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EMILY HAHN

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RAFFLES OF SINGAPORE

BOOKS BY EMILY HAHN

RAFFLES OF SINGAPORE
HONG KONG HOLIDAY
CHINA TO ME
MR. PAN
THE SOONG SISTERS

With much affection to George and Katharine Sansom

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Many thanks are due the Explorers' Club of New York for their generosity in allowing a free use of their excellent library during the preparation of this text. The same is true of the British Library of Information in New York, with special reference to the kindness of Mrs. Mary Burke of that organization. The writer also wishes to express her gratitude for the practical help given her by Dr. James Chapin of the American Museum of Natural History.

Dr. Bartholomew Landheer, of the Netherlands Information Bureau in New York, was kind enough, during the writer's absence in England, to check the book in proof for the spelling of the many Dutch names which occur in the text, a tedious job and one which she sincerely appreciates his having done.

APOLOGIA

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"The volume is too cursory for the specialist and too detailed for others. . . ." (From R. O. Winstedt's review of Vlekke's Nusantara in the Journal of the Revel Asiatic Society and Soci

of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1944.)

Cruel words which, though they were not inspired by this book, might well have been. The author of Raffles of Singapore hereby offers a brief apology for her unorthodox treatment of an exceedingly conventional subject, knowing that biography and history used customarily to be written in a special style, dry and pedantic. That, in her opinion, was a fault. She feels that her own generation while growing up was frightened away from history by this stupid tradition, which masked Clio's beauty and drowned the music of her voice in dull, pedestrian language. The old fashion was deliberately to steal from the story of men and nations all excitement and even interest. History we understood to be a dreary list of wars and coronations, appended to a catalogue of dates.

If in following the new fashion the writer exaggerates, leaning too far in the other direction, she hopes that her facts at least are fundamentally sound and that she has avoided slop-

piness in recounting them.

Her hope and purpose in producing this book are not to contribute to our knowledge of Raffles; for excepting that she had access to Dutch sources which are not commonly known to English readers, she has nothing new to offer. She meant it rather for the ordinary person who, like herself, was cheated at school by bad teaching and never learned of history's true deep pleasures until he was able to dispel his early false impressions.

Those readers who are already well grounded in the period are asked to refer to the Bibliography before reading the book. They may then feel that the writer has at any rate tried to avoid being included in the category of those so scathingly condemned by Lord Curzon as "either not having read what has been written by better men before, or reading it only in order to plagiarize and reproduce it as their own, . . . misunderstand, misspell, and misinterpret everywhere as they go." The desire to avoid this pitfall for the hack writer turned historian also explains why the author has refrained from the temptation to paraphrase or modernize the older writers whose works she has consulted.

The interest we all feel today in Indonesia as well as the general topic of imperialism appears to her to lead as a matter of course to England and, particularly, to Raffles's period. What is happening today in Java has a definite relationship with the past in which he played so large a part.

It has been difficult to keep to a consistent spelling of Malay and Javanese names, particularly as they occur many times in direct quotations where they must be left untouched in whatever form the original writer preferred: Dutch, English, or purely arbitrary. Sticklers for accuracy are referred to the Glossary and Index, where these variations are properly listed.

Acknowledgment is made elsewhere to those individuals who have helped in various ways to locate or secure the information included in this book; but it should be stated here that Major C. R. Boxer was responsible for all of the translation and much of the selection of the Dutch material used. Naturally this responsibility does not extend to the writer's interpretation of the facts thus supplied. On a number of occasions Major Boxer's views did not coincide with those of his wife, which is one of several reasons for his firm, consistent refusal to accept more credit for his help than is herewith given.

EMILY HAHN

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CHAPTER I

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Had Mrs. Benjamin Raffles been able to hold out one more night her son would have been born on the terra firma of Jamaica instead of seeing his first daylight from the cabin of the Ann. Not that it mattered to anyone. Even the captain was complacent, a rare state of affairs for a man of his calling when a baby gets itself born under his command. But then the circumstances were unusual, for he was Benjamin Raffles, father of the infant, who was the first male child his wife had produced; what man under such circumstances would complain, even though he was captain? Not the father of Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles, in any case.

The eighteenth century was altogether more philosophical about such facts of nature than is the twentieth, due in large part to the difficulties of travel. When a ship's sailing schedule is liable to be knocked galley-west by a change of seasonal wind, it seems unduly captious to take exception to some feminine mistake of a month or so. Today the shipping companies are not so amiable about maritime deliveries. Ticket agencies have been known to refuse ladies all too evidently close to their hour of travail when they try to book passage on long sea voyages. But such practice is generally frowned on and will probably not become general. There is a good deal of old-fashioned prejudice still to be found in our hearts: we are still hopelessly in favor of reproduction, and it goes against our instincts thus

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summarily to discourage women big with child, however inconvenient their company aboard ship. We are extraordinarily kind, for some reason, to any woman who, like Mrs. Raffles, gives birth on a ship at sea. Be she steerage passenger or millionairess, half-witted or famous, malodorous or attractive, sweet or bad-tempered, everybody loves her for a day. She is esteemed, petted, and spoiled; she is considered a creature of noble fortitude rather than just another feckless female who can't count.

