stairway, I came to stand before a great glassed-in shrine, whose panes and woodwork were full of dirt. The inside was filled with buddha images of gold and brass, silver and ivory, granite and wood, alabaster set with gems; of images from north and south India, from Siam and Ceylon. But in an opulently ornamented silver shrine, sitting still and fine and infinitely distinguished and venerable, was a beautiful old Buddha, cut from a single immense crystal, and the light of the candle I held up behind it shone in colors through its glass body. Of all the many images of the Perfect One, this crystal one was the only one I will not forget—it truly expressed the nature of the utterly flawless Enlightened One.

Here, there, and everywhere were priests, temple servants, and their minions in great number. Hands were stretched out to me, and ceremonial-looking brass and silver bowls were held out to me on every side. In brief, I ended up passing out more than fifty tips. But I did all of this, including my questioning of the priests, in a semicompetent dream state, a kind of half consciousness. I had no respect for the miserable priests; I felt scorn for the images and shrines, the ludicrous gold and ivory, the sandalwood and silver. But I felt a deep sense of empathy and compassion for the kindly, gentle Indian folk, who over centuries had turned a magnificent pure teaching into an utter caricature and built this immense edifice of naive gullibility, foolishly sincere prayers and offerings, and movingly misguided all-too-human ignorance and childishness. The feeble, blind vestige of the Buddha's teaching that in their simplemindedness they were capable of understanding, they honored, cared for, hallowed and ornamented, made offerings to costly images—what are we to do, we smart and spiritual people from the West, who are much closer to the source of Buddha's teaching and to all knowledge?

I was dragged past more altars and pillars. Here and there was the glitter of gold and rubies, dull old silver in quantity, and with all the fantastic richness of the temple treasures, the shabbiness of the temple

servants and the priests, the poorness of the wooden partitions and glass cases, the beggarly dearth of lighting were amazing to see. Priests displayed the ancient holy books of the temple, richly bound in silver, whose sacred texts in Sanskrit and Pali they themselves probably could no longer read. And what they noted down on a palm leaf in exchange for a tip was no beautiful saying or name, but just the date and the name of the place—a tacky, matter-of-fact receipt.

Finally I was shown the shrine and the receptacle in which the holy tooth of the Buddha was kept. We have all that in Europe too. I gave my donation and moved on. The Buddhism of Ceylon is beautiful to photograph and to write literary descriptions of. Beyond that, it is nothing but another of the many moving, painfully grotesque forms in which helpless human suffering expresses its need and its lack of spirit and strength.

And then they pulled me unexpectedly back out into the night. In the woolly darkness, the rain still poured down heavily, beneath me the candles of the youths reflected in the holy turtle pond. Oh, there's no lack of holiness and holy things here, but for that Buddha who was not made out of stone or crystal or alabaster—for him everything was holy, everything was God!

I was again pulled and shoved, and groping in the dark, I helplessly went along. I was hurried outside down a few steps and over some wet grass, where suddenly, as a red rectangle in the night, the lit-up doorway of a second, smaller temple stood before us. I went in, offered flowers, was pushed toward an inner door, and suddenly I saw before me, frighteningly near, a large recumbent Buddha in the wall, eighteen feet long, made of granite and luridly painted in red and yellow. It is amazing how from the slick vacancy of all these figures, the magnificent essential Idea of them shines forth—the wrinkleless serene smoothness of the countenance of the Perfect One.

Now we were finished. I was again standing outside in the rain, and I still had to pay the guide, the candle bearers, and the priest of the smaller temple. But I had given away all my money, and looking at my watch, I now saw with a shock that the whole nocturnal temple journey had taken only twenty minutes. I ran quickly back to the hotel in the rain, with my small host of faithful from the temple at my heels. I got money from the hotel cashier and shared it out. The priest, the guide, and the first and second candle bearers bowed down before its power, and shivering, I climbed up the many steps to my room.

PIDURUTALAGALA

In order to take leave of India in a quiet and worthy fashion, on one of the last days before my departure, alone in the freshness of a rainy morning, I climbed the highest peak in Ceylon, that of Pidurutalagala. When expressed in English feet, the height of its summit sounds quite impressive, but in reality it is just a little over two thousand meters high and climbing it is just a stroll.

The cool green mountain valley of Nuwara Eliya lay silvery in the light morning rain. It was typical English-Indian with its corrugated sheet metal roofs and its wastefully large tennis courts and golf courses. The Singhalese loused each other in front of their huts or sat shivering, wrapped in wool head scarfs. The landscape, which resembles that of the Black Forest, lay lifeless and veiled. Aside from a few birds, for a long time I had seen no living thing, until in a garden hedge I saw a fat, poisonous green chameleon, whose sinister movements I watched for a long time to the accompaniment of the song of the insects.

The path began its climb from a small ravine, the few roofs disappeared, a rapid brook rushed by me on its way down. The way was narrow and steep and for a good hour I climbed steadily upward through tough, thick bush and annoying swarms of gnats. Only rarely did a bend in the path provide the chance for a view, and when it did, you saw always the same pretty, somewhat boring valley with its lake and hotel roofs. The rain gradually halted, the cool wind went to sleep, and the sun came out again for a few minutes.

I had climbed the initial slopes, and the path now led over more level, springy bog and past several beautiful mountain brooks. Here the alpine roses grow more opulently than at home, on sturdy trees three times the height of a man, and a furry, white-flowering weed here reminded me very much of edelweiss. I found many of the wildflowers we know from home, but all strangely enlarged and more developed,

and all of them with an alpine character. The trees here have no tree line to worry about and grow vigorously and rich with foliage all the way to the uppermost heights.

I now came to the last stage of the ascent. The path abruptly began to climb steeply and soon I was surrounded by forest; a weird, dead, enchanted forest, where trunks and branches, winding snake-like, stared at me with their long, thick, white beards of moss. A wet, bitter odor of leaves and mist hung in the air.

It was all quite beautiful, but it was not really what I had pictured to myself, and I was already beginning to fear that today yet another was to be added to the many disappointments of my Asian journey. As I was thinking this, the forest came to an end. I came out, warm and rather breathless, onto a gray Ossianic heath and saw the bare summit with its small stone pyramid quite near in front of me. A hard, cold wind drove into me, and I pulled my coat round myself and slowly continued climbing the last hundred paces.

What I saw up there was perhaps not typically Indian, but it was the greatest and purest impression that I received of all of Ceylon. The wind had just swept the whole breadth of the Nuwara Eliya valley clear of clouds. I saw, deep blue and immense, the high mountains of Ceylon swelling in mighty ramparts. In the midst of them stood the beautiful pyramid of primordially sacred Adam's Peak. Beyond it in a boundless distance and depth lay the sea, blue and smooth, and in between were a thousand mountains, broad valleys, narrow gorges, streams, and waterfalls—with its countless folds, here was the whole mountainous island in which the ancient tales saw paradise. Far below me, mighty ranges of clouds cruised and thundered over isolated valleys; behind me churning mist rose smoke-like out of dark-blue depths; and across all of it blew the cold sibilant mountain wind. Both the foreground and the distance stood out clearly in the humid air, deeply saturated in a windblown fusion of colors, as though this country truly were paradise, and as though just now at this very moment the first humans were descending into the valleys for the first time from its blue cloud-wreathed mountains.

This great primeval landscape spoke more potently to me than anything else I had seen in India. The palm trees and the birds of paradise, the rice paddies and the temples in the rich coastal cities, the valleys of the tropical lowlands steaming with fertile growth—all that, and even the primeval forest, beautiful and enchanting as it was,

remained always alien for me, as something just there for the onlooker —it never became intimately and fully part of me. For the first time, here in the cold air, amid the seething clouds of the raw heights, it became completely clear to me to what extent our being and our northern culture are rooted here in these more primitive and poorer lands. We come to the South and the East full of longing, drawn by an intimation of a darker and more fulfilling home; and we find paradise here, the fullness and lush abundance of an all-natural bounty; we find the plain, simple, childlike people of paradise. But we ourselves are other; we are strangers here and without birthright; we have long since lost paradise, and the new paradise that we have and seek to build is not to be found on the equator and in the warm seas of the East; rather it lies within us and in our own northern future.

RETURN JOURNEY

Again I have been traveling day and night, day after day for weeks, over the blue-black sea, living in a tiny hole of a cabin. I stand for hours in the evening leaning on the railing. I see the bare black surface grow bright in the evening light. I see the strangely displaced constellations flaming against the green late-night heavens, and I see the gleaming white moon sitting straight up like a boat floating in the blackness. The English people lie in their deck chairs and read out-of-date English magazines and reviews, and the Germans throw dice in the smoking room using leather cups. I often join them, and from time to time silence and suspense occur on deck when the marvelously built, brown-black, tiger-like woman from Honolulu passes by, with a spring in every step, rocking back and forth with vital force and animal confidence. No one is in love with her, no one feels up to her level. We look at her like a beautiful but overwhelming act of nature, a storm or an earthquake. But many of us are in love with the gentle, overly slender, two-meter-tall young lady from England, who has the face of a boy and can laugh like an angel. She was in China visiting relatives. She traveled there via Vladivostok and is now traveling back via Suez. During the day she wears discreet, practical traveling clothes and in the evening gets quite dressed up, and she is clearly passing her entire smiling youth doing nothing besides parading her own charm and loveliness across all the seas and lands of the earth.

My desires and thoughts are all already in my homeland, which nevertheless, being infinitely far away, remains half unreal; whereas my many impressions of the last few months are with me in a newer, more sensually vivid way. When I think them over, what comes out is that only a very few of them are really “exotic.” Most of them are purely human in nature and are not significant and important to me because of their foreign costume but because of their relationship to my own and everyone else’s human nature.

As for the still completely fresh exotic images that constantly throng my mind, they include the palmy beach of Penang with its stretches of white sand and yellow fishermen's huts, the luminous blue Chinese streets in the cities of the Straits and the Malay States, the hilly swarm of islands of the Archipelago near Riouw, the monkey tribes in the jungles, and the crocodile rivers of Sumatra. The latest of those impressions came from up in Nuwara Eliya. There everything was more or less home-like and simple, raw, and plain; no temples, no palm trees. But on my first outing there, suddenly a beautiful white flower spoke to me. It reached out and touched me in the inmost treasure chamber of my earliest and strongest impressions, impressions of the type we take in as children and which later no sea or mountain in the world can equal. After weeks of living in new, strange, superficial impressions, I felt touched in my inmost depths by this flower, which reminded me of something. As I tried to trace what it was, I soon realized that this was the same white, large-cupped calla lily that when I was a little boy had blossomed in my mother's room. And as I walked farther, I found this same large white flower, which had been cultivated in my parent's house in the Black Forest as a cherished favorite and a prideworthy rarity, growing in its hundreds and thousands, blooming as buttercups do in April at home. It was a luxuriant and beautiful sight, but it only half pleased and thrilled me to see what had once been my mother's pride and joy growing here in Ceylon as an uncared-for weed.

