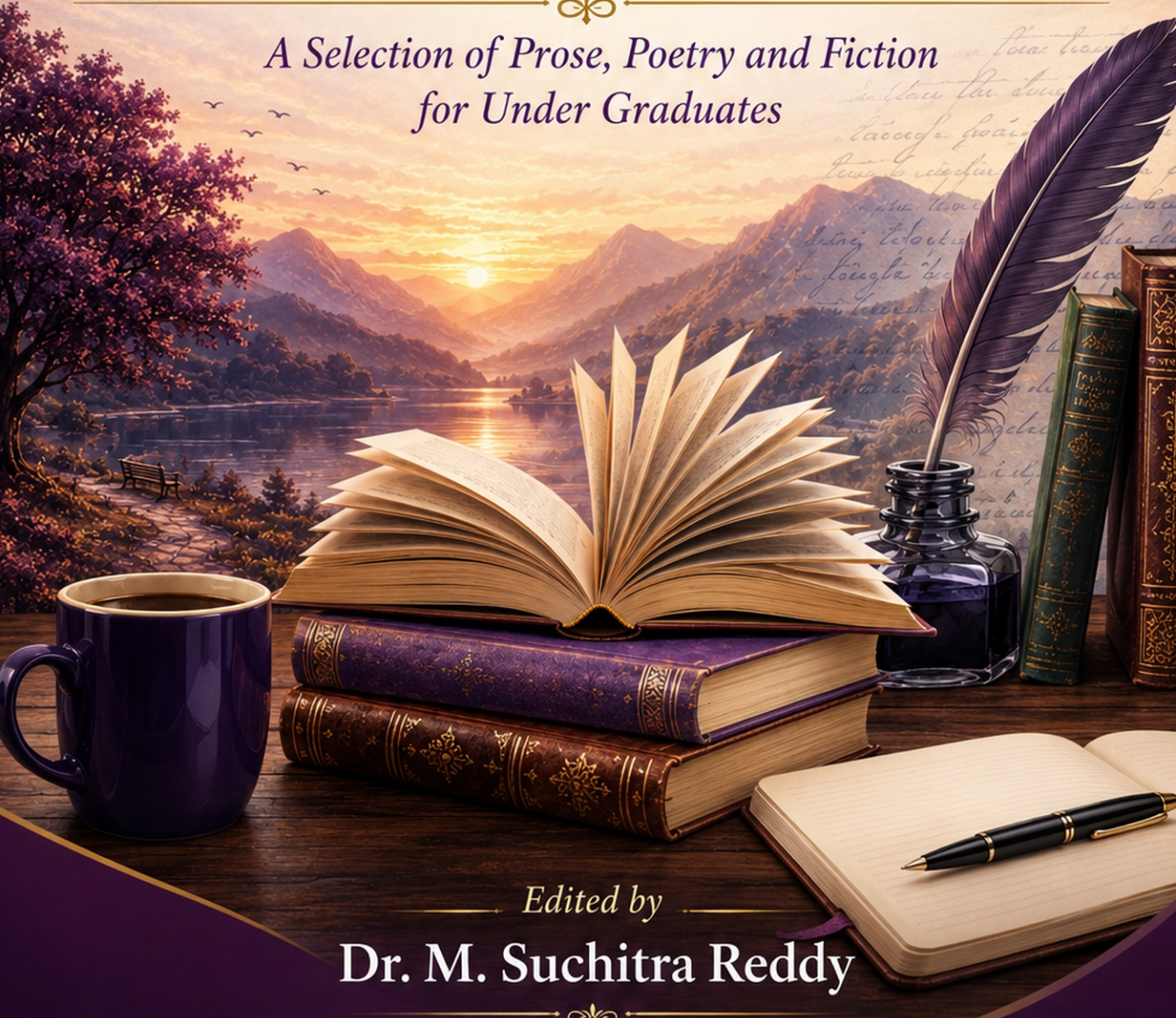




THE ENGLISH SPECTRUM:

