



## The Road to—Palambang

By LEE WILSON DODD

Once on a future time not long ago  
Before the end of wars, or ever we  
Forsook the serpentine seraglio  
To cross the indiscriminating sea—

Aphgar, the pirate, whetted a new blade  
To carve a harp of crystal. Then he sang  
The twenty-seven songs the sirens made  
Below the sapphire rocks of Palambang.

THE above stanzas were composed in sleep, or perhaps in that odd twilight zone when one is passing from a sort of semi-consciousness into complete slumber. I am not given to this method of composition; indeed, with a single minor exception as a young man, this is the first time in my fifty-one years that such a thing has happened to me. I have never been subject to "strange psychic experiences." For a writer, and inveterate rhymers, I believe I may add that I am a fairly well-balanced person—too well-balanced, no doubt, for my own imaginative good. I smoke, I take an occasional drink, when I can get one that I am not afraid of; but I use no other habit-forming drug save my morning coffee. Forgive these details. I wish to make this account of a somewhat freakish experience as accurate as possible.

Poetry may no longer be so important as it was, but science must be served; and I hereby affirm that in this paper, granting the usual limitations upon human accuracy, I am setting down the facts as to the above eight (I cannot help feeling, though I produced them) rather beautiful lines.

I had been playing a quiet game of contract all evening at the house of a friend. When I arrived at the house I had found my host and hostess and Mr. and Mrs. R (we were all old friends) busily searching through four or five anthologies. They were engaged, they explained, in trying to select a simple poem of eight lines for the youngest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R—. The child had been told by her English teacher to choose such a poem for herself and learn it by heart, and she had appealed to her parents for aid and comfort. Mr. R—, who said it would fall to him to teach the child the poem before breakfast next morning, was very firm about those eight lines. A quatrain would be too short; anything longer would be too long. Finally, all hands aiding, "Tony O," by Colin Francis, was selected from Mr. De la Mare's delightfully personal anthology, "Come Hither." Then Mr. R—, giving us his ironic blessing, departed, and the rest of us settled down to our game.

I returned home just before eleven, carrying with me—a loan from my hostess—"The Last Blackbird," Ralph Hodgson's second exasperatingly slender collection of his verse. Something should long since have been done to induce Ralph Hodgson to write more, just as something should long since have been done to induce—oh well, no matter for the name, you may choose your own!—to write considerably less. After some chat with my wife, who had not been with me, over the evening's talk and the evening's game, I got into bed with the Hodgson book and read it through. The singing loveliness of the Hodgson lines was murmuring me into sleep. I turned out the light. The last of the longer poems in the book, "The Vanity of Human Ambition and Big Behavior," is a highly fantastic irony, lyric in movement, and star-powdered with odd, unearthly sparkles of beauty. It tangled itself into a wambling reverie that was on the borderland of dream. When, at such times, does one veritably "fall asleep"—?

And then, somehow, the above eight meaningless lines at the head of this report drifted in upon me—and woke me up. I roused, broad awake, and happily smiling. The lines were running themselves over and over in my head; and at last, to be rid of them, and also because they amused me, I got up, fumbled through my clothes, and found my pocket notebook and pencil; then, without bothering to turn on a light, I jotted the stanzas down. Writing in the dark is a singular sensation. I wondered if the lines would be even partially legible in the morning. . . . Then I fell into bed again and went fast asleep, sleeping peacefully all night.

When I woke in the morning I had forgotten the

whole incident. It was only recalled to me by finding my pocket notebook and pencil lying on a chair by my bed. At once the whole thing flashed back, and I was able to repeat the eight nonsensical lines without referring to the notebook. However, the lines in the notebook, though drunkenly scrawled, were legible enough and corresponded exactly with the lines as I had recalled them.

So much for the peculiar genesis of a decidedly peculiar composition.

Let me now, very briefly, make some attempt to trace origins for the seemingly fantastic combination of images that enters into it. I cannot of course be certain of anything in the following notes; I can only say that the interpretations as I give them seem satisfactory to me.

