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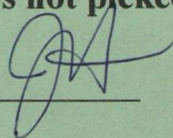
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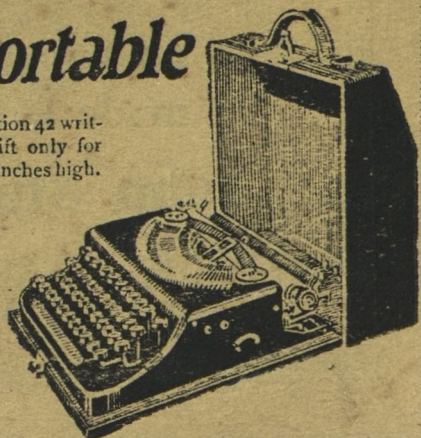
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BARBARISM

By H. M. Tomlinson

It looked to me a definite check. There was no bridge. The bed of the stream was of white sand, but the water seemed queer, coming dark and quick as it did out of the forest. It had no name that I knew. The three Malays with the packs waded straight over up to the waist. Their eyes were fixed to the route; water or earth seemed all the same to them; they went lightly up the opposite bank, and disappeared. I could not even hear them. The forest took them in. My companion followed them, and it was my turn. But this was early in the first day of the journey, and it took me some seconds to understand that I, too, was expected to get wet. We are so used to the provision of bridges, with public-houses on their hither side, that at first it appears to be an oversight on the part of Nature, and an affront to our dignity, to have to wet the shirt, and to go on walking as though it were dry. Odd, that chill coming through dry clothes; and how heavy it makes the boots! I went on as though nothing had happened; but I knew something had happened. I had done more than cross from one side of a stream to the other. All the support of civilization, which we accept without knowing it is there, and so imagine we are supporting ourselves, was abandoned. I was on my own resources now, and realized that they were inadequate. I was carrying, for example, a rifle because of tigers and other possibilities, but the rifle only gave moral support to our Malays. I knew I couldn't be so infernally quick as a tiger, and that the rifle therefore was no more to me than a burden

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which was already as heavy and unaccommodating as a load of sin. Presently we came to another stream—but it was a river. It was turgid, swift, and quite wide enough, and was plainly very deep. A tree had fallen across it; its wet trunk, midway, was half submerged. Wading over was a joke to this. The bare-footed Malays got across as easily as cats. My friend followed them; and when he was half way over, and I had started, and was well down the first greasy descent of the trunk's butt, wondering how many more seconds I should last, he fell. Somehow he managed to keep desperate finger-tips on a snag of the trunk, while the current stretched his legs and body down stream. The Malays had gone on. I stood balancing over the water, helpless. He was some distance from me. There was nothing I could do. I shouted at him that if he let go—already I knew of him that he was a bit inclined to easy surrenders—if he let go he would have to die. He became energetic, and at last straddled the trunk, and reached the shore. I have no idea how I got over with the gun.

So the day went on, while the jungle silently contemplated us. I was wet, hot, hungry, and tired, but fairly happy, and inclined to tell the tropical forest it could do its worst; for quite clearly, though it was a fascinating foe, yet it was an implacable one. It would grant nothing to us.

All right. Then one would have to be careful, and force concessions. There were still ten miles ahead of us of the roughest kind of travel before we should find a native campong, when I met one of the Malay carriers coming back to me—I had been watching some ants, and was a long way in the rear. He was without his pack. He looked most woe-begone. He shook his head in severe disapproval, and I gathered from him that the other white man had collapsed, was lying in the forest, and would not continue; he added that the night

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was coming, and the place was bad. While kneeling in the damp trash beside the other white man, in the act of persuasion, and even of abuse, I noticed my clothes were bloodstained, and found hanging to my ribs some leeches, already bloated. The revulsion was psychical. I was horrified, not hurt. Other leeches, as I then noticed and pointed out to my friend, were attached to him. Hadn't he better get up? He glanced down at his body, and was up at once, in dismay. And he really did look as though he had met something much more formidable than he had expected. He was about done. But he pulled himself together, good man, and on we went.

We had a life of that sort for weeks. At times it was much worse than the first day. We ate when we could, and whatever we could get. We slept in places where fires had to be kept going at night to dissuade the wild beasts. The leeches nauseated me daily. We would wade across a river, then squash through a morass made by a herd of elephants; and when, climbing up a slippery bank out of that, fatigued and famished, you sprawled on your face, the hand snatched at a handful of thorns. When you rose you had to pick off more leeches. Down came the rain. There was no home to go to.

I will admit that at last, though I was glad I was there, I got rather nervous about it. Awake at night, lying on the ground, looking at the ghosts of the nearest trees fading as the fire declined, it makes you feel a little queer inside to hear the half-moan, half-snarl, of a tiger. The forest seemed hanging intently over you, waiting in silence for something it knew was going to happen.