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND COMMUNICATION

*A Selection of Prose, Poetry and Fiction
for Under Graduates*



Edited by

Dr. M. Suchitra Reddy



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Introduction



Language is more than a tool for communication—it is a bridge to understanding ideas, cultures, and the human experience. This book has been designed to equip learners with the ability to use the English language effectively, both in academic contexts and in real-life situations. Comprising prose, poetry, and grammar, the book aims to blend literary appreciation with practical language use. It is not merely a collection of readings and rules—it is an invitation to think critically, write with precision, and communicate with clarity. Guided by the objectives of building vocabulary, enhancing comprehension, and improving written communication skills, the course integrates literature, grammar, and practical writing exercises into a single, coherent learning experience. It blends creative engagement with analytical thinking and practical application.

In the Prose section, Anton Chekhov’s *The Bet* offers a compelling exploration of human values, freedom, and the cost of materialism, while R. K. Narayan’s *All Avoidable Talk* brings to life the subtle humor and quiet observations of everyday Indian society. Together, these narratives encourage learners to reflect on life’s complexities while sharpening their reading and interpretative abilities. The prose selection introduces learners to the vivid storytelling of Ruskin Bond in *Kishan Singh* and the reflective wisdom of C. E. M. Joad in *Civilization of Today*. These pieces invite learners to explore themes of human relationships, values, and the evolving nature of society.

The Poetry section presents two distinct voices: Rudyard Kipling’s *If*, a timeless meditation on resilience, self-discipline, and moral strength, and A.K. Ramanujan’s *Ecology*, a nuanced portrayal of human relationships with nature and tradition. These poems invite learners to explore language as both an art form and a lens for understanding the world. In poetry, the lyrical beauty of William Butler Yeats’ *Ballad of Father Gilligan* and the contemplative imagery of Robert Frost’s *Birches* offer opportunities to appreciate rhythm, symbolism, and deeper emotional expression. These works encourage learners to see poetry not just as art, but as a mirror to life’s varied experiences.

The Composition unit focuses on developing strong written communication skills through practical exercises in book reviews, film reviews, and research methodology. These components not only enhance Learner’s crit-

ical thinking but also prepare them for academic and professional tasks that require clarity, coherence, and evaluative judgment. The grammar component focuses on essential skills for professional and academic success. Learners will gain confidence in writing clear and effective CVs, identifying and correcting common errors, and crafting formal written communication such as reports and job applications.

Learners will have engaged with rich literary works, practiced nuanced reading and writing skills, and built a foundation for effective communication in academic, creative, and professional contexts. This course will encourage learners to think deeply, write purposefully, and appreciate the enduring power of the English language.

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PART I: UNIT-I



Kishan Singh

-Ruskin Bond



Pre-Reading activity:

1. Have you ever passed through a tunnel?
2. Which is the longest railway tunnel in India?
3. Can you describe a train journey during the night?
4. Would you like to live a simple life in a forest or a busy life in the city?
5. How have human beings treated nature and animals?

About the Author:

Ruskin Bond was born on 19 May 1934 in Kasauli, Punjab, to a British couple, Edith Clarke and Aubrey Bond. His parents separated when he was young and Ruskin was very close to his father who died of jaundice when he was 10 years old. Ruskin Bond went to the Bishop Cotton School in Shimla, from where he graduated in 1950. He loved reading and was influenced by the works of T. E. Lawrence, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte and Rudyard Kipling. Soon he began writing and won several competitions including the Irwin Divinity Prize and the Hailey Literature Prize. He wrote one of his first short stories 'Untouchable' at the age of 16 in 1951. After graduating from high school, he went to the U.K. for a better career in writing. While in London, he started working on his first novel, 'The Room on the Roof'. It won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize (1957), awarded to a British Commonwealth writer under 30. Ruskin Bond worked for a

while in a photo studio while trying to find a publisher for his works. Once he started earning money from his writing, he moved back to India and settled in Dehradun. He spent the next few years earning his living as a freelance writer of short stories and

poems for newspapers and magazines such as ‘The Pioneer’, ‘The Leader’, ‘The Tribune’, and ‘The Telegraph’. In 1980, one of his most popular novels, ‘The Blue Umbrella’ was published and made into a film by Vishal Bharadwaj.