I believe that the dream-poem has eight lines because it had been impressed upon me that the poem for Mr. R—'s little daughter must have just eight lines, neither more nor less.

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Once on a future time not long ago  
Before the end of wars . . .

My friends and I, while playing cards (you may judge of the scientific precision of our play), had discussed at some length a drama given a night or two before at a local theatre. We thought it a very bad drama indeed; but that is neither here nor there. The one point to be noted is, that it was a war play—an extremely inept example of pacifist propaganda. We were all, in a sense, pacifists at the card table; but not, we hoped, merely sentimental ranters against war. We believed that even pacifists should be realists and have a certain intelligence.

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—the serpentine seraglio . . .

I am at a loss here. I can only suggest that there was a scene in the war play, modernistically stylized, in which Red Cross nurses and hospital assistants and doctors danced a drunken snake-dance through streaming rain shot through with star-shells and flashes from the guns. It may—or it may not—have been that. The typically Freudian symbolism suggests itself. I bow to the erudite, and pass on.

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—the indiscriminating sea . . .

A wonderful phrase! I wish I could write like that when awake!

But I am reasonably certain that the sea washed into my dream from the concluding stanzas of Ralph Hodgson's poem, "The Last Blackbird."

In that poem the poet informs a personified Nature that mankind has all but destroyed the beauty and magic that She had put into the world. There is only one blackbird left, and he will soon be finished off.

—Then Nature, rising, stood:

"The chase is over; yon last bird is free.  
Before I give new beauty to the wood,  
How say'st thou, poet, to a wider sea?"

She looked above: small as a pigeon's wing  
A cloud came up and crost the blackbird's tree.  
She said, "How say'st thou if yon blackbird bring  
To wash my world, a deeper, wider sea?"

And, obviously, this wider, deeper sea would not have discriminated between the just and unjust; there is not even a suggestion of an ark.

Aphgar, the pirate, whetted a new blade  
To carve a harp of crystal . . .

There is a lot of elusive and, I must admit, doubtful stuff to be dealt with here.

That last long poem in Hodgson's book, the one on Human Ambition and Big Behavior, contains several strange beings remarkably like Aphgar, the pirate (Crim, *Githar*, John of Teflis, for examples), although Aphgar himself does not appear in it. I have never to my knowledge met this gentleman before. With my family I was motoring in Europe for several months last year, and a friend has suggested that, with my notorious love for odd words, I may have been unconsciously impressed by the advertisements of "Agfa Films"—which are made, I believe, in Germany. It is possible, though I can hardly credit the connection. "Githar," of the Hodgson poem, probably pushed himself forward and was somehow transmogrified.

But why did Aphgar whet a new blade to carve a harp of crystal?

Family matters are involved here and must be mentioned.

In the first place, I have a daughter who, not content with the piano, wishes to learn the harp. She had just returned to boarding school from her spring vacation, during which she frequently besought us to buy her a harp. She had, if I may say so, rather harped upon that harp, and the matter was still before the family council. In the second place, I have a son, who had just received from his grandmother, on his thirteenth birthday, a large, keen, formidable jack-knife. I may as well confess that I feared, and still fear, the worst from that jack-knife. Thirteen, as a number, has a doubtful reputation, and thirteen is certainly the preferred age for bruises, broken limbs, chopped fingers, and slashed arteries. . . . It is, at any rate, my theory that something of all this may have entered into the above romantic lines: although more cautious scholars might still be tempted to refer them for further study to Mr. John Livingston Lowes, if only I were a sufficiently dead and famous person.

The twenty-seven songs the sirens made . . .

"What songs the sirens sang," doubtless, from old Sir Thomas Browne. But why the precise number "twenty-seven"? I am enormously intrigued by the factual assurance of that number: and, after due reverie, I offer the following explanation.

My partner and I had won the first two rubbers at contract, both of us holding extraordinary hands, and the score then stood 26-0 in our favor. Naturally, a great to-do was made over this; it was for us the high-spot of the evening—for we were a good deal less fortunate later on.

