

**Faraway Places.** Just a month ago, upon the basis of some books lately published, we opined that men of the Atomic Age anxious to get away from it all were favoring frigid climes as the locale of their dreams. We opined too hastily. Here are some new books, all intended to gratify men surfeited with civilization, which suggest that there are those who favor the high seas for escape: the Indian Ocean in Alan Villiers's "Monsoon Seas" (below), the Atlantic edging France and Portugal in George Millar's "A White Boat from England" (page 13), and the Hebridean Sea in Gavin Maxwell's "Harpoon Venture" (page 14). These follow a well-worn literary tradition: as L. Sprague de Camp and Willy Ley establish in "Lands Beyond" (page 15), a history of dream worlds down through the ages, "the lands beyond" usually have been across or in the middle of the seas. Only one writer finds escape on land—John Sack who describes an ascent of the Peruvian mountain Yerupaja in "The Butcher" (page 15).

## Bay of the Great South

**MONSOON SEAS:** *The Story of the Indian Ocean.* By Alan Villiers. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. 337 pp. \$4.75.

By ROBERT PAYNE

OF ALL the great seas the Indian Ocean must be the most pleasant to write about, for it lies on the frontiers of legend. The deep blueness of the ocean, the incandescence of its waters, the strange winds that blow across it, the very shape of this sea with its two northern prongs embedded in Asia, the sheer length of the African hothouse on one side and the enchanted spice island on the other, all these are enough to turn a man's head. I suspect that the Atlantic was invented by a vengeful God, the Pacific by naval intelligence, and the Mediterranean by historians. Only a poet of prodigious powers could have invented the Indian Ocean. No one who has sailed it ever quite recovers from its blazing sunrises and still more blazing sunsets, or from the serene blue of the waters when they are calm. This blue is everywhere. I have seen the same blue off Djibuti which I saw months later off the coast of the island of Bali, and the great harbor at Colombo is filled with the same serene color, and though you will not find it off Calcutta or Rangoon, you will find it nearly every-

where else. All the way from Africa to the Spice Islands this color accompanies you, reminding you that if the rivers of Asia are holy, then the sea they fall into is holier still.

Alan Villiers, who has sailed the Indian Ocean in everything from an Arab dhow to an iron tub of a landing craft, is perfectly aware of the strangeness inevitable to his story. He has tales to tell which are never quite credible, because the ocean itself is never quite credible. Sindbad the Sailor reported that he saw full-grown elephants fed to some white-winged birds on an island in the Indian Ocean which may have been Madagascar. Shall we believe him? But there are stranger things than elephants fed



Alan Villiers—milk and maelstroms.

