

DAS ENDE DER GEBURT
by
Vicki Baum

File
A Tale of Bali *The Peasant of Bali*

The somewhat puzzling origin of this manuscript though explained by Miss Baum in her ~~foreword~~ foreword would lead one to belief that it was used as a convenient introduction to a product of her own fertile imagination, that is before one has read the manuscript, after having read it however I at least am convinced that Miss Baum was left this manuscript by ~~the~~ doctor Fabius and that she edited and rearranged it. Though of course not being acquainted with the original she did a marvellous job and has ^{co-related and} integrated the material in a remarkable fashion.

Miss Baum tells us how she became first acquainted with Bali when she was shown some beautiful photographs of the Island and the Balinese in 1916. At that time the so-called civilized nations of the world were engaged in a life and death struggle which left little room for interest in the strange life of the people on a small island, which in post-war period has been advertised by ambitious steamship lines as the nearest approach to paradise on earth. However Miss Baum ~~revisited~~ revisited Bali in 1935 when she made the acquaintance of this remarkable doctor Fabius, who was greatly beloved by the natives for his medical care and help and his ~~sympathy~~ sympathy with and understanding of Balinese folklore. Coming back to the United States she wrote several letters to doctor Fabius, but received no answer. The reason was, that the doctor, a very old man had died in the meantime. She did inherit from him however a small Japanese valise, which contained a voluminous manuscript. The first part of this manuscript with sundry changes is the work at hand. It makes one of the most remarkable books ~~it~~ it has ever been my ^{to read} ~~privilege~~ privilege, under its simple surface is a deep philosophy of almost universal content. It ^{is} as much an epic of the soil as THE GOOD EARTH and the GROWTH OF THE SOIL, and in spite of its length holds one spell-bound from beginning to end. There was a tempting opportunity to make this book conform ^{to} ~~the~~ tourist's and travel eulogies about Bali. It does however nothing of the kind. It is a beautiful book of epic scope and will stand in an-

nals of modern literature as one of the outstanding works in colonial literature. Not a single false note has been struck and the reading of it moves one to the core in sympathy with the suffering of a subject people, whom the Dutch colonial ~~government~~ government had the grace finally to consider as an extraordinary people, whose customs and religion should be preserved with the only exception that some of the cruel customs such as widow-burning and torturing of ~~criminals~~ criminals should be abandoned. Anybody who can read this book however without at the end feeling a great love for the Balinese must be completely blind to the beauty of one ^{of} the earth's last remaining primitive cultures.

The story is simply the story of the peasant Pak, but it involves considerably more than a mere narrative of his own life. The ~~theme~~ theme opposes the simple daily tasks and pleasures of the serf with the arrogant wealth and foolhardy bravery of the rajah. ~~With~~ The book is more than a novel; it is taken from real instances in the life of the Balinese and the last war of the rajah Alit with the Hollanders in 1907. The book stretches from 1904 to 1907. The historical incident of the shipwrecking of a Chinese merchant vessel flying the Dutch flag on the coast of Bali, its subsequent plunder by the Balinese after they had saved the Chinese are at the beginning and at the end the punitive expedition of the Dutch East Indian army. In between we become thoroughly and most movingly acquainted with Balinese life from the highest to the lowest and with never a let-up in interest.

In the introduction we find the aged doctor Fabius in conversation with Pak who is now an old man at peace with the world and as it says at the very end of the book "with his heart ^{happy} with a happiness, which is unknown to ~~the~~ white man." We have completed the perfect cycle, as indicated in the quotation from the Bhagavad-Gita at the outset of the book: "The end of Birth is Death. Death's End is Birth. Thus it has been ordained." After this introduction comes the story proper. The first chapter is entitled: THE SHIPWRECK OF THE SRI KUMALA. In this first chapter we are introduced to Pak, our principal hero, his young sister Lambon, the Balinese dancer, his ugly but sensible wife Puglug, his old

father wise in Brahmin wisdom. ~~His~~ His neighbor, the much venerated Brahmin priest, the Pedanda, Ida Bagus Rai, his son, the best dancer of the South Balinese territory under the reign of rajah Alit, Raka. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ A Chinese boat is shipwrecked and that is ~~the~~ where the trouble starts which gives the Dutch colonial government after three years a welcome excuse to send a punitive expedition to this still independent part of the island. Local authority is the Punggawa who directs the rescue of the shipwrecked and places some Balinese guards along the coast in order to prevent the plundering of the wreckage. Pak is one of the guards. A sinister figure in all this is the Chinese Njo Tok Suey who takes care of the interests of the shipwrecked Chinese. The principal Chinese's name aboard the ship is Kwe Tik Tjiang. Strange doings occur during the night after the shipwreck. Pak on guard has gone to sleep. A disreputable character in that neighborhood is the fisherman Bengkek of hoarse voice, because of a throat affliction. He participates in the plundering of the Chinese vessel and as Pak halts him on his way back from the wreck, he bribes him with three valueless China plates, which according to Pak, the innocent have a beautiful design of roses on them. Pak's mouth is thus sealed and he buries the ~~the~~ three plates as a great treasure.