Well, it can hardly be proved, yet I am convinced that that line would have read "the twenty-six songs the sirens made"—if only the metre had permitted of it. Truth, in poetry, is but too apt to yield, is it not, to the exigencies of metre and rhyme? That is, perhaps, one reason why so many scientists are not a little annoyed by poetry.

—the sapphire rocks of Palambang . . .

Yes, I know beyond possibility of error where "Palambang" came from:

I once wrote, and even had produced one Holy Week in Baltimore, a satirical farce, in which one of the characters returned inopportunely to civilization from—Palambang. I remember choosing Palambang from the East Indian map because of the grotesque sonority of the word. It is a word I much like the sound of; it stimulates my imagination, and invariably amuses me, even as Chimborazo and Cotopaxi are held in special favor by a certain Georgian English bard. I find, however, on consulting my maps again, that Palambang should be spelled Palembang—which, to my ear, is not nearly so fantastic a word; and the dream-alteration in the spelling was probably due to that very reason, if reason it may be called.

It remains to question why the "dream-work," to employ a picturesque term from Freud, has endowed Palambang with a set of sapphire rocks, below which the sirens sang their twenty-seven songs. There is a geographical difficulty here. The town of Palambang, or Palembang, Island of Sumatra (if one must be accurate), is "a large place on the river Musi, with 50,000 inhabitants (2500 Chinese), extensive barracks, hospitals, etc., a mosque (1740), considered tomb of Alexander the Great." It is difficult to imagine sirens singing even three or four songs below the sapphire rocks of an inland river-town like that! But of course the poetic reference to Palambang, with the three internal a's, had no such crude earthly connotations. And those sapphire rocks had anything but a geographical origin.

My daughter, who desires to play the harp, was given a ring on her last birthday with a small amethyst in it. When she returned home from boarding school she revealed to us the fact that a piece of the amethyst had chipped off, unaccountably; and she suggested that she would like us to replace it, as soon as possible, although she would much prefer to have the amethyst replaced by a small sapphire. After more or less family confabulation, which need not concern us here, the request was granted and the thing was done. Not, however, that those sapphire rocks might not have been considered as self-justifying; "the sapphire rocks of Palambang" is a beautiful phrase, and every beautiful phrase is self-justifying, no matter how inherently absurd.

But indeed, as you may long ere this have gathered, I am inordinately proud of the whole poem! I hope I may ever be moved to dream another one-half so good.



## BOOKS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

### Keats in Foreign Eyes

**KEATS' VIEW OF POETRY.** By TAKESHI SAITO. To which is prefixed an "Essay on English Literature in Japan," by EDMUND BLUNDEN. London: Cobden-Sanderson. 1929.

**THE LIFE OF JOHN KEATS.** By ALBERT ERLANDE. Translated from the French by MARION ROBINSON. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith. 1929. \$3.

Reviewed by CLARENCE DEWITT THORPE  
University of Michigan

"SHAKESPEARE would stare to see me there," wrote Keats on being invited to a party at Olliers "to keep Shakespeare's birthday." Keats would himself stare, I think, to see the steadily growing list of books being written in his honor, and at none more, perhaps, than at the two latest additions—representing as they do cultures so widely separated as the French and Japanese. But, as Keats once truthfully remarked, "The world has one great human heart," and he himself had the power, to a degree possessed by few who have lived, to touch that heart in deep and sensitive places. The almost simultaneous appearance of two important, sympathetic studies from practically opposite sides of the world demonstrates this fact anew.

Of the two, the Japanese book is by far the more significant, both in intrinsic value and in its implications of Keats as a world poet. The French, particularly in such a tribute as M. Maeterlinck's upon the occasion of the 1921 anniversary, and in such an important biographical study as Lucien Wolff's "Life and Works" (1910), had previously shown their capacity to understand Keats; but, although in the "Keats Memorial Volume" eleven out of a total of twenty-one contributions from foreign countries came from the Orient—India, Persia, Arabia—, Professor Saito is the first to speak for Japan.