Ruskin Bond’s writing career spans over five decades in which he experimented with different genres including fiction, essays, autobiographical, non-fiction, romance, and books for children. He has authored over 500 short stories, essays and novels, more than 50 books for children, and two volumes of autobiography, ‘Scenes from a Writer's Life’ and ‘The Lamp is Lit’. In the year 1992, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for English writing in India and in 1999 he won the Padmasri award.

About the Lesson:

Originally extracted from *The Tunnel*, *Kishan Singh* is a short story about a watchman who takes care of a tunnel in a forest and a boy named Ranji who is amazed by his adventurous life. Kishan Singh lived a simple, lonely life in a hut, just fifty feet away from the tunnel. His job was to inspect the tunnel at day and night to ensure the safe journey of trains that pass through the tunnel. One afternoon, just as Kishan Singh was about to fall asleep, Ranji, a young boy from a neighboring village came walking out of the tunnel. He came to see the train pass through the tunnel. Kishan and Ranji strike a brief friendship. Ranji learns more about Kishan’s life and his knowledge about the animals and birds living in the forest. He tells Ranji about a leopard he has often seen in that area. Interested in Ranji’s curiosity, Kishan invites Ranji to come and watch a night train pass the tunnel at nine o’clock. The following evening, Ranji arrives and together with Kishan they wait drinking tea and experiencing the evening atmosphere of the forest. At about ten minutes before nine, Kishan is able to hear an unfamiliar sound in the tunnel and guesses it to be the leopard, he had often seen in the forest. He asks Ranji to accompany him in the tunnel to drive away the animal, lest it loses its life. Kishan is brave and confident that he would not be attacked as he shared a natural bond with the leopard. He risks his life to save the animal. Ranji is scared but still he follows Kishan who shouts and howls through the tunnel and is successfully able to drive the leopard away.

After this brave encounter, Ranji sees the train coming out of the tunnel. He is in awe of the majestic sight of the train rumbling through the dark sleepy forest and it appears as the “dragon of his dreams”.

Ranji once again travels in the same train, a week later, with his father to Delhi. Bored with his father, who was absorbed in completing the ac-

counts of his business, he stared out of the window and saw the lamp of Kishan Singh burning. He knew his friend was out there and would always remain like a firefly that would light up the tunnel for the safe passage of trains and other animals. The story ends with the promise of a beautiful friendship between Ranji and Kishan Singh.

About fifty feet from the entrance to the tunnel stood the watchman's hut. Marigolds grew in front of the hut, and at the back there was a small vegetable patch. It was the watchman's duty to inspect the tunnel and keep it clear of obstacles.

Every day, before the train came through, he would walk the length of the tunnel. If all was well, he would return to his hut and take a nap. If something was wrong, he would walk back up the line and wave a red flag and the engine-driver would slow down.

At night, the watchman lit an oil-lamp and made a similar inspection. If there was any danger to the train, he'd go back up the line and wave his lamp to the approaching engine. If all was well, he'd hang his lamp at the door of his hut and go to sleep.

He was just settling down on his cot for an afternoon nap when he saw the boy come out of the tunnel. He waited until the boy was only a few feet away and then said, "Welcome, welcome. I don't often get visitors. Sit down for a while, and tell me why you were inspecting my tunnel."

"Is it your tunnel?" asked Ranji.

"It is," said the watchman. "It is truly my tunnel, since no one else will have anything to do with it. I have only lent it to the Government."

Ranji sat down on the edge of the cot. "I wanted to see the train come through," he said. "And then, when it had gone, I decided to walk through the tunnel."

"And what did you find in it?"

"Nothing. It was very dark. But when I came out, I thought I saw an animal—up on the hill—but I'm not sure, it moved off very quickly."

"It was a leopard you saw," said the watchman. "My leopard."

"Do you own a leopard too?"

"I do."

"And do you lend it to the Government?"