From the long journey at sea, perhaps the most beautiful and most penetrating impression was that of the island of Socotra seen from the north, with its pale, dead sand hills and the wild, raw, and rugged chalk cliffs staring back at one. Then there was the southern end of Calabria with its lonely millennia-old stone cities in the raw rock cliffs. Not to be forgotten are the mountains of Sinai, with their noble outlines, standing crystalline in soft rosy light, and the Suez Canal, which on the return journey I saw in its full colors in the bright Egyptian air.

But much stronger for me in my memory than these beautiful images were the many small human things I saw. The lean, silent Chinese servant, sleeping on a thin bast mat on the floor in front of his master's door. His master roared at him in the middle of the night to fetch some trifle. Tired, he turned his head, his lids fluttered for a moment, then he looked up with his clever, patient, brown eyes and got to his feet, awake and resigned, with the submissive soft call:

“Tuan!”

Or the Malay foreman of the forest workers of Batang Hari, a relative of the former raja, a man from a noble family, haggard, with a beautiful sad face. I saw him one evening noiselessly appear on our veranda, blow out his lantern, and make his presence known to the landlord with a dignity and refinement of gesture that we rarely see in our fine noble officers at home.

Then the swarthy hordes of children in the jungle villages, who watched our boat arrive, staring with curiosity, full of suspense, and with our first step onto the land, fled in terror but without a sound and disappeared like little animals into the bush.

And how lovely it was in the evening in the Chinese part of town to see a young pair of friends going for a walk. Fine, slim youths with beautiful brown eyes and light, bright, spiritual faces, clothed either entirely in white or entirely in black, with infinitely noble, slender, intelligent hands. Tenderly and cheerfully they walked together, with the left hand of one loosely resting in the right hand of his friend or with an arm on his friend’s shoulder.

And throughout the Archipelago, the kindhearted, handsome Malays, kept in strict submission by the Dutch, polite and pliable; and on Ceylon the soft, gentle Singhalese. You scold them and they make a face like a troubled child; you give them an order and they begin working with fake, overdone zeal; you tell them a joke and their laughter spreads broadly and blissfully over their whole face. They all have the same beautiful beseeching eyes, and they all retain a vestige of primitive innocence and unaccountability in their light, flighty state of mind. They forget important things in the course of a meal, and they lose themselves in games so totally that they sometimes get very serious about them and kill each other; which is why in really serious matters, matters of real importance, they are much too cowardly. In Nuwara Eliya I saw a laborer who was chased from the work site and pursued by the overseer, who kept beating him. He had committed some kind of minor treachery, and he was completely willing to be punished, but under no circumstances did he want to leave. He wanted to stay there, just to stay there, stay by his work, stay by his bread, stay by his honor, stay by his communality with the others. The strong young man unresistingly let himself be struck and whipped with the end of a rope. He slowly yielded to the violence, howling loud and without restraint like a wounded animal, and great tears ran down his

dark face.

It was also beautiful and thought-provoking to see all these people at their religious practices—Hindu, Mohammedan, and Buddhist. All of them, from the rich urban householder down to the least coolie or outcast, have religion. Their religion might be inferior, spoiled, externalized, or denatured, but it is mighty and omnipresent like the sun and the air. It is a life force and a magical atmosphere, and it is the only thing that we can seriously envy these poor, subjugated peoples. That which we northern Europeans, in our intellectualistic and individualistic cultures feel only rarely—perhaps while listening to the music of Bach—the self-oblivious feeling of belonging to an intangibly pervasive community and the ability to draw force from an unconquerable magical source—this is something that the Mohammedan has every evening in the most remote corner of the world as he performs his prostrations and says his prayers; and the Buddhist has every day in the cool vestibule of his temple. And if we are unable to achieve this once more in a higher form, then we Europeans will no longer have any right to superiority over the East. The English, who in their sense of nationalism and in their exclusive cultivation of their own race, possess a kind of ersatz religion, are thus the only Westerners who have achieved real power and real cultural significance out here.

My ship sails on and on. The day before yesterday, the untamable sun of Asia still burned down on the deck. We sat there blithely in our thin white clothes and drank ice-cold drinks. Now we are already closer to the European winter, which will soon greet us with cold and rain showers in Port Said. Then the hot coasts of the Eastern isles and the blistering Singapore noon will regain their glamor in our memory. But none of that will ever be as dear and valuable to me as the potent sense of unity and close relatedness of all human beings that I found among the Indians, Malays, Chinese, and Japanese.

ASIAN TRAVELERS

One thing continued to strike me daily more and more strongly from the moment I laid eyes on my first Asian port and as long as I continued to travel in the East—how much the Asians travel! In the West, in Europe and America, traveling and "modern transport" are considered to be our Western specialties. So for example, the average citizen anywhere in Europe sees a train trip of more than six or eight hours as a noteworthy journey. A shop assistant or a porter who has perhaps been to Paris, to Geneva, to Nice, or even to Naples, has the reputation of a worldly man, someone who has gotten around in the world. In Asia, it is otherwise. In India, Indochina, the Archipelago, and in much of China, the people travel infinitely more than we do. For simple people of the lower classes to travel two, three, six, or ten days is considered nothing special. If one of us travels from Colombo to Batavia he thinks of himself as an enterprising chap, and he is astounded to learn that a sea voyage of three weeks, a train trip of many days, means nothing to an Asian.

The coolie who carries your suitcase for you in Singapore comes from Hankou. The small shopkeeper from whom you buy a bathing suit in Penang or Kuala Lumpur is at home in Peking. The Malay salesman who sells you suspenders and boots in Sumatra has done the hajj, the pilgrim's journey to Mecca, which means a trip of roughly twenty days each way, three times what it takes to make the trip from Europe to America and back.

If one of our peasants personally sells his potatoes or apples in the nearby big town and has to travel three hours by train to do it, for us that is a big thing. Poor, half-wild natives on a Malayan island travel with their load of rattan or their small amount of wool for four, six, or ten days downhill through the primeval forest to get to their nearest port town and need twice as long to get back. Individual Indian merchants from northern India make long, rugged, strenuous, and

dangerous trips every few years through Tibet to China, or to Lake Baikal, or even as far as Moscow. In Pelaiang near Jambi in southern Sumatra, we had a Chinese cook whose family lived near Shanghai and whom he regularly visited! The Chinese wholesalers in the Straits, in Java, and so on, nearly all still have property in China, often also wives and children, and often travel back and forth between the two places, over a distance comparable to that between Naples and Moscow. There are also Indian and Arabic merchants who have branches in Colombo or Bombay and as far away as Peking and for whom a sea voyage of three weeks is a small, oft-repeated business trip.

Add to that all the many pilgrim journeys! People from Siam and Burma go on pilgrimages to Ceylon. The faithful from Java and Sumatra go on the pilgrimage to Mecca, and the pious from extreme southern India go on pilgrimage to Benares. Compared to those journeys, the pilgrimage of one of our poor farmers from the Lake Constance region to Lourdes is a mere trifle.

The last Asian travelers of this kind I saw were two Mohammedans from Java. They boarded our ship in Singapore and traveled as representatives of a Mohammedan company to Suez. From there they were to go to Tripoli, gather reliable information on the war there, and report back home concerning the best ways to morally and financially support their brothers in the faith in their war efforts.

PART TWO

POETRY

and

SHORT FICTION

OFF THE COAST OF AFRICA

Having a home is good,
Sweet is sleep under the home roof
By the children, the garden, the dog. But oh,
Hardly back from the last journey
The far-away tempts you yet again.
Homesickness is better,
To be alone under the stars with your longing.
Rest and ease you can only own
When the heart beats easy.
But the wanderer bears the brunt of travel.
His expectations are always disappointed.
Yet the wanderer's troubles are easier
Than peace at home.
Only the wise man finds happiness
Amid home's joys and cares.
I would rather seek without ever finding
Than be tucked and warm and tied to nearness,
For in the country of happiness while on this earth,
I can never be an owner, only a guest.

EVENING ON THE RED SEA

Out of the burning wastes
Skuds a poisonous wind.
The sea waits, dark, almost motionless.
A hundred rushing gulls are our guides through this yawning hell.
Lightning shoots on the sky's rim—without power—
Unknown rain's goodness in this cursed land.
But over there, bright and cheerful,
A peaceful cloud floats alone.
God put it there for us—
We shall not suffer uncomforted
In this world alone.

Never will I forget this endless desert,
This cruel hell,
The hottest place on earth.
But that smiling cloud floating there
Is the sign I need, for heavy weather I know soon
Is coming to menace my life's noon.

ARRIVAL IN CEYLON

Tall palms on the beach,
Shining sea, naked oarsmen in the boat,
Ancient sacred country
Eternally ablaze in the fire of the young sun,
Blue mountains lost in mist and dream,
Dazzling peaks scarcely visible for the sun.

The glaring beach receives me,
Strange trees stare rigidly into space,
Multicolored houses reel in the sun's heat,
Human noise dins from the shimmering street.

Gratefully my gaze takes in the crowd—
After endless ocean, what a sweet change!
My heart clenches with joy,
It beats with love, drunk on the bliss of travel.

NIGHT IN THE CABIN

The sea clangs on the wall,
In the little round window the night goes blue
And exhales hot desert breath.
I wake for the tenth time,
Lie still in the airless inferno,
And never fall asleep.
Like a primal heart
The engine throbs on and on, hot and moaning,
Senselessly strains in blind pain without salvation
Through ever new distances.

For one whose heart is not clear and fast
And bright like a crystal
Such a place is no nest.
He is pursued by longing and relentlessly pines for home.
Unquiet love follows him everywhere
And makes him poor;
And all things watch him with wild demonic eyes
For he bears the enemy in his own breast
And can never escape him.

JUNGLE RIVER

For a thousand years it flows through the forest
And sees the huts of naked brown people
Of wood and reeds appear and pass away.
Its brown water pours lukewarm
Over leaf and branch and dark jungle slime
And ferments in steep burning rays of sun.
At night the tiger comes, and the elephant
Noisily bathes its sweltering powers
And trumpets its brute sensuality through the forest.
On the bank the heavy crocodile steams in the mire and reeds
Today as a thousand or a hundred thousand years ago.
Reserved and slim, the wild jaguar breaks through the cane.

Here I live quiet days in the forest
In a reed hut, in a light dugout
And seldom does a sound from the human world
Awaken my sleeping memories.
But in the evening, when the sudden night
Falls fell, I stand by the river and listen
And hear here and there and far and near
Stray sounds,
The song of human voices in the night.
Those are fishermen and hunters
In their light boats surprised by dusk.
Profound childlike fear makes their hearts wilt in their breasts,
Fear of the night and of the crocodile
And of the ghosts of the dead

Stirring at night over the dark stream.
The song is strange, no word familiar,
Yet it does not sound different from an evening song
At home on the Rhine or Neckar,
Of a fisherman or a maid.
I breathe fear and breathe longing
And the wild forest and the alien dark stream
Are like home to me.
For here as everywhere where people are
Uncertain souls approach their gods
Conjuring the dread of night with a song.