M. Erlande's "Life" is an excellent thing of its kind. If short biographies are again to come into fashion, it is to be hoped that all may be written in the spirit of this one. M. Erlande has achieved all the interest of romantic biography—the Fanny Brawne love affair helped immensely in this—without descending to its faults. He is too concerned with an accurate presentation of Keats as the poet and man he was in the life to indulge in fiction or guesses. Working chiefly with biographical materials already at hand, supplemented by his own thorough knowledge of Keats's prose and verse, he has executed a compact and authoritative portrait which will both stand the test of rigid critical scrutiny and most admirably serve the needs of the general reader. The value of the book as it comes to us in English dress is enhanced by the presence of J. M. Murry's graceful introduction; whatever of Keats Mr. Murry touches, he illuminates.

Professor Saito's essay is more for the scholar. Originally written as a doctoral dissertation at the Imperial University of Tokyo (where, incidentally, as Mr. Blunden tells us in his introduction, there is an active and productive interest in the English poets), it bears the imprint of a finely mature mind well adapted to the tasks of critical scholarship. I have called it an important book, and it is that in spite of the fact that Mr. Saito's basic thesis is admittedly no longer new. His interpretation of Keats as a seriously reflective poet much occupied with the problems of life and art has been advanced both in England and America, and is now rather widely accepted. But in specific emphasis, there is here much of the flavor of a fresh point of view. The Oriental mind obviously has something new and enriching to bring to the study of English poetry: a distinctive background and literary tradition, a unique religious and philosophical point of view, an unashamed enthusiasm, a taste tending towards the classical. This Longinus-like accommodation of a near-romantic enthusiasm to analytical judgment and clean taste, now nearly extinct in the English and American academic world, is a timely suggestion as to the possibilities which lie in a union of the scholarly and the esthetic approach.

Except for J. M. Murry no other critic

has given Keats so high a place in poetry. To Professor Saito, Keats "is in a sense the culminating point of the English Romantic poets." Almost "all the Romantic elements are found in him as if he were the focus of the genius of his period." Keenly aware of Keats's power as a sensuous poet—the close of Chapter I shows this particularly—Professor Saito feels, nevertheless, that his unique greatness lies not here, but "in his neo-idealistic poetry and view of life," his humanitarian ideal, his resolution to know and express the truth of things.

Professor Saito's main topic is Keats's poetic theory. Poetry has its birth in imaginative experience. To experience reality to the depths is to experience *beauty*. Hence arises the relationship between truth and beauty—it should be observed, and this is a comment on the Oriental mind, that to Professor Saito this relationship presents no difficulty whatever: "The word 'truth' here . . . is used in the sense of reality, and in Keats's opinion . . . a thing of absolute beauty is at the same time a thing of absolute reality." The mission of a poet is "to seize the reality of things and to sing of it with a selfless spirit."

Poetry, Keats thought, should be spontaneous and inevitable, but it must also be rich in the highest thoughts. It should be worded in accordance with "the native quality of the mother tongue"—though the commonplace and trivial are to be discarded. "The excellence of every art," declared Keats, "is its intensity," and intensity, says Saito, "is the parent of concentration and suggestion." It is easy to understand why Professor Saito, trained in the traditional Japanese forms—the *hokku*, with its seventeen, and the *uta* or *tanka*, with its thirty-one sounds—should attach much importance to the qualities of concentration and intensity. His discussion here is especially useful in its implications of a fresh mode of attack upon a crucial problem in poetics.

Professor Saito's essay should be read. Because of its enthusiastic tone it may be open to some distrust; but the unbiased reader will find it one of the most closely-reasoned studies of Keats yet made. There are one or two minor errors of fact. One is an inaccurate quotation from Sidney Colvin's "Life"; another occurs in remarks which involve the date of "Hyperion, A Vision": "In 1818 . . . Keats was still delighted with the 'luxuries.' . . . It is in Hyperion that Keats for the first time treats with severity of the 'giant agony of the world.' . . . 1819 is the *annus mirabilis* of Keats's life." "Hyperion," as I think the author must know, was certainly begun in the fall of 1818. But such lapses are rare and are of small note in comparison with the genuine merit of Professor Saito's excellent book.