The second chapter entitled THE PURI, concerns itself with palace and palace grounds of Raja Alit. The Legong dancer Raka is his best friend. The palace is full of harem intrigue. The prince has no children and ^{is} a Brahmin philosopher, bored with life and an opium addict. He is ugly and Raka is beautiful. The Chinaman has complained to the Dutch authorities about the plundering of his ship. He wants compensation. The haughty rajah has ample money to compensate the Chinaman, but there is a principle involved and he is proud. The Dutch authorities, through the intermediary of the controller Visser try to collect. The rajah is polite, but lends a deaf ear. The argument is continued in the chapter Buleleng, which is the residence of the Dutch colonial authorities. We meet the Resident, a ~~Dutchman~~ Dutchman, whose seaman's experience has little patience with the intricacies of Balinese diplomacy.

Boosmer, his assistant however is for direct measures and feels that the Dutch authorities should send troupes and finish this irksome matter for ever with stern measures against the incomprehensible rajahs and their little appreciation of the benefits of Dutch colonial rule.

Next chapter takes us again back to the simple PEOPLE OF TAMAN SARI, that is the peasants, like Pak who make up the population of this rural peasant community. Pak has his troubles, he wants to take a second wife. His wife has only born daughters and moreover she wants an assistant in her daily tasks. She intrigues to get for his second wife, the industrious, but pimplefaced Dasni. Pak however has an eye for something more comely and wants the handsome Sarda for his second wife. Man has more or less his own way in a Balinese household and Pak has his way as he builds her a handsome new house in the walls of which he places the three fateful plates. A great honor is Pak's share, his sister, the dancer Lambon ~~is~~ is chosen as one of the new concubines of the Rajah.

In the following chapter entitled THE BIRTHDAY a son is born to Pak and the Rajah celebrates his birthday, when he treats his Dutch guests, who come to negotiate with the Balinese prince over the compensation for the Chinaman's shipwreck, to a feast of dancings and celebrations.

Thereafter comes a chapter in which the fortunes of Pak take a turn for the worse. His brother Meru has cast an eye on one of the Rajah's concubines with the result that he has his eyes put out as punishment, his rice harvest spoils, there is a rat plague and sundry other misfortunes.

The chapter entitled Raka, tells us about the rajah's favorite and the superb dancer he is. Unfortunately the dancer has fallen in love with Lambon, who is now almost a prisoner in the rajah's harem. They have ~~secret~~ ^{clandestine} meetings. They are not caught, but Beautiful Raka becomes a victim to the dread leprosy. Eventually he becomes an outcast from his community, incomprehensible as he is the son of the holy Pedanda, he is followed into exile by his wife.

One of the greatest attractions for the Balinese are cockfights. Pak obtains a champion rooster, who goes from victory to victory, in the end but to be con-

fiscated by the rajah. Pak's heart has become more and more embittered against the prince. First he has taken his sister, then his brother Menu had his eyes put out, finally he takes his champion fighting cock.

For the funeral of neighboring deceased rajah a funeral show is put on in which three of his widows are ~~burned~~ alive with his corpse. This is in spite of the agreement with the Dutch colonial authorities in which the Balinese princes promised not to do this again. Dutch patience has conveniently given out and they have finally found a welcome excuse to send a punitive expedition to South Bali.

In the final chapter we see the immolation of the rajah, his concubines and faithful followers who are no match to the trained Dutch colonial army. The peasants, such as Pak however felt that the struggle was Rajah Alit's and not theirs and in the end he returns to his sawahs, living his peaceful peasants life, cultivating the ricefields.

This is but a bare outline of this magnificent book. It is fragrant with the flowers, the artistry, the harmony of Bali. At the end we feel we have a thorough knowledge of all that makes the life of these extraordinary people so fascinating. The very simplicity of the tale however conveys indelibly to us that their struggles though in to us unfamiliar surroundings are very much the same as ours. Therefore the appeal of this book is universal and as eternal as to us the very existence of man. There is a breathless, urging quality about this manuscript which makes one to go on and on and so completely different from all other books on Bali which for some reason or another always seem artificial to us. This not a ~~roy~~ picture of a paradisaical island but the true tale of a people to whom we can feel deeply akin in spite of the differentiation in our lives.

Personally I feel that with this volume Doubleday will publish one of the most outstanding books in its publishing career.

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