Turning home to the hut's meager protection,
I lie down, the forest and the night all around
And the lucid, shrill song of cicadas,
Till sleep take me away and till the moon
Comfort the frightened world with its cool shimmer.

COMFORTLESS

No path leads back to the origin;
There is no host of stars
No forest, stream, or sea
To comfort the soul and make it happy.

There is no tree, no river, no beast
That can reach the heart;
To your heart comfort comes
Only from someone like you.

CHINESE NIGHT PARTY IN SINGAPORE

Under the swaying lights
Up there on the garlanded balcony
They squat at peace in the festive night,
Sing songs of long dead poets,
Harken in bliss to the twanging lute
Which makes the maidens' eyes bigger and more beautiful.

Through the starless night the music rings
Like the beat of crystal dragonfly wings.
Brown eyes laugh in unspoken joy—
No eye without a smile!
Down below, sleepless, its thousand bright lights like eyes,
The shining city waits by the sea.

ON THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

Every night home is near
Before my dream-happy eyes
As though it were still mine.

Yet still I must wander long
And in the fiery sun of faraway isles
Compel my heart to peace
By singing to it and rocking it
Like a stubborn child.
And always it defies me
Will not come to peace
For it is weak and wild
As children are.

AT NIGHT

At night when the sea rocks me
And the pale glow of stars
Lies upon the broad waves
Then I set myself completely free
From all doing and loving
And stand still and just breathe
Alone, alone, rocked by the sea
Lying with a thousand lights still and cold about me.
Then in thought I see my friends
And sink my gaze in theirs
And ask each one, still and alone,
Are you still mine?
Is my pain a pain for you, and is my death a death?
Do you feel my love, my need?
Just an echo, just a breath?

And calmly the sea looks on in silence
And smiles: No.
And nowhere is there greeting or reply.

PELAIANG

The night is bright with lightning
Twitching with white light
Flaring wild, mad, glaring
Over the forest, the river, and my pale face.
Leaning on the cool trunk of a bamboo
I stand and look on, quite detached
At the rain-whipped, pallid land
Which longs for peace.
And from my distant youth
Flashing through the rain-dark gloom
Comes a cry of joy
That everything is not empty after all
That everything is not yet hollow and dark
That storms still scatter light and rain
And beyond the vacant flow of days
Shine secrets and wild wonders.
Breathing deep, I listen to the thunder
And feel the storm wet in my hair
And for an instant am awake like a tiger
And happy as I was in childhood days
And since childhood days have never been.

IN SIGHT OF COLOMBO

The hot day flickers out in green light,
The ship cuts the waves, still and steady.
To go through this world so still and sure,
Through battle and night to be so firm
Was the goal of my journey, but I learned nothing.
Still waiting, I turn home,
Keen for a new day's ups and downs,
Interested in life's cruelty.

Stillness and the way of stars is not for me
I am a wave, a tippy boat
By every storm my heart is tossed,
Bruised and thrown by the every breeze.
As far and farther yet I traveled
I found only myself, and from my journey
Come home with wanderlust,
Still raring for life's pains and pleasures,
Looking for new games and struggles.
From all my adventures, I've escaped unhealed.
I'm a child of earth, not of the stars.
My mind is restless, the wind blows me.
I'm rocked by sea, roused by storm.
Consoled by light, afraid at night.
And though a hundred times in the thick of life
I've prayed for wisdom and fought for peace,
My destiny lies with the earth,
To be like her who gave me birth.

ROBERT AGHION

In the course of the eighteenth century—which like any other time can show us many faces and which is by no means exhaustively portrayed by images from chivalrous novels or by ornamental porcelain figures—in Great Britain a new kind of Christianity and Christian activity emerged, which rather quickly grew from a tiny root into a big, exotic tree, and which today is called "the evangelical mission to the heathens." There was also a Catholic version of this, but this did not represent anything new or different, since from the very beginning the Roman Church shaped itself and behaved like a world empire, whose rights, duties, and obvious tasks included the subjugation or conversion of all peoples, and this project was at all times vigorously pursued, sometimes in the holy, loving style of the Irish monks, sometimes in the more abrupt and relentless manner of Charlemagne. But in sharp contrast to this, the various Protestant communities and churches developed as national churches, and this is where they most clearly distinguished themselves from the universal church of the Catholics. Each of them served the spiritual needs of a particular nation, race, and language. For example, Hus served the Bohemians, Luther the Germans, and Wycliffe the English.

Now though this Protestant missionary movement that began in England actually contradicted the essence of the Protestant Church and justified itself by referring to the original apostolic writings, on the surface there was little occasion for it to have to do this. Since the glorious age of discovery when people had gone off in every direction discovering and conquering, the initial scientific interest in the character of distant islands and mountains as well as the heroism of seafarers and adventurers had everywhere given way to a new modern spirit. Now people were no longer interested in daring feats and new experiences in newly discovered exotic regions, no longer interested in strange animals and palm forests. Now instead they wanted pepper and sugar, silk and fur, rice and sago—in brief, things that were good

for making money in international trade. In pursuit of these things, they were frequently rather one-sided and violent, and they forgot and violated many of the rules they had observed in Christian Europe. A great number of terrified natives were hunted down and shot like vermin, and educated Christian Europeans carried on in America, Africa, and India like foxes breaking into a henhouse. One does not have to be particularly sensitive to see that all this was quite abominable. So much crude and beastly pillaging and plundering occurred that shame and revulsion were aroused in the people back home, and this is what eventually led to an orderly and decent approach to colonization. Our missionary movement was part of this new approach. It was founded on an altogether proper and worthy desire for the poor and defenseless heathen peoples of nature to receive something better and more uplifted from Europe than just gunpowder and booze.

Think what you will concerning the nature, value, significance, and effectiveness of this mission to the heathens, it remains quite certain that like other genuine religious movements it sprang from a pure heart and will; that noble and not unimportant men founded it with true conviction and intention; and up to the present time it has had many men of such quality in its service. If they were not all heroes and wise men, there were at least some of that kind of men among them, and if certain individuals were disreputable in their behavior, still it would be unreasonable to blacken the name of the whole movement on their account.

But enough of prefatory remarks! In the second half of the century before last, it was not rare in England for well-meaning and benevolent private persons to actively adopt this missionary idea and donate funds for its realization. However, regular companies and organizations intended for this purpose, like the ones we have today, did not exist at that time. Instead, each individual tried to promote and further this good purpose in his own way and in accordance with the means he had at hand, and the person who set out for distant countries as a missionary in those days did not, as people do these days, travel over the sea like a well-addressed piece of mail and arrive at a well-regulated and organized workstation. Rather he traveled with trust in God and without much preparation straightway into a dubious adventure.

Sometime in the 1790s a London entrepreneur, whose brother had

made a fortune in India and had died there without any children, decided to dedicate a considerable sum of money to the spreading of the Gospel in that country. A member of the mighty East India Company as well as several clerics were taken on as advisors, and they developed a plan in accordance with which, to begin with, three or four young men, properly equipped and provided with a decent amount of money, should be sent out as missionaries.

The announcement of this enterprise immediately attracted a swarm of adventurous manhood—all sorts of unsuccessful actors, discharged barber's assistants, and so on, saw themselves called upon to undertake this attractive journey, and the pious council had to make a considerable effort to look past these intruders in order to seek out serious and worthy men. Without saying so, they were particularly hoping to attract young theologians; however, the English clergy on the whole were not at all tired of the homeland nor the slightest bit keen on strenuous, dangerous enterprises. Thus the search dragged on and on, and the founding patron began getting impatient.

At last the news of his intentions as well as his lack of success found its way to a farming village in the vicinity of Lancaster and to the vicarage there, whose venerable master was providing room and board to a nephew named Robert Aghion, a son of his brother, whom he was modestly employing as his assistant. Robert Aghion was the son of a ship's captain and a hardworking Scotswoman. He had lost his father early and had hardly known him. Thus as a boy with good faculties he was sent to school by an uncle of his, who had earlier on been in love with Robert's mother. Robert was properly trained for a career in the ministry, and was now as well qualified a candidate for such a position as a person with good references but no private means could be. In the meantime he was assisting his uncle and benefactor in his vicar's duties, and could not reckon on a parish of his own as long as his uncle was alive. Since the worthy vicar was still a healthy and vigorous man in his late fifties, his nephew's future did not look all that bright. As a poor lad with little prospect of coming into his own position and income before his middle years, he was no enviable match for a young woman, at least not for an honorable one, and he had never come in contact with any other kind.

Thus, like his destiny itself, his state of mind was not free from dark clouds, but they hung over his modest and innocent nature more like weighty decorations than dangerous obstacles. True, as a healthy man

with simple feelings, he did not see why a person like himself who had completed his studies and been dignified with the clerical office should stand in love's fortunes and in the opportunity to marry behind every young farmer or weaver or wool spinner, and when occasionally he accompanied a wedding ceremony on the small fragile organ of the village church, his state of mind was not always free from discontent and envy. But his simple nature itself taught him to keep impossibilities out of his thoughts and to focus instead on what was open to him in view of his capabilities and station in life, and that was not at all inconsiderable. As the son of a deeply pious mother, he had straightforward, tried-and-true Christian sensibilities and Christian faith, to sermonize upon which was a joy to him. But he found his true spiritual pleasures in the contemplation of nature, for which he had a keen eye. He had not, however, the slightest inkling of those bold, revolutionary, positivistic sciences of nature that were coming into being just during his time and in his country and would later sour the lives of so many clergymen. Instead, as a modest, fresh young man without philosophical concerns but with capable eyes and hands, he found complete satisfaction in seeing and knowing, gathering and examining, the things of nature he encountered. As a boy, he had bred flowers and taken an interest in botany and had then avidly occupied himself with stones and fossils. In regard to the latter, of course, he did no more than venerate nature's wondrous and suggestive play of forms. Most recently, since he had been spending his time in rural surroundings, he had become especially fond of the colorful world of insects. His favorite thing of all was butterflies, whose amazing transformation out of the pupal and larval stages never failed to enchant him. In particular, their exquisite markings and soft blend of saturated colors gave him the kind of pleasure that a less talented person can only experience in the impressionable years of early childhood.

Such was the makeup of the young theologian who was among the first to sit up and take notice of the foundation's announcement, and who immediately upon hearing it felt a sense of longing in his inmost being that felt just like a compass needle pointing to India. His mother had died a few years ago and he was not engaged to any young woman nor had he even made a secret promise to one. His uncle did indeed earnestly express his misgivings about the prospect, but in the end he proved to be an upright man of the cloth who knew that his nephew was not at all indispensable to him in his work. The young man wrote

to London, received an encouraging answer as well as money for the trip to the capital, and he happily departed at once for London, following a stern leave-taking from his uncle, who was still angry and continued to issue emphatic warnings. The young man took with him a small box of books and a bundle of clothes, sad only that he could not also bring along his herbaria and his fossil and butterfly cases.