### Elijah Reincarnate

**DOWIE: Anointed of the Lord.** By ARTHUR NEWCOMB. New York: The Century Co. 1930. \$3.50.

THIS generation must almost have forgotten Dowie, the reincarnation of Elijah, who founded a new religion (like all founders, he only professed to restore true Christianity), established a new city for the pure outside Chicago, got millions from his devotees and kept the suckers biting for a long time by the old army game of paying dividends out of incoming capital; who brought a host of crusaders to save New York and was a ludicrous failure because his voice was lost in Madison Square Garden; and finally was deposed from leadership of his own church because of mismanagement aggravated by eccentricities of a rather scandalous sort.

It was a fantastic and fascinating personality; and one cannot help wishing that Arthur Newcomb, who was closely associated with Dowie during his great years in Chicago, had written a straight biography instead of a "slightly novelized" adaptation. He may have had sound reasons for making this look like fiction rather than fact; but the fictitious element adds nothing to the story and much space is wasted on irrelevancies such as the details of Dowie's trip around the world. No treatment could altogether spoil the story, but Mr. Newcomb has fallen far short of making the best of it.

### Walnut and Marble

**THE BLUE AND THE GRAY, or, WAR IS HELL.** Revised and Edited by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY from an Old Script by JUDSON KILPATRICK and J. OWEN MOORE. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1930. \$2.

**ELSIE DINSMORE ON THE LOOSE!** By JOSIE TURNER. Drawings by ELDON KELLEY. New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by HENRY WALCOTT BOYNTON

THIS is one of the successes of Mr. Morley's gay experiment at the Old Rialto in Hoboken. As sponsor and edifier of the entertainment, he is a little plaintive about the fact that it scored only fifty-two performances, whereas its immediate forerunner, Boucicault's melodrama "After Dark," had totted up a grand 437. He believes that it was just as good a show, but everything outside happened to go wrong. The stock market went to pieces, and half the theater public stayed at home. The weather was cold and the audiences were too small to keep the house warm "by sheer human radiation." By the time money had been collected to mend the boiler it was too late.

But its producer touches lightly on all this. He prefers to recall the fun everybody had getting up the play. We understand from the gloomy novels of the theater that there is a particularly seamy side to the business of rehearsing, but if this producer and his crew ever suffered annoyances, discomforts, jealousies, or what not, they vanish under the genial backward glance of the entrepreneur. His people, we gather, are all by nature and habit Good Companions. This play, he says "was a joy to do and a joy to remember . . . deserved better luck, and we preserve it in this form for our future use."

Its source is odd and interesting. The original romantic war play it is founded on, "Allatoona," was written by the gallant cavalryman and adventurer General Kilpatrick, as a souvenir of a certain Georgia campaign in which he played no mean rôle. J. Owen Moore's part in the play is not made clear. Apparently he adapted the Kilpatrick script and the Morley hand has dealt freely with the adaptation. Mr. Morley's problem, I suppose, was to keep the color and substance of the original while subduing its worst romantic exuberances. And there are witty touches here and there, sly jests barely under the surface of the dialogue, of whose source we are sure. The object of the jests, is the sentimental fustian that passed for the heroic in the Civil War era. But to a reader, at least, the effect of the performance is not altogether uproarious. This is a restoration not a burlesque, and the hand of the restorer is touched with indulgence and even with tenderness for an age of haircloth patriotism and black-walnut romance.

"Elsie Dinsmore on the Loose" deals more rudely with the well-known futilities and banalities of the Victorian period. It is straight burlesque, quite ruthless, and there is rather too much of it. The idea is amusing enough. The famous and virtuous Elsie is transplanted bodily to our own time and put through her paces in various modern settings. Her father, Mr. Horace Dinsmore, is a man about town, a middle-aged buck of the '60s who finds himself at home at a costume ball or a night club of the '20s. He preserves the moral patter and the hypocrisy of old without missing a trick of the modern social joyrider.