Since this is the case in 1946, one can see how much less reason Captain Benjamin had to complain, back in 1781 on the fifth of July. He wasn't an exception. English sea captains who liked to have their wives about them used often to take them along on voyages like this journey aboard the Ann. The ship was making a routine run, London to Port Morant and back with fresh cargo, so while she was loading Mrs. Raffles had ample time to recover and to slip ashore and register her babe properly, before the Ann pointed her nose toward home.

Our information on this subject is meager, but since we learn from Raffles, in letters which he wrote years later, that his father was chronically unable to support his family without aid, we can guess that the bright warm islands of the West Indies gave the captain's wife an unusual taste of luxury, after living frugally in London most of her life. We must be satisfied, however, with conjecture, because Sir Stamford has never been generous with descriptions of his childhood's difficulties. Doubtless he was reluctant to dwell on his own trials and troubles partly because he was modest, partly because of pride.

Fortunately for us, writers like Thackeray, Hickey, and their contemporaries have been less self-contained, and so we have a clear picture of the London in which Raffles grew up, whether or not he ever wished us to know the worst. We can make a close guess at what his home was like: it must have been dark and inconvenient, for even the wealthy residents of London lived in gloomy buildings in those days. Nobody knew any better. The Raffles family was poor, but not abject with the poverty that knows no pride. Such a state would have been, in many ways, easier to support philosophically. Raffles

came of gentlefolk, poor boy, and he was taught never to forget to be genteel, no matter what misfortunes he labored under. When he went out into the world, a weedy boy of fourteen, he had learned his lesson well and knew how to keep the true state of affairs at home decently hidden. So did his parents, so did his sisters, with a fierce pride that cost them God knows what in privations which were never admitted, then or later, when circumstances became easier.

It is difficult, indeed, not to lose patience with the longsuffering clan of Raffles. Life could have been much pleasanter for all of them if they had possessed a little less fortitude, a little more humility. If only Captain Benjamin Raffles and Mrs. Raffles (nee Lindeman of the Herefordshire Lindemans, also sister of the Rev. John Lindeman, a respectable clergyman), and the young Misses Raffles, and Master Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles-if only they hadn't been so tiresomely genteel and decent it would have gone better for everyone. But they couldn't help it: they were victims of the time and the system. Far more than she is today, England was rigidly divided into classes, and the Raffleses belonged irrevocably to the respectable middle class. Had they been low-class cockneys, they could have relaxed. A poor cockney with no education, heir to no social position, was able in the late eighteenth century to settle back in his dirt with his wife and ragged brats; he got a little fun out of life. He took it easy. He could beg or steal, he could even do a menial job and earn some menial money, which goes as far as the other kind. Nobody expected him to entertain ambitions for his children's betterment; he wouldn't dream of it. He took no more thought for his offspring's future than an animal of the fields. So long as they pigged it with him and were willing to share his lot he was not unkind to them, unless he happened by some accident to achieve drunkenness. Then he might possibly beat up his dear ones, unless they were wary enough to stay out of his path. Anyway, one way or another, life for the genuine low-class poor was not too terrible to contemplate, back in those dark ages before England was modernized by machinery.

It was the shabby-genteel who were in pitiful condition, so

that one is divided, when contemplating them, between exasperation and reluctant respect.

It is genuinely a relief to know that the captain's wife went down to Jamaica once, at any rate, for a sort of holiday. There were other mitigations in the Raffleses' lot too: their father the captain could at least tell them about warmer climes, where slaves were plentiful and everyone had leisure and every day was like a dream. They would probably become ambitious to see all this for themselves. At the end of the eighteenth century more than one English heart yearned toward the romance of "the Colonies." Hundreds of British men and women were out in India or Malaya, finding compensation for the discomfort of the long voyage in a marvelous manner of life unknown to the home island.

English minds were full of oriental visions just then. We citizens of the United States used to learn at school that the loss of the American colonies and the revolution leading to it were heavy blows to the British. We were taught that the English were plunged into the depths of despair by our defection, and that George's throne practically tottered when his subjects realized how he had wantonly lost this pride of the Atlantic for them. For all I know, our children are still hearing this nonsense. In actuality the ordinary Briton of the late eighteenth century was scarcely aware of America, either before or after our war of independence. The quality of the troops the Crown sent to put down the insurrection was a fair sign af England's contemptuous opinion of us; only a handful of men were spared for the job. When they failed in their mission, the English, far from feeling astonishment and terror, didn't experience much emotion at all, with the exception of a few businessmen who had invested heavily rather than wisely in the new western colonies. No ordinary Briton could have guessed how the United States were to flourish in the next couple of centuries. The only important effect our Revolution seemed to have on the mother country was to turn public notice more completely toward the Indies, West and East, which had long held most of their attention anyway. And British above allit was so new, so glamorous, so full of possibilities! It was con-

venient, too, as a wastebasket: India in those days fulfilled the function of Australia in the next century in accommodating the wild youngsters, the problem children, and the younger sons of England. She also offered tempting careers to solid citizens. The ports of India were already well-established cities, with an aristocracy composed of British men and women who kept dozens of native servants, lived in a sort of fairyland, and were too happily busy to remember their more humble origins at home. A lady writing a friend from Madras in 1783 makes none of the mention we might expect of political difficulties or of housekeeping problems, but she speaks briefly and ungrammatically of the trials of sea travel, as one sufferer to another, before turning once and for all to the engrossing topic of dress. A lady who at home would have been absorbed in domestic topics, in India has learned to chatter like a lady of fashion, of high degree, and of no earthly use to anybody.