Eager and anxious, this candidate for India entered the tall, solemn-looking house of the pious merchant in the somber, blustering old city of London. There in a dim corridor his future was held up before his eyes by a huge wall map of the Eastern Hemisphere and then, in the first room, by a big, mottled tiger skin. Apprehensive and confused, he let himself be conducted by an elegant servant to the room where the merchant awaited him. The man who received him was a large, serious, well-shaven gentleman with sharp, ice-blue, eyes, who despite his stern mien, after only a short bit of conversation, found the shy applicant quite to his liking. He invited him to sit down and continued the interview with an air of trust and benevolence. He then had the young man hand over his written curriculum vitae and his references and rang for a servant, who after brief instruction silently led the theologian away to a guest room, where immediately a second servant appeared with tea, wine, ham, and bread and butter. The young man was left alone with this snack and proceeded to satisfy his hunger and thirst. Afterward, reassured, he made himself comfortable in a blue velvet armchair, thought over his situation, and idly inspected the room. After a brief look around he discovered two further representatives of a distant, hot clime. In one corner, next to the fireplace, was a stuffed, red-brown monkey, and hanging above it on a blue silk panel was the tanned skin of a huge snake, whose eyeless head hung down limp and blind. These were things he appreciated, and he immediately hurried over to look at them close up and run his hands over them. Though the notion of a living boa, which he tried to strengthen by rolling the shining silvery skin into a tube, was somewhat gruesome and abhorrent, nevertheless his curiosity toward mysterious faraway places full of wonders was roused yet further by the sight of it. He felt he ought not let himself be frightened by either snakes or monkeys, and with delight painted a picture in his mind of the fabulous flowers, trees, birds, and butterflies that must thrive in those blessed lands.

Meanwhile, it was nearly evening, and a mute servant brought a lit lamp in. Out the high window, which gave on a lifeless back alley, it

was foggy twilight. The silence of the elegant house, the distant, faint hurly-burly of the big city, the loneliness of the high, cool rooms in which he felt as though imprisoned, the lack of anything whatever for him to do, and the dramatic uncertainty of his situation—all these things combined with the oncoming darkness of the London autumn night to bring the mood of the young man ever further down from the peak of his optimism, until after two hours, which he spent waiting in his armchair for some sign, he gave up every expectation for the day. Without further ado he lay down in the excellent guest bed and in a short time was asleep.

He was awakened, in what seemed to him the middle of the night, by a servant with the message that the young man was expected for dinner, and would he be so kind as to make haste. Half asleep, Aghion crawled into his clothes and, bleary-eyed, stumbled after the man through rooms and corridors and down a flight of stairs until they reached the large dining room, brightly lit by great chandeliers, where the lady of the house, clothed in velvet and sparkling with jewelry, peered at him through a lorgnette, and the master of the house introduced him to two clergymen. During the meal, the latter proceeded at once to sharply examine their younger brother, especially seeking to probe the genuineness of his Christian convictions. The sleep-drunk apostle had trouble understanding all the questions much less answering them, but his shyness sat well on him and the men, who were accustomed to quite another sort of aspirant, were all well-disposed toward him. After the meal in the adjoining room, maps were laid out, and Aghion for the first time saw the region where he was to proclaim the Word of God. It appeared on the map of India as a yellow dot south of the city of Bombay.

The next day he was brought to see a venerable old gentleman who was the merchant's chief spiritual advisor and for years had been confined to his study on account of his gout. The old man immediately felt drawn to the guileless young man. Without subjecting him to any questions concerning the faith, he very quickly came to an understanding of Robert's mind and being and, since he perceived little missionary zeal in him, began to feel sorry for the young fellow. He began vividly describing to him the dangers of the sea voyage and the horrors of tropical regions; for it seemed senseless to him for a fresh, young man to offer himself up and perhaps perish out there when he did not possess the talents and aspirations that would suit him to such service. Thus he laid a friendly hand on the candidate's

shoulder, looked him in a kindly manner deep in the eye, and said, “Everything you say is all well and good, but I still cannot quite fathom what it is that attracts you to India. Be frank with me, dear friend, and tell me without holding anything back: Is it some sort of worldly desire or urge that compels you, or is it just your inner desire to bring our Gospel to the poor heathen?” At these words Robert Aghion blushed red as a cheat caught in the act. He lowered his eyelids and for a moment held his tongue. But then he confessed in all candor that though he was indeed sincere in his pious intent, it would in truth never have occurred to him to try to go to India or become a missionary at all if his enthusiasm for the wondrous, rare plants and animals of the tropical lands, especially the butterflies, had not drawn him to it. The old man saw clearly that the youth had now given up his ultimate secret and that he had nothing more to confess. Smiling, he nodded to him and said in a kindly way, “This is a sin you must work through on your own. Go to India, my dear boy!” And immediately taking on an air of gravity, he laid both hands on Aghion’s head and blessed him solemnly with biblical words of blessing.

Three weeks later, the young missionary, fully fitted out with trunks and suitcases, sailed away as a passenger on a lovely sailing ship. He watched his homeland sink away in the gray sea, and he became acquainted with the moods and perils of the sea in the first weeks, even before the ship reached Spain. In those days, it was not possible for a traveler to India to arrive as green and unseasoned at his destination as it is now. Today you can board a comfortable steamer, skip Africa by sailing through the Suez Canal, and after a short time, dazed and inert from too much sleeping and eating, you lay eyes on the coast of India. But in those days, sailing vessels had to toil for months around the immensity of Africa, imperiled by storms and becalmed by doldrums for days at a time; and the passenger had to sweat and freeze, to suffer hunger and do without sleep. Thus a man who had successfully completed such a voyage was long since no longer a mother’s child or an untested neophyte. Rather he was a man who had learned to some extent to stand on his own two legs and rely on his own resources. And this was also the case with the young missionary. His journey from England to India took a hundred fifty-six days, and he set foot on land in the port of Bombay as a mariner, tanned and lean.

In the meantime, he had not lost his joy and curiosity, although it had grown somewhat calmer, since during the journey his sense of exploration had made him disembark on every beach and he had

regarded every palm-grown and coral isle with awestruck curiosity. Now he set foot in the land of India with eager, wide-open, grateful, joyous eyes and made his entry into the beautiful, shining city with courage intact.

First he searched for and found the house that had been recommended to him. It was nicely set in a quiet suburban street, with coconut palms hanging over it. To the happy newcomer, under the broad leaves and with its windows open, it looked like an ideal Indian home. As he was entering, though at the moment he had more important things to do and to look at, he had just time to notice a dark-leaved shrub with large golden yellow flowers, around which a host of lovely white butterflies were gaily fluttering. With this image in his somewhat bedazzled eyes, he climbed over the few low steps that lay in the shade of the broad veranda and walked through the open door of the house. A Hindu servant in white clothing with bare, dark-brown limbs came across the cool tile floor to meet him, made a respectful bow, and began speaking to him in nasal, singsong Hindustani. He was quick to see, however, that the foreigner did not understand a word, and he conducted him with further fawning bows and serpent-like gestures of respect and invitation deeper into the house and to a doorway that, instead of a door for closure, had a bast mat hanging in it. At once the hanging was pulled aside from within, and a big, gaunt, imperious-looking man appeared, wearing white tropical clothes and straw sandals on his bare feet. He directed a stream of abuse in an incomprehensible Indian language at the servant, who made himself small and slunk away along the wall. Then he turned to Aghion and, in English, bade him come in.

The missionary first tried to excuse his unannounced arrival and to justify the poor servant, who was not guilty of any wrongdoing. But the man made an impatient motion with his hand and said, “You’ll soon learn how to deal with these knavish servants. Come in, I’ve been expecting you.”

“You are Mr. Bradley, then?” asked the newcomer politely. Taking his first step into this exotic household and looking at his advisor, teacher, and colleague, a feeling of alienation and cold arose in him.

“Yes, of course, I’m Bradley, and you of course are Aghion. So Aghion, do come right ahead in! Have you already had lunch?”

The big, bony man—unhesitatingly, with the brusque, peremptory manner of the experienced overseer and commercial agent that he was

—took the destiny of his guest into his brown, dark-haired hands. He had him served a meal of rice and mutton in a fiery curry sauce, assigned him a room, showed him around the house, answered his first inquisitive questions, and laid out the primary, essential rules of life in India. He set the four brown Hindu servants scurrying about, barking cold, angry orders that echoed through the house. He also called for a master tailor who he charged with immediately making Aghion a dozen outfits of the sort that suited local custom. With gratitude and somewhat intimidated, the newcomer accepted all this, though it would have been more to his taste to have made his entry into India a quieter and more stately affair. He would have liked first to have made himself a bit at home and to have unbosomed himself in friendly conversation concerning his first impressions here as well as the many strong impressions he had had of his journey. However, in the course of a sea voyage of a half a year, one learns to make do with all kinds of situations and when as evening approached Mr. Bradley went off to take care of his commercial business in town, the young evangelist breathed a happy sigh of relief and decided now to celebrate his arrival quietly in his own manner and go out and greet the land of India.

Solemnly, after quickly tidying it up a bit, he left his airy room—which instead of doors or windows had big empty openings in each wall—and set off into the outside world with a broad-brimmed hat with a long sun veil on his blonde head and a sturdy walking stick in his hand. With his first step into the garden, he took a deep breath, looked eagerly around him, and with heightened senses drew in the air, the odors, the light, and the colors of this strange, legendary land that he, in a modest way, was to help conquer, and to which now, after such long waiting and anxious anticipation, he was inclined to abandon himself to without holding back.

He liked very much all that he saw and sensed around him, which seemed to him like a radiant, thousandfold confirmation of his many dreams and visions. High, dense bushes stood round and succulent in the potent sunlight, covered with large, marvelous, vividly colored flowers. On their slender, smooth, pillar-like trunks, the still crowns of the coconut palms seemed incredibly high in the air. A fan palm stood behind the house, holding its weird, severely uniform, giant wheel of huge leaves, a man’s height in length, stiff in the air. By the roadside his nature-friendly eye made out a small living being, which he cautiously approached. It was a small green chameleon with a triangular head and evil little eyes. He bent down over it and felt a

childlike feeling of good fortune at having had it granted to him to see such things and to examine the inexhaustible abundance of nature at the very source of her wealth.