Elsie, at fourteen, has been brought up according to the old tradition, by a governess who is a dream of propriety. "I have fed the goldfish and emptied the ice-box pan," said she with characteristic gaiety to Mammy Chloe, who was following her nursing about the house, to prevent the child's overtaxing her strength. "And now, Mammy Chloe, if you will fetch the green enamelled watering pot, which dear, kind Mr. Travilla presented to me, I shall water the rubber plants." Upon this innocent and idyllic existence crashes dear Papa's sudden determination to introduce his daughter to the world. Elsie's outward self is transformed, the pantalet becomes the panty, she learns to absorb her cocktail with surprising ease and excellent results, she becomes at home in resorts of pleasure and

fashion. But everywhere she carries with her unblemished her maxims and her niceties.

The Epilogue (headed by two poetical mottoes) is worth quoting:

And now, with this happy anniversary of the birth of the sweet floweret, who had blossomed into this world of sin and sorrow just fifteen years before, bringing joy to all hearts, let us leave our little heroine, older and wiser than when we first met her, though no less pure, innocent and devout. . . . We may be sure that whatever betide, whatever the future may hold in store for Elsie and her distinguished-looking father, they will always abide steadfastly by the principles which have guided their faltering steps in the past. As for kind Mr. Travilla, can you not guess, dear reader, that it will not be long ere he speaks of the emotion budding in his good heart?

### Catholicism and the Future

**THE COMING AGE AND THE CATHOLIC FAITH.** By WILLIAM BARRY. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1930. \$2.50.

Reviewed by THEODORE MAYNARD

DR. WILLIAM BARRY, since 1907 Canon of Birmingham, and since 1923 a Monsignor, has long been known as one of the leading Catholic scholars. As theologian, historian, and critic he has been equally distinguished, and his novels are by no means negligible. But he is in his eighty-first year and the fact is apparent only too frequently in this book.

The first twenty-three pages of "The Coming Age and the Catholic Church" were written in 1911. A decline in vigor is painfully apparent throughout the remaining two hundred pages. They possess, indeed, mellow wisdom, and a learning that has penetrated to the marrow of the writer's bones. Moreover, Monsignor Barry's style cannot be anything but graceful and charming. But he is very old and very tired. For this reason, many of the later chapters, slight as they are, come to an abruptly huddled close.

His book has so excellent an idea that I hope some younger man will use it again. Monsignor Barry could hardly have written it himself when he was younger; the World War and the settlement of the question of the Pope's temporal sovereignty had to occur first. Now, despite all the difficulties of her situation—and, in fact, largely because of those difficulties—the Church has a unique opportunity, of which she will most certainly take full advantage, though quietly and without hurry. Protestantism, bankrupt as a spiritual force, seems doomed to extinction before long. And the old challenge of the rationalist has lost its force, since the Church is now almost the sole defender of the validity of reason. Even birth control, which Monsignor Barry notes to be the chief remaining stone of offense, is likely to result very greatly to the advantage of Catholicism. For while many thousands drop away from the Church on this account—under the combined pressure of human passion and inhuman economics—nevertheless the preponderant Catholic birthrate will do much more than balance these defections.

The Communist explosion in Russia—which we must expect to see followed by similar explosions elsewhere—may well in the long run of the world's history be of aid to the Church. Catholicism at all events has never been identified with capitalism (which is, on the contrary, one of the byproducts of the Reformation) or with industrialism, which, as the Bolshevik experiment has shown, finds a more congenial bedfellow in communism even than in capitalism. The Catholic alternative to both systems is to be found in the *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII, though it is stated there with cautious moderation and in its most general terms.

This summary, though it takes in a little more than Monsignor Barry has put into his book, as it also leaves out a little, will, I think, be acceptable to the author. He is able to sing his *Nunc Dimittis*; to conclude his book with, "And now, the world's great age begins again, Italy and the Pope are free." But younger men will look upon that culmination as the opening of a new chapter.