"I have received your letter and am very happy to hear of your safe arrival in Bengal after so uncommonly bad and disagreeable a passage as you had, but you was most fortunate in meeting with such a man in the command of the ship as Captain Serocold. I make no doubt but you will like your situation, as I hear the inhabitants of Bengal are much more sociably disposed than we humdrum Madrassars. To add to your society there are a great many ladies arrived here whose final destination is your quarter. Many of them are single, and some very pretty, really beautiful. I have not yet been to see them, being, as you well know, a sad visitor. I hear nothing talked of now but the fashions! It is reckoned the height of indelicacy to show the ear or any part of it; the hair is therefore cut in such a manner as wholly to cover that part of the head, not even the tip must be seen. For my part I am very well satisfied with the old custom, and too sedate to adopt every absurd and preposterous innovation. . . ."

A glorious vision had taken hold of the British. True, England was not the empire she was to become when Queen Victoria sat on the throne and Disraeli taught her to be an empress, but she was already the country which had produced the East India Company, and her people were cashing in on that fact.

Colonization was not yet a political matter. It was not even primarily the affair of the government. The colonies were offshoots of trade, the be-all and end-all of the average Briton. If an Englishman went to far-off lands and wrestled with the natives for existence, and finally produced something worth sending home to sell, he was not thinking so much of his country's glory or of his King as he was of his record with the Company. He was always, if he lived in India, connected with one of the "factories," and through his very languid efforts petty trading was done to such a degree that a thousand such small transactions made up an important figure for the annual accounting back home, in Threadneedle Street.

Remember, it was a disparity of opinion as to the nation's duty toward British colonists which finally led to that revolt of America. The colonists of North America had come to think of themselves as settled residents of the new country, rather than temporary commercial travelers out to exploit a strange land. In India the mentality was different.

Stamford Raffles was born during the Revolutionary War, and there is a definite link between our history and his. A comparison, though farfetched, is amusing. Our nation was born at the same time he was. We didn't know to what heights our destiny was to take us; neither did he. (Though we all felt premonitions of glory.) The children being born in the American provinces when Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles put in his appearance were dedicated to the new experiment of a republic. Raffles, on the other hand, was an empire builder, dedicated to empire from the cradle. He didn't know it. Until just a bit before the end he thought of himself as a servant of the East India Company first, and second as a loyal and not unworthy subject of the Crown, doing his best for the nation by way of trade. But he was an empire builder nevertheless, perhaps the first genuine one in England. Clive and Hastings came before him and played their parts against the same backdrop, it is true. But both of these men, particularly Clive, were individualists and careerists first: their work was only fortuitously constructive of the British Empire. Raffles, a younger man, saw the Company, and himself an integral part of the Company, all a

part, in turn, of the great divine plan of empire. He never doubted the final rightness of empire; he merely doubted the Company's interpretation, sometimes, of Divinity's intentions. Then he tried to set them right again, back on the path leading to the right true end—a greater empire.

As a result he was not half the "character" Clive was, nor did he want to be. In his world a man didn't stand alone on the stage, posturing. A man who could choose his part didn't play the hero: he preferred to be stage director. He stood offstage and told the mob what to do—yes, and the hero too.

The relations which had existed through two centuries between the East India Company and the Crown seem simple enough in retrospect, a long record of charters granted, renewed, held back, and then granted again as new monarchs came to the throne and felt kindly disposed or covetous toward the merchant adventurers. Closer inspection breaks up the orderly pattern. A conscientious student of history can easily spend a lifetime tracing the East India Company's strange Siamese-twin existence, side by side with the British Government through the years; still he will not have unraveled it. What at first seems obvious becomes obsure under the reading glass. For example the chief article of trade for many years, the staple industry which provided the lifeblood of the Company, was not an Indian product at all but a Chinese one—tea. And though we speak nowadays a good deal, loosely, of England's conquest of India, as though it were a simple tale of armed expansion, the British Government was not India's conqueror. The East India Company, John Company, was. The conquest of India was primarily commercial; it was carried out by commercial agents. It is true that they were Englishmen, and their military wore English uniform, but they were acting for the Company. For generations the British rulers of the Indians and all their petty officials were East India Company agents, and nothing else. This does not mean the Indians were mistaken in laying the actions of the white men at the door of the British Crown. By the time Clive made his name famous