Weird music woke him from his rapture. Out of the whispering quiet of the deep green wilderness of garden plants and trees erupted the rhythmic din of metal drums and bass drums and the piercing bright tones of wind instruments. The nature devotee listened dumbfounded, and since nothing could be seen, he was immediately eager to discover the nature and source of this festive, barbaric music. Following the sound, he left the garden, whose gate stood wide open, and was soon walking down a lovely, grassy road through a pleasant cultivated landscape of domestic gardens, palm plantations, and smiling, bright-green rice fields. Coming around the hedge of a park or garden, he found himself on a village-like lane lined with Indian huts. The little houses were made of mud or only bamboo poles, their roofs covered with dry palm leaves. In all the doorways brown Hindu families stood and squatted. He looked at them with curiosity, getting his first glimpse of the humble village life of a foreign nature folk. From the first moment he was fond of these brown people, whose beautiful childlike eyes conveyed an unconscious, unresolvable, animal-like sadness. Beautiful women gazed at him, silent and deer-like, from amid heavy plaits of long, dark-black hair. They wore gold jewelry in their noses, on their wrists and ankles, and had rings on their toes. The little children were completely naked, with nothing on their bodies but strange amulets of silver or horn hung on hempen string.

But he did not stop anywhere, not because he would have felt uncomfortable having all these people curiously staring at him, but because he felt inwardly ashamed of his own fascination with looking at them. Besides, the wild music continued to sound, now from quite nearby, and at the corner of the next street he found what he had been looking for. There stood an incredibly strange edifice of the most fantastic form and of a frightening height, with a huge gate at its center. As he gawked up at it, he saw that the structure's entire immense surface was covered with stone figures of fabulous animals, humans, and gods or devils, crowded one upon another, teeming in their hundreds right up to the distant, narrow pinnacle at the top, a jungle of interwoven bodies, limbs, and heads. This frightening stone colossus, a great Hindu temple, glowed brightly in the horizontal rays of the late-evening sun, clearly proclaiming to the stunned interloper that these animal-like, gentle, half-naked people were by no means an

Eden-dwelling nature folk but had been in possession of ideas, gods, imagery, and religion for thousands of years.

The booming of the big drums had just ended, and from the temple streamed a multitude of pious Indians in white and colored robes, with at their head, separated from the others, a small solemn group of Brahmins, haughty in their millennial learning and dignity. They strode past the white man like proud noblemen walking by a craftsman's apprentice, and neither they nor the humbler figures that followed them seemed likely to be in the least inclined to have themselves instructed on the divine and human aspects of the Law by a recently arrived foreigner.

When the crowd had dispersed and the place had become quieter, Robert Aghion approached the temple and with awkward interest began to study the statuary of the facade. However, he soon turned away perplexed and frightened, for the grotesque allegorical language of these figures, many of which were horrifically ugly (though seemingly executed with a very high level of artistic skill), confused and frightened him no less than the sight of various scenes of shameless obscenity that were unabashedly placed right in the very midst of the host of divinities.

As he turned away and began to look for his way back, the temple and the street suddenly went dark. A play of colors passed briefly over the sky, and abruptly the tropical night fell. The eerily swift onset of darkness, although he was long since familiar with it, sent a slight shiver through the young missionary. With the failing of the light, from the trees and bushes all around came the shrill song and clamor of a thousand great insects, and in the distance he heard the strange, wild call of some beast crying out in wrath or pain. Hurriedly Aghion searched for and, with luck, found his way home. He had not entirely covered the short stretch of road before the entire country around him lay in deep nocturnal darkness, and high above the black heaven was full of stars.

Back at the house, as he, distraught and distracted, was approaching the first lit room, he was met by Mr. Bradley with the words, "So there you are. You know, to begin with, you shouldn't stay out so late in the evening; it's not without danger. By the way, do you know how to handle a gun?"

"A gun? No, I've never learned to do that."

"Then learn soon….Where were you this evening?"

Aghion enthusiastically told his story. He asked eagerly what religion this temple belonged to and what gods or idols were venerated there, what the many figures on the walls meant, what the unusual music was, whether the fine men in white robes were priests, and what their gods were called. But here he met his first disappointment. His mentor claimed to know nothing whatever about any of this. He declared that there was nobody who understood anything about the foul jumble and filth of this idolatrous scene, that the Brahmins were an unholy band of exploiters and idlers, that these Indians altogether were a swinish pack of beggars and fiends, and that a decent Englishman would be best off having nothing to do with them at all.

"But," said Aghion haltingly, "my work is precisely to lead these confused people onto the right path! In order to do that I will have to get acquainted with them and love them and learn everything about them."

"You will soon know more about them than you'd like. Of course you'll have to learn Hindustani and later on maybe some of these other nigger languages. But with love you won't get far."

"Oh, but the people looked so nice and kind!"

"You think so? Well, you'll see. I know nothing whatever about your plans for the Hindus and I make no judgment in that regard. Our job here is gradually to teach this godless bunch a little culture and at least give them some faint notion of decency. Perhaps we'll never be able to do more than that."

"But our morality, or what you call decency, is the morality of Christ, sir!"

"You mean love. Yes, well go ahead and tell a Hindu sometime that you love him. Do that and today he will beg from you, and tomorrow he will steal your shirt from your bedroom!"

"That's possible."

"That is in fact absolutely certain, my dear sir. What you are dealing with here is, as it were, uncivilized people who as yet haven't the slightest inkling of honesty and right; not with sweet English schoolchildren but with a tribe of sly, brown rogues, for whom the vilest behavior is the height of pleasure. You'll remember my words later on."

Aghion sadly abandoned further questioning and resolved to apply himself meekly and diligently for the time being to learning everything

that was to be learned here, but then to go on and do whatever he thought was intelligent and proper. Still one thing was sure: regardless of whether the severe Mr. Bradley was right or not, from the moment he had laid eyes on the monstrous temple and the unapproachably proud Brahmins, his position and mission in this country appeared infinitely more difficult to him than it had ever occurred to him it could be.

The next morning the trunks in which the missionary had packed his possessions from home were brought to the house. Carefully he unpacked, put the shirts with the shirts and the books with the books, and he found himself cast into a pensive state by many of the objects that passed through his hands. There was the small copper engraving in a black frame, whose glass had been broken during the voyage, that portrayed Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*; and his mother's old prayer book that he had been given as a young child; and, as a guide to the future, a map of India given him by his uncle; and two steel hoop nets for catching butterflies that he had had made for himself in London. One of these he immediately put aside to be used in the next days.

By evening his possessions were divided up and stowed, the little copper engraving hung over his bed, and the whole room was tidy and in good order. As had been recommended to him, he had set the legs of his table and his bed in little earthen bowls filled with water to keep the ants away. Mr. Bradley was gone the whole day on business, and the young man found it strange to be invited by the respectful servant to come to meals using signs, and to be served by him at the meals without being able to speak a word to him.

Early the next morning Aghion's work began. A handsome, dark-eyed youth named Vyardenya appeared and was introduced to him by Bradley. He was to be his Hindustani language teacher. The smiling young Indian spoke not bad English and had the best manners. However, he shrank fearfully back when the guileless Englishman reached out in a friendly manner to shake hands with him, and from then on the Indian avoided all bodily contact with the white man, which since he belonged to a high caste, would have rendered him impure. He also definitely never wanted to sit in a chair that a foreigner had used before him. Instead each day he brought his own fine bast mat neatly rolled up under his arm. This he spread on the tile floor and sat cross-legged on it, noble and erect. His pupil, whose

enthusiasm he must have been well pleased with, tried to learn this art from him as well, and during his lessons the Englishman always sat on a similar mat on the floor, even though at the beginning all his limbs were in pain. At last he became accustomed to it. With diligence and patience he learned everything the youth tirelessly and smilingly pronounced for him word by word, beginning with the everyday formula of greeting. He threw himself afresh every day into the struggle with the Indian guttural and palatal sounds, which at the beginning sounded to him like inarticulate gurgling but which little by little he learned to distinguish and imitate.

Hindustani being as interesting as it was, the lessons in the morning hours with the courteous language teacher, who always behaved like a prince obliged by need to give lessons in a middle-class house, went by quite fast, but the afternoons and evenings were long enough for the hardworking Mr. Aghion to experience the loneliness in which he lived. His host, with whom his relationship was ambivalent, who related to him half as a patron and half as a kind of supervisor, was not often at home. Most of the time he came back from the city, either on foot or horseback, around noon, and presided as the master of the house over meals, to which he occasionally brought an English clerk. Then he lay down for two or three hours to smoke and sleep on the veranda, and toward evening he went for another few hours to his office or warehouse. From time to time he had to go away on a trip for several days to do buying, and his housemate had little against this, for with the best will in the world he was unable to make friends with this rough and word-stingy businessman. Also there was a fair amount in the way Mr. Bradley lived his life that the missionary did not like. Among other things, from time to time in the evening Bradley and the clerk sat around and drank a mixture of water, rum, and lime juice until they got drunk. They had invited the young clergyman to join them at this in the beginning, but he had always gently declined.

Under these circumstances, Aghion's daily life was not particularly amusing. He had tried to make use of his feeble beginner's language ability by going, during the long vacant afternoons when the wooden house was beset on every side by stifling heat, to visit the staff in the kitchen and trying to converse with them. Though the Mohammedan cook gave him no reply and was so stuck up that he pretended not even to see him, the water carrier and the houseboy, who squatted idly on their mats for hours and chewed betel, had nothing against having some fun with the young master's labored linguistic efforts.

But one day Bradley showed up at the kitchen door just as the two rascals were slapping their skinny thighs with delight over some errors and word mix-ups on the part of the missionary. Bradley beheld the merrymaking and bit his lip. With lightning speed, he delivered a slap to the boy, a kick to the water carrier, and yanked the terrified, dumbstruck Aghion out of there. Back in his room he said somewhat angrily, “How many times do I have to tell you not to have anything to do with these people! You are spoiling the boys for me, of course with the best intentions, but nevertheless it is simply not acceptable to have an Englishman making a fool out of himself in front of these brown rascals.”

Then he walked out, before the insulted Aghion could justify himself.

The lonely missionary got to be with people only on Sundays, when he regularly went to church. Once he even had to give the sermon in place of the less-than-industrious English minister. But he who had preached with love to the farmers and weavers of his district found himself out of place and alien in front of this emotionally distant congregation of businesspeople, tired, sickly ladies, and young employees out for fun. The cold-blooded commercial or exploitative bent of these people, who were bleeding this rich land for whatever they could get but had not a single kind word for the natives, was painful to him. Gradually this created a bias in his way of looking at things, and he always took the side of the Hindus and spoke of the obligations of the Europeans toward the native peoples, thus making himself both unpopular and ridiculous. Or else he was simply looked down upon as an idealistic and naive young man.

