

A Great Voyage

By Thomas Merton

Introduced and Transcribed
by **Paul M. Pearson**

Readers of *The Merton Seasonal* may recall that during Dr. Robert Daggy's last visit to England in December 1993, a number of unpublished manuscripts written by Merton in 1928-1930 were discovered in the possession of Frank Merton Trier, a cousin of Merton's who was still living in the family home, "Fairlawn," in West Horsley. The Winter 1994 *Seasonal* included an account of the visit Bob Daggy and I made to meet Mr. Trier,¹ along with a transcription of one of these stories – "The Haunted Castle," written in January 1929.² At the time of the visit we were shown the original school notebooks containing this story along with three other stories – "The Black Sheep,"³ "Ravenswell" and "The Five Emeralds." Mr. Trier kindly provided us with photocopies of the original manuscripts for the Merton collection at the Thomas Merton Studies Center at Bellarmine College.

Earlier this summer Mr. Trier contacted me again to say that he thought he had overlooked photocopying one of the stories and sent me a photocopy of a fifth story. This story – "A Great Voyage" – is the shortest of the stories and is contained in the same school notebook as "The Haunted Castle."

Merton Trier told us that Thomas Merton often wrote stories to entertain his younger cousins – Frank Merton Trier and Richard Trier – and that "The Haunted Castle" and "A Great Voyage" were two such stories written while he was spending the Christmas holidays with Aunt Gwyn and her family at Western Cottage, Windsor, shortly before the family moved to "Fairlawn." The notebook containing these two stories is dated 1929 and so the stories must have been written in early January before the children returned to school.

"A Great Voyage," like "The Haunted Castle," contains illustrations drawn by Merton, no doubt to entertain the younger boys, as is the case with the story-line. Robert Daggy described "The Haunted Castle" as a "Winnie-the-Pooh" story and an early example of Merton staying "abreast of current literature,"⁴ due to its resemblance to A. A. Milne's Pooh stories. *Winnie-the-Pooh* had been published only three years earlier, in October 1926, to be followed in October 1928 by *The House at Pooh Corner*.

In "The Haunted Castle" Merton had changed the names of Milne's characters and introduced a new character of his own – Winnie-the-Pooh became Sir Ted le Pooh, Christopher Robin became Dick, Tigger became Jagular and the fourth character in the story is called Toc-toc and is the man who drives Dick's toy toc-toc boat, the name of a child's toy boat at the time this story was written. In the story Sir Ted sets out to explore a haunted castle in search of honey and is joined in his "perilous mission" by his three friends. The story concludes with Sir Ted finding his honey, Jagular some large joints of meat, Toc-toc some treacle and Dick "a large box full of lovely pots of jam, of Bath buns, of eclairs, of jam tarts and plum puddings."⁵ "A Great Voyage" continues the adventures of the four friends in a similar vein. This time they set off in the toc-toc boat on a long voyage in

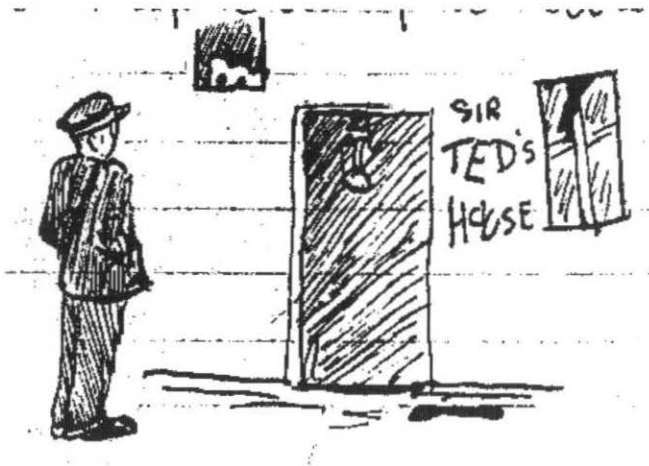
search of the “dark continent.” As with “The Haunted Castle” this story contains illustrations by Thomas Merton, reminiscent of his comment in *The Seven Storey Mountain* about stories which he wrote at St. Antonin, “scribbled in exercise books” and “profusely illustrated in pen and ink.”⁶ Merton’s comment in his autobiography may sound like the poetic license of the budding author writing in later years but these manuscripts dating back to 1929 confirm Merton’s description.