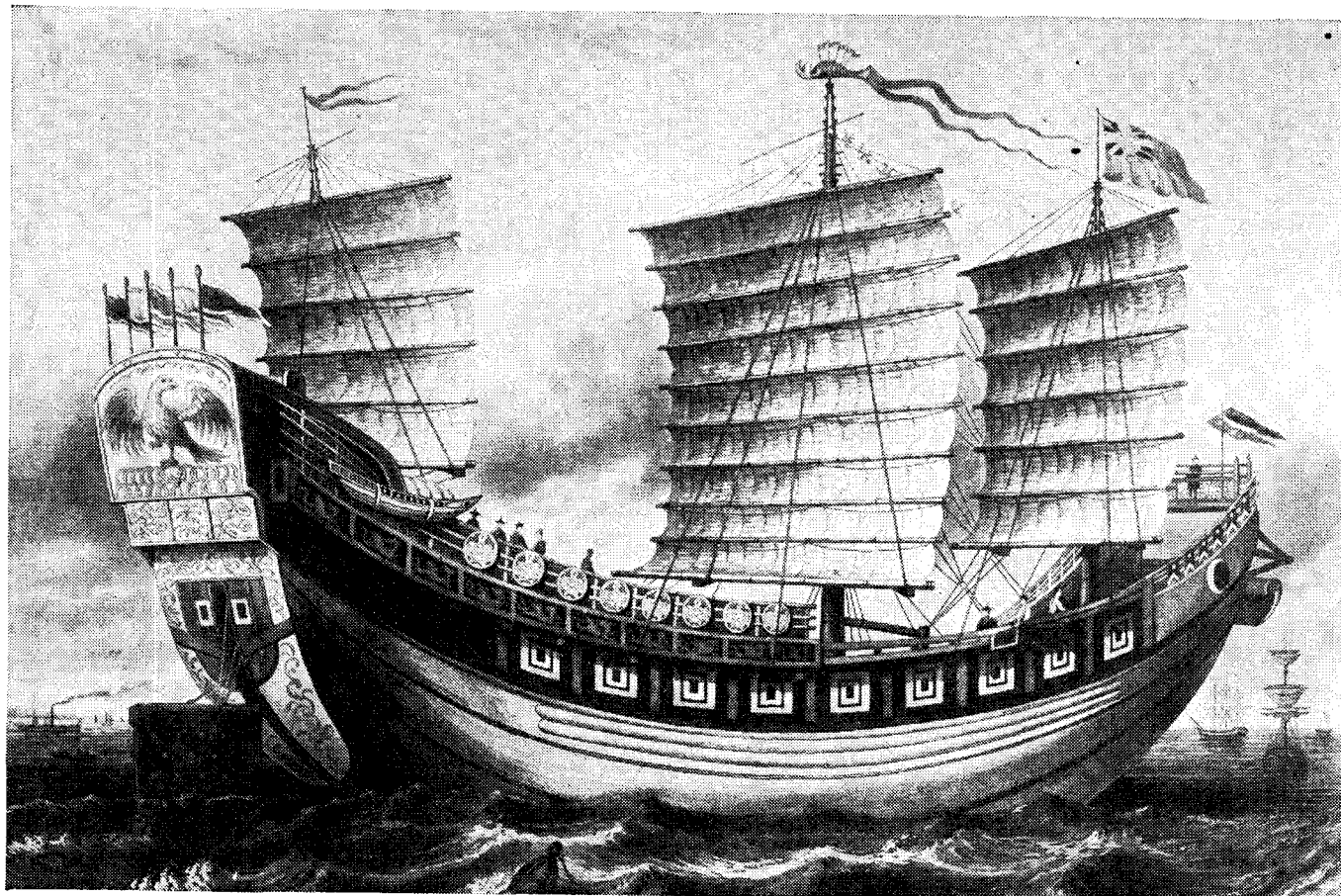
to birds in this ocean: there are times when the sea inexplicably turns into a milky, dazzling light, and other times when ghostly galleons appear, and there are strange maelstroms in the south, and who will deny even now that there is unbelievable splendor of wealth on the shores of this ocean? The Indian Ocean is only another name for the fabulous East, which remains fabulous even though we are tired of being told so.

But where to begin? There are so many stories and legends to tell, so many adventurers to track down, so many speculations to make that Villiers has some difficulty getting into stride. You cannot write about an ocean from a fixed perspective. You must go from island to island, from coast to coast, from trading route to trading route, and from one age to another.

So Villiers begins casually and grimly with a sketch of the Andaman Islands. I should have thought this was the last place to begin, for these islands with their green forests and stockades filled with Indian prisoners, mostly murderers, hint at the menace which lies concealed in these seas. He hurries to Ceylon, and tells the story of how tea was invented by an old monk who wanted to keep awake during seven years of contemplation, and nearly slept his life away; happily, some tea-leaves fell into his water-cup, and he was watchful to the end. Ceylon he rates the most beautiful of islands: a permissible exaggeration, for he seems to have spent little time in Bali. An inveterate storyteller, he recounts more tales about Mauritius, Reunion, and Rodriguez, and thirty more islands, but Villiers is only warming up. Indeed, his preliminary skirmish with the islands is something of a nuisance.