At times when he was troubled over his situation and feeling sorry for himself, there was one consolation that never entirely failed him. He would equip himself for an outing, hang his botanical specimen boxes over his shoulder, and take up his butterfly net, which he had fitted out with a long, thin bamboo pole. The very thing about which most other Englishmen were wont to complain bitterly, the searing heat and the Indian climate in general, was just what filled him with delight and wonder. For he kept himself fresh in body and mind and never let himself cave in to it. This country was in every way an inexhaustible trove for his passionate interest in nature. Every step of the way unknown trees, flowers, birds, and insects drew his attention, and he resolved that with time he would come to know them all by name. Strange lizards and scorpions, huge, fat millipedes, and other

goblin-like creatures scarcely frightened him anymore, and since the time he had beaten a fat snake to death in the bathroom with a wooden bucket, his fear of unexpected dangers from animals had more or less disappeared.

The first time he used his net he caught a big, gorgeous butterfly. He picked up the proud, radiant creature in cautious fingers and saw its broad strong wings glowing in alabaster hues dusted with colorful down. His heart beat with a boundless joy he had not felt since as a boy, after a long breathless chase, he had caught his first swallowtail. Gladly he accustomed himself to the discomforts of the jungle and did not lose heart when deep in its wilds he got stuck in a mud pit, was mocked by herds of monkeys, or was attacked by angry ant tribes. Only once he found himself cowering on his knees, shaking and pleading, behind an immense rubber tree as nearby, like a combined storm and earthquake, a troop of elephants crashed through the dense thicket. He got used to being awakened in his open-air bedroom in the early morning by the cries of irate apes in the nearby forest and by night to hearing the howling of jackals. His eyes would shine bright and wakeful in his lean, brown, and now manly face.

He became increasingly familiar with the city as well, particularly the peaceful, garden-like outer districts. The more he saw of the Hindu people, the better he liked them. The one thing he found quite awkward was the custom of the lower class of allowing their women to walk around the street naked from the waist up. Seeing the naked necks and arms and breasts of the women on the street was something the missionary could not get used to, although it was quite often a very appealing sight, and the women's nakedness gained in naturalness through the deep bronze hue of their sun-hardened skin and the open, uninhibited manner with which they carried themselves.

Next to this indecency, nothing bothered him and stayed so much on his mind as the riddle that the spiritual life of these people represented for him. Religion was everywhere, wherever he looked. In London on the highest church holiday there was surely not as much piety on display as could be seen here on every workday in every street. Everywhere were temples and sacred images, prayer and sacrifice, processions and ceremonies, penitents and priests. But how could it ever be possible to make sense of this jumble of religions? There were Brahmins, Mohammedans, fire worshipers, and Buddhists, devotees of Shiva and Krishna, turban wearers and believers with smoothly shaven

heads, snake worshipers, and servants of sacred tortoises. Who was the God whom all these errant believers served? What did he look like and which of the many cults was the oldest, holiest, and purest? This was a question nobody knew the answer to and to which the Indians themselves were entirely indifferent. Whoever was not satisfied with the faith of his fathers moved on to a different one or set forth into the world as a penitent to find a new religion or even create one. Food in small bowls was offered to gods and spirits whose names no one knew, and all these many divine cults, temples, and priesthoods existed happily side by side without it ever occurring to the followers of one faith to hate the others or much less kill them, as is the custom with us at home in the Christian countries. Much of what he saw he found lovely and charming—flute music, sweet flower offerings; and in many faces there was a peace and a lighthearted serenity that one might seek in vain in the faces of Englishmen. Another beautiful and sacred thing, as he saw it, was the Hindus' strictly observed commandment not to kill any animal, and from time to time he felt ashamed of, and tried to justify, his own practice of mercilessly killing beautiful butterflies and beetles and impaling them on pins. On the other hand, among these same people, for whom every worm was a holy creature of God and who showed heartfelt devotion in their prayers and temple rites, thievery and lies, false witness and breaches of trust were very much everyday things, over which not a soul lost his temper or was even surprised. The more the well-meaning religious envoy pondered these matters, the more this people became for him an impenetrable riddle beyond all theory and logic. He soon again began to engage in conversation with the servant Bradley had forbidden him to speak to. At one point, they had even seemed to reach a state of deep heart-to-heart understanding, but an hour later the servant stole a wool shirt from him. And when, sternly but not unkindly, he confronted the fellow with the matter, at first the servant denied the deed under oath and then with a smile admitted everything. He showed the missionary the shirt and trustingly explained that since the shirt already had a small hole in it, he had felt sure that the master would never want to wear it again.

Another time it was the water carrier who provided amazement. This man received his salary and his board for providing the kitchen and the two bathrooms every day with water from the nearby cistern. He always did this work in the early morning and in the evening. The entire remainder of the day he either sat in the kitchen or in the

servants' hut and either chewed betel nuts or a piece of sugarcane. Once, since the other servant had gone out, Aghion gave him a pair of trousers to brush out that he had gotten full of grass seed on a walk. The man just laughed and put his hands behind his back, and when the missionary lost his patience and strictly ordered him to do the small task at once, finally he went along and did the job amid grumbling and tears, then sat himself down inconsolably in the kitchen and raved for an hour like a person in utter despair. Through a great deal of effort and after working through a great number of misunderstandings, Aghion finally brought to light that he had seriously offended the man by ordering him to carry out a task that was not part of his duties.

All these little experiences gradually coalesced into a kind of glass wall that separated the missionary from his surroundings and cast him into an ever more painful solitude. He devoted himself all the more strenuously, even desperately, to his language studies and made good progress. This fed his passionate hope that the door to understanding this strange people might someday open. Now ever more frequently he dared to address local people on the street. He went without a translator to the tailor, to the grocer, to the shoemaker. At times he succeeded at getting in conversations with simple folk. He would chat with an artisan about his work, or with a mother, warmly praising her infant. In the words and glances of these heathen folk, and especially in their kind, childlike, happy laughter, their soul spoke to him so clearly and fraternally that at times all barriers fell away and the feeling of foreignness vanished.

Finally he came to the conclusion that the local children and simple people were almost always accessible to him, and that in fact all the problems, all the untrustworthiness and corruption of the city folk, were derived from contact with the European sailors and businesspeople. From that time on, he found himself taking excursions farther and farther into the interior of the country, often on horseback. He brought along small copper coins in his pocket and also often pieces of sugar for the children, and when, far inland in the hilly landscape, he tied his horse to a palm outside a farmer's mud hut and ventured underneath the roof of reeds, gave his greeting, and asked for a drink of water or coconut milk, almost always an innocent, friendly interaction and a bit of chitchat ensued, during which the men, women, and children often broke out gaily laughing over his linguistic inadequacies—something that did not bother him in the least.

As yet, on such occasions he had made no effort to tell people about the dear Lord. Not only did it seem to him that there was no hurry, but also it was quite a tricky and almost impossible undertaking, since he was unable to find any Indian words for the commonest expressions of biblical belief. In addition, he felt that he had no right to put himself forward as a teacher to these people and ask them to make significant changes in their lives before he had a good understanding of them and was capable to some extent of being with them and talking to them on an equal footing.

This caused him to extend his studies further. He tried to learn about the life, work, and livelihood of the native people. He had them show him trees and fruits, domestic animals and implements, and tell him their names. Little by little he learned the secrets of wet and dry rice cultivation, the production of bast and wool. He observed house construction and pottery making as well as basket work and cloth weaving, which he knew something about from home. He watched muddy rice paddies being plowed by pink-red water buffalo. He learned about the work of domesticated elephants and saw tame monkeys fetch ripe coconuts out of tall trees for their masters.

Once, on one of his excursions in a peaceful valley among high green hills, he was overtaken by a heavy rainstorm from which he sought shelter in the nearest hut. He found the members of a small family gathered in the small room between the mud-clad bamboo walls. They greeted the foreigner with shy astonishment. The mother of the family had dyed her gray hair fiery red with henna and displayed, with her friendly welcoming smile, a mouthful of equally red teeth, the result of her lifelong passion for betel nuts. Her husband was a big fellow with serious eyes and long, still-dark hair. He rose from the floor and assumed a royally erect posture to exchange words of greeting with the guest. He then offered him a freshly opened coconut, from which the Englishman took a swallow of sweet juice. A small boy, who had fled behind the stone hearth at the stranger’s entrance, flashed him a look of fearful curiosity from beneath his forest of shining black hair. On his dark breast glowed a brass amulet, which was his only ornament as well as his only clothing. A big bunch of bananas had been hung over the door to ripen. The whole hut, whose only light came through the open doorway, conveyed no feeling of poverty but rather one of utter simplicity and a lovely, pure order.

At the sight of this domestic contentment, a peaceful homey feeling

arose out of the distant depths of childhood memory and gently touched the traveler, a peaceful homey feeling he had never felt a trace of in Mr. Bradley's bungalow. As it came over him now, it seemed to the missionary that the refuge he had found here was not only that of a wanderer caught in the rain but also that of a man lost in life's dark troubles who was now once more coming to feel the meaningfulness and joy of a right and natural, fulfilling way of life. The fierce, loud rain pounded down on the reed roof of the hut and formed a sheet like a glass wall outside the doorway.

The elders chatted in a happy and uninhibited manner with their unusual guest, and when they finally politely asked him the inevitable question—what then was his goal and purpose in this country—he became embarrassed and began to talk about other things. Once again, as so often before, it seemed to the modest Aghion tremendously cheeky and pretentious that he had been sent here as the emissary of a distant people with the intention of taking away the god and faith of this people and requiring them to replace it with another. He had always thought that this diffidence would fade away when he reached greater mastery of the Hindu language, but today it became clear without a doubt that this had been a self-deception, and that the better he understood the brown people, the less he felt within himself the right or the desire to interfere in their life as their master.

The rain subsided. Water, shot through with rich red earth, ran down the hilly road. Sunrays found their way between the shining wet trunks of the palms and were reflected with dazzling brilliance from the glistening giant leaves of the pisang trees. The missionary thanked his hosts and was about to leave when a shadow fell across the floor and the little room went dim. Quickly he turned around and saw a figure coming through the door noiselessly on bare feet. It was a young woman or a girl, who was startled at the unexpected sight of him and fled behind the stone hearth with the boy.

"Say hello to the gentleman!" the father called to her, and she shyly came two steps forward, crossed her arms in front of her breast and bowed several times. Raindrops shimmered in her dark black hair. The Englishman gently and bashfully laid his hand on her head and greeted her, and as he was feeling the soft, smooth hair alive under his fingers, she lifted her face to him and smiled at him warmly with her dark, marvelously beautiful eyes. She wore a chain of rose-red corals around her neck and a heavy gold bangle on one ankle, and nothing else

besides a dark orange lower robe fastened just under her breasts. Thus she stood in her beauty before the dumbfounded stranger. The slanting rays of the sun played softly in her hair and on her glowing brown shoulders, and her small pointed teeth sparkled in her youthful mouth. Robert Aghion was enchanted by the sight of her and wanted to look deep into her still, gentle eyes, but soon felt too embarrassed. The moist fragrance of her hair and the sight of her naked shoulders and breasts confused him, and he quickly dropped his eyes before her innocent gaze. He reached into his pocket and took out a small steel scissors with which he cut his nails and beard and also used in gathering plants. He gave it to the beautiful girl, well knowing that this was a quite precious gift. She took the thing shyly with joyful surprise, while her elders exhausted themselves in expressions of thanks. And as he now took his leave, she followed him out under the wide eave that shaded the front of the hut, took his left hand and kissed it. The warm, gentle touch of those flower-like lips set the man's blood coursing. He wanted to kiss her on the mouth, but instead he took both her hands in his right hand, looked into her eyes and said, "How old are you?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"And what is your name?"