These stories are relatively sophisticated for a thirteen-year-old boy and are a good illustration of Merton’s almost compulsive need to write. As in A. A. Milne’s stories, Sir Ted, in both “The Haunted Castle” and “A Great Voyage,” has difficulty in reading and in pronouncing certain words – “earthalanche,” “avaquake,” “earthshakes” and “parkickulars.” They provide us with an insight into the beginning of Merton’s literary craft from a much earlier date than was previously possible and we also see Merton’s interest in current literature and his introduction of it into his own work and style.⁷

1. Robert E. Daggy, “Discoveries & Rediscoveries Twenty-Five Years After Thomas Merton’s Death,” *The Merton Seasonal* 19.1 (Winter 1994): 2-3.
2. Thomas Merton, “The Haunted Castle,” *The Merton Seasonal* 19.1 (Winter 1994): 7-10.
3. Thomas Merton, “The Black Sheep,” introduced and edited by Paul M. Pearson, *The Merton Annual* 11 (1998): 13-32.
4. Daggy, “Discoveries & Rediscoveries” 3.
5. “Haunted Castle” 10.
6. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948) 52.
7. “A Great Voyage” is published with the permission of the Merton Legacy Trust.

* * * * *

It was a fine summer morning, when Toc-toc came to the door of Ted’s house by the hill – or better, under the hill, because it was almost a cave. As I was saying, Toc-toc, in his beautiful blue uniform came up to Ted’s door and knocked loudly, and even to make himself heard, he shouted: “Ahoy! Good morning! It’s Toc-toc” and to finish off he gave the door a tremendous kick, and pretended he was a door bell by shouting “ting-ling, ting-ling, ting-ling.” But although he made such a noise, he had to wait fully five minutes before his summons was answered. Then, Ted’s head peeped out of a little upper window.



“So there you are!” exclaimed Toc-toc.

“Am I? . . . oh please say it again!”

“So there you are!” roared Toc-toc obligingly, then added: “why.”

“I wasn’t quite sure” sighed Ted then added after a time “Is it over?”

“What?” asked Toc-toc. “But hadn’t I better come in?”

“Yes, do” answered Ted. A moment later they were seated together in the sitting room.

“Is it over” asked Ted once again.

“What over” asked Toc-toc.

“The earthalanche, or the avaquake, whatever it was.”

“Strike me pink! What do you mean, is it dangerous?” exclaimed Toc-toc leaping up from his chair.

“Earthshakes . . . yes that’s what they’re called . . .” said Ted solemnly “are big noises accompanied by terrible shaking and trembling . . . you know, general bust up . . . many dead and wounded that sort of thing . . . apply to Dick for further parkickulars.”

“I see” said Toc-toc much impressed. “Did one come along?”

“It did!” answered Ted “and I am surprised to find myself still alive . . . my whole manor-house trembled from . . .”

“Stern to stem?” suggested Toc-toc.

“Well, I suppose that’s what I mean” answered Ted “any way there was a great shaking and noise of banging and shouting and yelling then it stopped, and I waited to see if it would go on but it didn’t, then I looked out, saw you . . . and here we are.”

“Extreemly” said Toc-toc very much bored.

“Well, why have you come to visit me? I . . . I . . . well, I mean I can’t offer you any breakfast.”

“Don’t want any” answered Toc-toc gruffly. “What I’ve come for is to tell you that we are going on a long voyage, in my Toc-toc boat. Dick, you, Jagular and the whole lot.”

“Really” answered Ted “then, will we be away very long?”

“Very long” answered Toc-toc.

Ted sighed and said to himself: “Will I have to take all my pots of honey with me.”

“Well, have we got to go?” he said finally out loud.

“Yes, . . . you’d better hurry up!” Toc-toc with these words started off, and Ted, picking up all the jars of honey he could carry, he ran after him without even locking his door.

A moment later everybody was in the little Toc-toc boat.



The Toc-toc boat sailed down the middle of the Pond for a short time then suddenly, a groan was heard from Ted.

“What’s the matter Ted?” asked Dick.

“I think I’m seasick” said Ted.

“Really! How do you know?”

“I’m sure I am” said Ted “because I’ve got a terrible pain in my toes, and one in the tip of my ear.”

“Oh dear . . . fish out the seasick medicine . . . castor oil” said Dick fumbling about in a cupboard . . . out came a castor oil bottle and a large spoon.

“Oh no! Oh no! I’m quite better now! I don’t feel it anymore” explained Ted, and back went the castor oil into it’s cupboard.

The boat went along for a bit more and then Jagular suddenly said: “Where are we going?”

Dick turned towards him, and said: “To the Dark continent.”

“Grr-r-a-w-w- which?”

“Africa.”

“Oh.”

They went on in silence for a bit more, then Ted said: “Do you know where it is?”

“Posh! no-body knows really, but we’ll soon come across it” said Dick.

At that moment, they came in sight of a great island covered with dark fir trees, and at the sight of this, Dick shouted: “here we are!”

“Are we?” asked the others.

“We are . . . this is Africa, I know it, because it’s called the Dark continent and look how dark it is”

“Oh yes!” answered all the others.

It was thus that in the year of 1929 Captain Dick and his crew discovered Africa.