But we got out to the coast again at last; got out cheaply, too, for our foolish challenge of the wild against which society protects us. We suffered nothing but a little poisoning, through the insect bites and rough living. When, some weeks before, I first saw that

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native town on the shore of the China Sea, I thought it was barbarous enough ; but then, coming upon it out of the wilderness, I realized that it was an outpost of London and Pekin. Even the primitive altar in a field, which struck me as pagan enough when I noticed it on the outward journey, now seemed not so distantly related to St. Peter's. We were all right again, with known things about us.

Next morning I boarded a little coasting steamer for Singapore. She was shipshape and bright, my cabin was hung with chintz having a pattern of rose-buds, and the saloon table was as well-ordered as that of a good hotel. The captain, nice man, listened to the tale of our fun up-country, and then said : " You'd like some news from home. Here's the papers by the last mail." Most certainly, feeling secure with chintz curtains about us, and poisoned feet already less inflamed, we wanted news from England. The smiling little sailor re-entered with a week's bound numbers of the *Daily Mirror*. I opened the volume.

The first sight of leeches hanging horribly to my body had not given me a worse shock. News from England ! Then what a country ! The blood-sucking worms, the jungle bugs which raised weals, the fevers, the dark forest and the cataracts, and the rhinoceroses, —if all that was savagery, then what was this ? The natives we had met were certainly not barbarians. I had learned to like the Malays very much. They are a quiet, well-mannered, humorous, and hospitable people. They certainly have a war-cry, which is both hair-raising and exhilarating when they are watching two bulls fighting, or are shooting dangerous rapids. But they are, it is fair to add, gentle-folk. Was I to be forced to admit that, compared with the Malays, my own countrymen were barbarians ?

Now in the forest, on some anxious nights, when sleep would not come, I had been sustained by the com-

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forting thoughts of Waterloo Bridge at midnight, and a nook in Surrey, and some corners in Devonshire ; things like that in this world, it was strangely certain, did exist, and they were heartening. But I felt a sudden despair for England, even in the China Sea, when I opened that newspaper, and saw England's life reflected in such pictures. What a life ! It would shame the natives of the Aru Islands. To open those sheets seemed to let fly an inane and fatuous blare. There was no sense in it. It was only a silly noise. Were these the pictures of a people which was going to rebuild a civilization that had been wrecked by war ? Then there was little hope. I got, in that five minutes, the first real scare I had had in nearly six months' travel among Malay Islands. It was a very subdued adventurer who handed that volume back to the nice captain ; for he realized that, if he were safely out of the jungle, there was *that* to go back to.

I had become used to the Malays. I had learned to understand, fairly well, their ways of living and of looking at things. After a while I had no doubt that they had rightly solved the problem of accommodating themselves to their circumstances. They are a happy folk. You hardly ever see an anxious face among them, and never a hungry child. They need no old age pension. Their future is secure, if they will but give a brief time yearly to rice-fields, cocoanuts, and fishing-nets. But I am not at all sure to-day whether I understand the English, and that black doubt can be credited to the illustrated paper, the pictures of which I saw at the right perspective in the China Sea. I have not recovered from the shock. There was an occasion, when, years ago, returning from my first long journey in a difficult land, I stayed up all night so that I might have the earliest glimpse of an English light. Yet when somebody announced at lunch in the Channel the other day, " Start Point is sighted," I must confess

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that I examined my heart when I found that I was not thrilled. Who or what was wrong? It was a real trouble to me, to find that I was indifferent, for I knew that I was very glad indeed to be nearing home again. Yet was not England home? Well, say that one's home happens to be in England. That may express the subtle difference in one's mind, a difference which began about the end of the war, and has been established by that more popular press in which the English seem to delight.

And the further truth is, when first adventuring in the streets of London recently, though I was as much at home in Ludgate Circus as I was a short while ago on the island of Ternate (where you soon learn to find your way about) yet there was a mind about me in Fleet Street which I found harder to enter than, say, that of the natives of Kota Bharu. Of evidence of Europe's disastrous plight I had been seeing enough as far away as the Pacific; ships everywhere were running with light freights, at a loss to owners, though the means to fill them was often abundant. Plenty of ships, plenty of harvests, and a great want in Europe; and hardly any business. So what the deuce some things meant in Fleet Street I couldn't make out. It was but fair to suppose, as it is the business of journalists to give the public what it wants, that the newspaper placards indicated what then chiefly occupied the minds of most of my own people. But those placards were Chinese to me. One sheet grieved: Bad News About Papyrus. An honest paper, because, as a journalist, I know that editors don't like publishing gloomy stuff. But what did it mean? I could only conclude that Tutankhamen's prayer-book had been most unfortunately torn.