When he comes to describe the great Arab trading posts and the sea-empire they flung across the ocean, excitement enters the story. He has traveled with Arabs off the coast of Africa, and knows them well. He knows their history, and suspects they were the first real seamen. He hazards the guess that they will also be the last, for sailing ships will probably still be sailing the Indian Ocean when the rest of the world is powered by atomic piles, and Arabs will be in command of them. Of Vasco da Gama, whose papers he has studied in Lisbon, he writes learnedly and with passion—his study of the great conquistador is a model of what a short biography should be. He passes the Portuguese, Dutch, and British empires over the Indian Ocean under review. He finds little to say in favor of Dutch colonization and notes how John Company had the seeds of disaster in it from the

Robert Payne has written fiction, personal history, political comment, and biography mostly concerning the East. Among his books are "Forever China" and "Torrents of Spring," and "Zero: The Story of Terrorism."



Chinese junk that sailed to Europe—"from concubines to shipwrecks."

—From "Monsoon Seas."

beginning. Of the Portuguese he is more respectful, and in two sentences from the papers of Da Gama he illuminates the whole tragedy of colonization. Da Gama had acquired an Arab pilot. "We are coming to share in trade and to spread our faith, but not to conquer," Da Gama explained. The pilot answered: "You will find that you will have to conquer whether you wish it or not."

For the rest the book is a wonderful hodge-podge of stories, some culled from other books and others from the lore of the ocean. The extraordinary story of Houtman's Abrolhos, a piece to set beside "Benito Cereno," is told at length, and followed by the adventures of Alexander Hare, an old lecher who conveyed a boat-load of concubines round the eastern seas until he reached the Cocos-Keelings. There disaster befell the concubines. One story leads to another. Villiers goes from concubines to shipwrecks and from shipwrecks to the great armada which would, but for the grace of an early victory, have been let loose on Singapore, and from there to—. But the stories are endless, and it is like sitting with an old sailor on the fo'c'sle deck at night while the mast swings gently. In this day and age there are few pleasures greater than listening to a sailor telling his tales of the sea.

## The Sea Was a Relation

A WHITE BOAT FROM ENGLAND.

By George Millar. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 345 pp. \$3.50.

By EVERETT S. ALLEN

**H**OWEVER unexpected it may seem, one emerges from the leisurely pages of George Millar's writings uncommonly sensitive to a Chaucerian aura. The familiar mellow mantle, in an embodiment of iced white wine, the smoke of nutty shag, and bold laughter, lies comfortably over these paragraphs of world traveling. And the result is like meeting an old friend in a far-away place.

In essence, Mr. Millar describes the manner in which he and his wife, Isabel, sailed their graceful, 16-ton sloop, *Serica*, from England around the coasts of Spain and Portugal and into the Mediterranean. In actuality, however, the story is a bright little pageant of people, carefully fashioned with a gratifying discernment. Moreover, although *Serica* and her crew are always present, they interject themselves, like well-trained butlers, only when there is a purpose to be served.

The voyage, rather than being a central theme, is a vehicle linking episodes ashore. Although *Serica* might be called a yacht, her cruise from Lymington to the Riviera is not a "practical" book on yachting; it is far too creative. Nor is her skipper, though overly-modest, a top-notch mariner. Thus, the yarn spun here is not for the sea-going precisionist, who must forever be holystoning and tinkering with the sheets to measure the wind's eye in millimeters.

It is instead a story of comfortable comings and goings, of people and their talk, and occasionally of jousts with the elements. What the Millars sought was economical travel, leisurely accomplished; they have procured as well a collection of sensitively-drawn vignettes from the paradoxical Europe of post-World War II.

With a few deft lines, Millar draws the people of the ports, big and little, who reign in crisp officialdom, cast their nets for spending tourists, or claw the tired soil and deceptive seas for their livelihood. Here, pupils of a girls' school hurl garbage and rocks in a feud with an irate villager; a dying old man asks to see the visiting "yachtsmen Brittanique,"