"Naissa."

"Farewell, then, Naissa, and don't forget me."

"Naissa will not forget her lord."

He left the place and found his way home, deep in thought. When long after dark he arrived and entered his room, he realized for the first time that today he had not brought a single butterfly or beetle, not a leaf or a flower home from his excursion. And this home of his, the barren bachelor's house with the servants loafing about and cold, ill-tempered Mr. Bradley, had never seemed more unhome-like and comfortless than it did this evening, as he sat by his little oil lamp at his wobbly little table and tried to read his Bible.

That night when he finally fell asleep despite the humming of the mosquitoes and after hours of restless thinking, the missionary was visited by strange dreams.

He was wandering in a dim palm grove, where flecks of yellow sunlight played on the red-brown ground. Parrots called from the heights, monkeys performed their daredevil feats on the immeasurably tall trees, little hummingbirds flashed by like wondrous sparkling gems, insects of every kind proclaimed their joy of life through sounds,

colors, and movements. The happy missionary walked about this wondrous place filled with gratitude and delight. He called to an improbably balanced monkey, and behold, the nimble animal climbed obediently to earth and presented itself before him with the submissive gestures of a servant. Aghion understood that in this blissful realm the creatures were his to command, and at once he called the birds and butterflies around him, and they arrived in great glittering swarms. He waved and beat time with his arms, nodded his head, gave orders with looks of the eyes and clicks of the tongue, and all the magnificent creatures dutifully arranged themselves into beautiful soaring round dances and processions in the golden air, whistling and humming, and chirping and trilling in well-tuned choirs. They chased and fled from one another, played hide-and-seek, described solemn circles and mischievous spirals in the air. It was a radiant, glorious ballet and concert, a paradise regained, and the dreamer was moved by this harmonious enchanted world that obeyed him and was his own to a profound pleasure that was almost pain. For in all the happiness there was a touch of foreboding or a foreshadowing, a sense of that undeservedness and transitoriness that any pious missionary must in any case be ready to proclaim in the presence of any sensual pleasure.

This anxious foreboding was no deception. The spellbound nature enthusiast was still indulging in the sight of monkeys dancing in figures and was still caressing an immense blue velvet butterfly that had trustingly alit on his left hand and was allowing itself to be stroked like a dove when already shadows of fear and dissolution began to flicker in the enchanted grove and to enshroud the mind of the dreamer. Individual birds suddenly screeched shrilly and fearfully, restless gusts of wind tossed the high treetops, the warm sunlight became pale and sickly, the birds flitted off in all directions, and the great, beautiful butterflies, in defenseless fright, let themselves be blown away by the wind. Raindrops clattered furiously in the tops of the trees and a faint, distant sound of thunder rolled over the sky and died slowly away.

At this point Mr. Bradley entered the grove. The last pretty bird had flown. His form huge and dark like the ghost of a murdered king, Bradley came on. He spit scornfully at the missionary's feet and began to accuse him in injurious, contemptuous, hateful terms of being a crook and an idler, of letting himself be paid by his London patron to convert the heathens while in fact doing nothing but wasting his time catching beetles and going on excursions. And Aghion had to contritely

confess that Bradley was right and that he was guilty of all these misdeeds.

Now that powerful, rich patron from England appeared, the provider of Aghion's daily bread, along with several English clergymen, and these together with Bradley drove and hounded the missionary before them through bush and thorn until they came to a street with lots of people on it and then to the suburb of Bombay where the towering, grotesque Hindu temple stood. Here colorful crowds of people flowed around and about, naked coolies and proud, white-clad Brahmins. But across from the temple a Christian church had been built, and over the portal God the Father was depicted in stone, floating in clouds with his stern father's eye and a flowing beard.

The hard-pressed missionary forced himself up the stairs of the church and began to preach to the Hindu people. In a loud voice he demanded that they look across and compare, see how different the form of the true God was from their poor grimacing idols with their many arms and animal faces. With an outstretched finger he pointed to the intricate relief work of the Indian temple facade and then he pointed invitingly to the image of God on his church. But he was utterly horrified when he followed his own gesture and saw what he was pointing at. God the Father had changed and now had three heads and six arms, and instead of the expression of somewhat trite and impotent solemnity, he now had a superior, amused smile on his faces, exactly like the one often depicted by the more refined Indian makers of divine images. Desperate, the preacher looked around for Bradley and his patron and the clergymen, but they had all disappeared. He stood alone and helpless on the steps of the church, and now even God the Father had also abandoned him, for he was waving with his six arms over at the temple and smiling at the Hindu gods with divine serenity.

Completely abandoned, discredited, and lost, Aghion stood on the steps of his church. He closed his eyes and remained standing erect. Every hope in his soul had been extinguished, and he waited in desperate stillness to be stoned by the heathens. But instead of this, after a horrible pause, he felt himself pushed aside by a strong yet gentle hand, and as he flung his eyes open, he saw the stone image of God the Father, large and venerable, striding down the steps, while at the same time, across the way, the divine images on the temple were climbing down from their niches in swarms. They were all greeted by

God the Father, who then entered the Hindu temple and with friendly gestures of respect received the white-clad Brahmins. At the same time, the heathen gods with their animal snouts, ringlets, and slit-like eyes, visited the church all together in unison, found everything fine and good, and drew many worshipers after them. Thus an exchange of deities took place between the church and temple. Gong and organ sounded together in sisterly fashion, and quiet, dark Indians offered lotus blossoms on sober English-Christian altars.

And in the midst of the festive crowds, beautiful Naissa, with her smooth, shiny black hair and her big childlike eyes, appeared. She came walking across from the temple with many other believers, climbed up the steps of the church, and came to a halt in front of the missionary. She looked him gravely and sweetly in the eye, nodded to him, and offered him a lotus blossom. But he, totally enchanted, bent down over her clear, still face, kissed her on the lips, and took her in his arms.

Before he could see how Naissa responded to that, Aghion woke up from his dream and found himself stretched on his cot in the deep darkness, tired and frightened. A painful confusion of all his feelings and impulses was tormenting him to the point of desperation. The dream had disclosed his true self, his weakness and his despondency, his lack of belief in his vocation, his love for the brown heathen girl, his un-Christian hatred for Bradley, his guilty conscience with regard to his English patron. That was the way it was—it was all true and inalterable.

For a while he lay in the dark, sad and close to tears. He tried to pray and was unable. He tried to conceive of Naissa as a demoness and to acknowledge his attraction to her as depraved, but he could not do that either. Finally following a half-conscious impulse, he got out of bed, still enwrapped in the shades and horrors of the dream. He started toward Bradley's room, as much in instinctive need of the comfort of human company as with the pious intention, out of shame for his abhorrence of this man, of being candid with him about it and making a friend of him.

Softly, he crept on thin bast soles across the dark veranda to Bradley's bedroom. The room had a light bamboo door that covered only the lower half of the opening. The high room was faintly lit. Like many Europeans in India, Bradley kept a small oil lamp burning through the night. Cautiously, Aghion pushed the thin door inward

and went in.

A little wick smoldered in a small bowl of oil on the bedroom floor and threw faint, monstrous shadows upward onto the bare walls. A brown moth whirred in small circles around the light. A large mosquito net was carefully drawn around the wide bed. The missionary picked up the small lamp, went over to the bed, and pulled the netting a hand's breadth open. He was about to call the sleeper's name when with considerable shock he saw that Bradley was not alone. He lay on his back, covered by a thin silk nightshirt. His face with chin tilted upward looked not in the least gentler or more friendly than during the day. Next to him lay a second figure, a naked woman with long black hair. She lay on her side with her sleeping face toward the missionary. He recognized her. It was the big sturdy girl who came once a week to pick up the wash.

Without closing the curtain, Aghion rushed out and fled to his own room. He tried to go back to sleep, but he could not. The experience of the day, the strange dream, and then finally the sight of the naked sleeping woman had gotten him quite agitated. Also, his loathing of Bradley had become much stronger. He even recoiled at the thought of seeing him again at breakfast and having to speak to him. But most of all he was plagued and tormented by the question of whether or not it was now his duty to rebuke Bradley for his behavior and try to get him to reform. Aghion's whole nature was against this, but his duty seemed to require him to overcome this spinelessness, to unabashedly confront the sinner and give him a good talking to. He lit his lamp and, harassed by swarms of buzzing mosquitoes, read the New Testament for hours, gaining neither confidence nor consolation. He almost wanted to curse India altogether or at least the curiosity and wanderlust that had led him to this dead end. Never more than tonight had the future looked so bleak to him, nor had he felt less like he had the makings of a confessor and a martyr.

He came to breakfast with hollows under his eyes and fatigue on his face. He glumly dawdled with his spoon in his fragrant tea and sullenly fiddled at peeling his banana until Mr. Bradley appeared. The latter said his usual curt and cool good morning, set the houseboy and the water carrier scurrying about with a series of loud commands, painstakingly picked out the yellowest banana from the bunch, and then ate it quickly and disdainfully while a servant led his horse out into the sunny court.

“There’s something I’d like to talk to you about,” said the missionary, just as the other was about to leave. Annoyed, Bradley looked up.

“Well? I have very little time. Does it have to be right now?”

“Yes, that would be better. I feel duty bound to tell you that I am aware of your illicit relations with a Hindu woman. You can imagine how painful it is for me—”

“Painful!” shouted Bradley jumping up and breaking into contemptuous laughter. “Sir, you are a bigger jackass than I thought! Of course I couldn’t care less what you think of me, but that you are snooping around in my house and spying on me is beyond the pale. Let’s make this short. I’ll give you until Sunday. Between now and then, kindly find new lodging in the town, because I will not tolerate your presence in this house a single day longer!”

Aghion had expected a difficult outcome, but nothing like this. Nevertheless, he did not allow himself to be intimidated.

“It will be my pleasure,” he said, keeping his composure, “to liberate you from my burdensome tenancy. Good morning, Mr. Bradley!”

He walked out, and Bradley watched him, half aggrieved and half amused. Then he stroked his stiff mustache, pursed his lips, whistled for his dog, and went down the wooden stairs to the courtyard to ride into town.

This brief stormy outburst, which had brought some clarity to the situation, was actually welcome to both men. Aghion, however, was now unexpectedly confronted with worries and decisions that an hour ago had been pleasantly far away. But as he gave serious thought to his situation, it became clear to him that his quarrel with Bradley was only a side issue. He saw that now he had come to the point where it was an inescapable necessity for him to straighten out the confusion of his whole approach to his life. The clearer this became, the better he felt about it. Living in this house with his energies lying fallow, enduring the empty hours and his restless desires, had become an ordeal which his uncomplicated nature would not in any case have been able to tolerate much longer. Thus he quite naturally began to look forward to the end of this semi-imprisonment, let come what may.

It was still early in the morning, and a corner of the garden, his favorite spot, still lay in cool partial shadow. Here the branches of unpruned bushes hung over a very small walled pool that had once been intended for bathing but had fallen into neglect and was now home to a small tribe of yellow turtles. To this spot he dragged his

bamboo chair, lay back in it, and watched the silent little beasts swimming sluggishly at ease in the warm green water, quietly peering at him with their clever little eyes. Beyond, in the stable yard, the unoccupied hostler squatted in his corner and sang. His monotonous nasal song drifted over to Aghion like ripples flowing and ebbing in the warm air. After his sleepless and agitated night, fatigue snuck up on the missionary. He closed his eyes, his arms went slack, and he fell asleep.

A mosquito bite woke him up. Ashamed, he realized that he had slept away the entire morning, but he now felt fresh and untroubled. He at once resumed where he had left off, setting his thoughts and desires in order and patiently analyzing the confusion of his life. What had been unconsciously crippling him and troubling his dreams for a long time now came out into the clear light of day. While traveling to India had without doubt been a good and intelligent thing to do, he lacked the right inner vocation and drive to be a missionary. He was humble enough to see this as a defeat and a troubling inadequacy, but not as grounds for despair. Rather it seemed to him, since he was now resolved to look for more suitable work, to have found in India a good refuge and home, rich and full of possibilities in every way. Though it might be a sad thing that the indigenous people had committed themselves to false gods, it was not his job to change that. His job was to conquer this country for himself and to get the best out of it for himself and other people through his insight, his knowledge, and his youthful exertion, and to be ready for whatever work came his way.

The evening of the very same day, after an interview that lasted hardly an hour, he was hired by a gentleman residing in Bombay, a Mr. Sturrock, as his secretary and overseer for his nearby coffee plantation. Aghion wrote a letter to his former patron in which he explained the actions he had taken and engaged to pay back the money he had received from him, and Sturrock promised to forward it to London. When the new overseer returned to his lodging, he found Bradley sitting alone in his shirtsleeves at the evening meal. He told him, before he even sat down, what had taken place.

Bradley nodded with his mouth full, poured a bit of whisky in his water, and said in an almost kindly fashion, “Have a seat and help yourself. The fish is already cold. Now we are more or less colleagues. I wish you the best. Growing coffee is easier than converting Hindus, that’s for sure. And possibly it’s just as worthwhile. I didn’t think you

were that sensible, Aghion!”

The plantation he was to move to was two days’ journey inland, and Aghion was to set out for there with a company of coolies the day after next. Thus he had only a single day to put his affairs in order. To Bradley’s amazement, Aghion offered to join him the following day for an outing on horseback. But Bradley refrained from questioning him about this, and the two men, after having had the lamps with a thousand insects flying around them taken away, sat in the warm black Indian evening across from one another and felt nearer to each other than in all the foregoing months of forced cohabitation.

“So,” said Aghion, after a long silence, “you must surely not have believed in my missionary plans right from the beginning.”

“Oh, I did,” Bradley replied quietly. “I could plainly see that you were serious about it.”

“But you must have also surely seen how little suited I was to what I was supposed to do and think here. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It was none of my business. I don’t like it when people meddle in my affairs, so I don’t do that to them either. Besides, I have seen people try many crazy things here in India and succeed. Converting the natives was your job, not mine. And now you’ve seen some of your mistakes. At some point you might see others.”

“Do you have an example in mind?”

“For example, regarding your tirade this morning.”

“Oh, you mean the girl!”

“Exactly. You were trained as a clergyman. Nevertheless, you will admit that a healthy man cannot live and work for years at a time and stay healthy without occasionally having a woman. For God’s sake, you don’t have to blush! Now look here, a white man in India who didn’t bring a wife over here with him from England at the beginning has very little choice. There are no English girls here. The ones who are born here are sent back to Europe as children. The only choice left is between the sailors’ whores and Hindu women. Myself, I prefer the latter. What’s so bad about that?”

“Listen, Mr. Bradley, here we do not agree! For me, as it says in the Bible and as we are told by our church, any relationship out of wedlock is wrong and evil!”

“And if nothing else is available?”

“Why is nothing else available? If a man really loves a girl, he should

marry her."

"But surely not a Hindu girl?"

"Why not?"

"Aghion, you are more broad-minded than I! I would rather bite one of my fingers off than marry a colored girl, you understand? And later you'll see it that way too!"

"Oh, please, I hope not. Since we've gotten this far, I might as well tell you. I love a Hindu girl and it is my intention to make her my wife."

Bradley's expression became grave.

"Don't do it!" he said almost imploringly.

"But I am going to do it," Aghion continued excitedly. "I'm going to get engaged to the girl and then educate her and instruct her until she's ready to receive Christian baptism. Then we'll get married in the English church."

"So what is her name?" asked Bradley pensively.

"Naissa."

"And her father?"

"I don't know."

"Well, there's still a long while between now and the baptism. Think it over some more. Of course our sort can fall in love with an Indian girl; they're beautiful enough. They're also supposed to be faithful and tractable wives. Nevertheless, I tend to see them as a kind of little animal, like a playful goat or a beautiful deer, not as my own kind."

"Isn't that a prejudice? All men are brothers and the Indians are an old and noble people."

"You know more about that than I do, Aghion. As far as I'm concerned, I have a lot of respect for prejudices."

He got up, said goodnight, and went to his bedroom, the same bedroom where the previous night he had had the big, pretty laundry woman.

"'Like a kind of animal,' he said," Aghion thought, and belatedly began to feel resentful.

Early the next day, before Bradley came to breakfast, Aghion had a horse led out and rode away while the monkeys in the tossing treetops were still doing their morning scream. And the sun was not yet fully up when he reached the vicinity of the hut where he had met beautiful Naissa. Tying up his horse, he approached the dwelling on foot. The

little son was sitting naked on the threshold and playing with a baby goat, which he laughingly let butt him again and again in the chest.

Just as the visitor was about to turn off the road to enter the hut, a young girl stepped over the squatting boy, whom he immediately recognized as Naissa. She came into the lane, carrying a tall earthenware jug hanging empty from her right hand. She walked past Aghion without looking at him. He followed her with his eyes, entranced. He quickly caught up with her and called out a greeting. She lifted her head and replied softly, looking coolly at the man with her beautiful golden brown eyes as though she did not know him. He reached out and took her hand, but she recoiled and continued walking with quickened steps. He accompanied her to the walled-in water hole, where the water from a weak spring ran thin and sparse over old, mossy stones. He tried to help her fill and lift the jug, but she fended him off without a word and with a disdainful look. He was surprised and disappointed to find her so stand-offish, and he reached into his pocket to take out the present that he had brought for her. He was rather hurt to see her immediately drop her unfriendliness and reach out for the thing he had brought. It was a small enameled box with pretty images of flowers on it. On the inside of the round lid was a little mirror. He showed her how to open it and put the thing in her hand.

“For me?” she asked with innocent, childlike eyes.

“For you!” he said, and while she played with the box, he stroked her velvet soft arm and her long black hair.

She thanked him and hesitantly reached for the full water jug. He tried saying loving and tender things to her, but she obviously only half understood him. He tried to think of the right words and stood awkwardly in front of her. Suddenly the chasm between her and him seemed immense, and he thought sadly of how little the two of them had in common, and what a long, long time it would take for her to become his bride and friend, to understand his language, to grasp who he was, to be able to share his thoughts.

In the meantime, she had started back toward the hut, and he walked beside her. The boy was engaged with the goat in a breathless game of tag. His dark brown back glowed metallically in the sun, and his bloated rice belly made his legs look too thin. In an excess of alienation, the Englishman realized that if he married Naissa, this nature child would be his brother-in-law. To get his mind off this thought, he looked again at the girl. He gazed at her fine, charming

face with its big eyes and cool, childish mouth, and he began to wonder if he might not actually succeed in getting a kiss from those lips this very day.

He was shocked out of this tender vision by a form that suddenly emerged from the hut and stood before his unbelieving eyes like a ghost. The figure that appeared in the doorway, stepped over the threshold, and stood before him was a second Naissa, a mirror image of the first. The mirror image smiled at him, greeted him, and took something out of the pouch at her hip, which she triumphantly raised over her head. It glittered brightly in the sun and he presently recognized it as the little scissors he had given Naissa not long ago. The girl to whom he had given the box with the mirror in it today, into whose lovely eyes he had gazed and whose arm he had caressed was not Naissa at all, but her sister. As the two girls stood side by side, still hard to tell apart, the love-smitten young man felt unspeakably deceived and misled. Two deer could not have been more alike, and if at this moment he had been given the choice of choosing one of them to take with him and to have and to hold forever, he would not have known which of the two he was in love with. True, he was gradually able to make out that the real Naissa was older and slightly smaller than her sister. But his love, which a few moments before he had been so sure of, was now as though broken into two halves like the image of the girl that had now doubled before his eyes in such a weird and unexpected way.

Bradley heard nothing of these matters, and moreover was not asking any questions, when Aghion, who had returned home, sat mutely with him eating the midday meal. The next morning Aghion's coolies appeared, gathered up his trunks and bags, and began carrying them away. When Aghion thanked Bradley and, in a gesture of farewell, offered him his hand, Bradley took it firmly and said, "Have a good trip, my boy! Eventually a time will come when you will no longer be mooning over those sweet Hindu girls but pining away for the sight of the honest, leathery face of an Englishwoman. Pay me a visit then, and we'll be of one mind about a lot of things that we see differently today!"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HERMANN HESSE was born in 1877 in Calw, Germany. He was the son and grandson of Protestant missionaries and was educated in religious schools until the age of thirteen, when he dropped out of school. At eighteen he moved to Basel, Switzerland, to work as a bookseller and lived in Switzerland for most of his life. His early novels included *Peter Camenzind* (1904), *Beneath the Wheel* (1906), *Gertrud* (1910), and *Rosshalde* (1914). During this period Hesse married and had three sons.

During World War I, Hesse worked to supply German prisoners of war with reading materials and expressed his pacifist leanings in antiwar tracts and novels. Hesse's lifelong battles with depression drew him to study Freud during this period and, later, to undergo analysis with Jung. His first major literary success was the novel *Demian* (1919).

When Hesse's first marriage ended, he moved to Montagnola, Switzerland, where he created his best-known works: *Siddhartha* (1922), *Steppenwolf* (1927), *Narcissus and Goldmund* (1930), *Journey to the East* (1932), and *The Glass Bead Game* (1943). Hesse was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946. He died in 1962 at the age of eighty-five.