"I do not."

"Is it dangerous?"

"Not if you leave it alone. It comes this way for a few days every month, because there are still deer in this jungle, and the deer is its natural prey. It keeps away from people."

"Have you been here a long time?" asked Ranji.

"Many years. My name is Kishan Singh."

"Mine is Ranji."

“There is one train during the day. And there is one train during the night. Have you seen the Night Mail come through the tunnel?”

“No. At what time does it come?”

“About nine o’clock, if it isn’t late. You could come and sit here with me, if you like. And after it has gone, I will take you home.”

“I’ll ask my parents,” said Ranji. “Will it be safe?”

“It is safer in the jungle than in the town. No rascals out here. Only last week, when I went into the town, I had my pocket picked! Leopards don’t pick pockets.”

Kishan Singh stretched himself out on his cot. “And now I am going to take a nap, my friend. It is too hot to be up and about in the afternoon.”

“Everyone goes to sleep in the afternoon,” complained Ranji. “My father lies down as soon as he’s had his lunch.”

“Well, the animals also rest in the heat of the day. It is only the tribe of boys who cannot, or will not, rest.”

Kishan Singh placed a large banana-leaf over his face to keep away the flies, and was soon snoring gently. Ranji stood up, looking up and down the railway tracks. Then he began walking back to the village.

The following evening, towards dusk, as the flying-foxes swooped silently out of the trees, Ranji made his way to the watchman’s hut.

It had been a long hot day, but now the earth was cooling and a light breeze was moving through the trees. It carried with it the scent of mango blossom, the promise of rain.

Kishan Singh was waiting for Ranji. He had watered his small garden and the flowers looked cool and fresh. A kettle was boiling on an oil-stove.

“I am making tea,” he said. “There is nothing like a glass of hot sweet tea while waiting for a train.”

They drank their tea, listening to the sharp notes of the tailor-bird and the noisy chatter of the seven-sisters. As the brief twilight faded, most of the birds fell silent.

Kishan lit his oil-lamp and said it was time for him to inspect the tunnel. He moved off towards the dark entrance, while Ranji sat on the cot, sipping tea.

In the dark, the trees seemed to move closer. And the night life of the forest was conveyed on the breeze—the sharp call of a barking-deer, the cry of a fox, and the quaint *tonk-tonk* of a nightjar.

There were some sounds that Ranji would not recognize—sounds that came from the trees. Creaking’s, and whisperings, as though the trees were coming alive, stretching their limbs in the dark, shifting a little, flexing their fingers.

Kishan Singh stood outside the tunnel, trimming his lamp. The night sounds were familiar to him and he did not give them much thought; but something else—a padded footfall, a rustle of dry leaves—made him stand

still for a few seconds, peering into the darkness. Then, humming softly, he returned to where Ranji was waiting. Ten minutes remained for the Night Mail to arrive.

As the watchman sat down on the cot beside Ranji, a new sound reached both of them quite distinctly—a rhythmic sawing sound, as of someone cutting through the branch of a tree.

“What’s that?” whispered Ranji.

“It’s the leopard,” said Kishan Singh. “I think it’s in the tunnel.”

“The train will soon be here.”

“Yes, my friend. And if we don’t drive the leopard out of the tunnel, it will be run over by the engine.”

“But won’t it attack us if we try to drive it out?” asked Ranji, beginning to share the watchman’s concern.

‘It knows me well. We have seen each other many times. I don’t think it will attack. Even so, I will take my axe along. You had better stay here, Ranji.’

‘No, I’ll come too. It will be better than sitting here alone in the dark.’

‘All right, but stay close behind me. And remember, there is nothing to fear.’

Raising his lamp, Kishan Singh walked into the tunnel, shouting at the top of his voice to try and scare away the animal. Ranji followed close behind. But he found he was unable to do any shouting; his throat had gone quite dry.

They had gone about twenty paces into the tunnel when the light from the lamp fell upon the leopard. It was crouching between the tracks, only fifteen feet away from them. Baring its teeth and snarling, it went down on its belly, tail twitching. Ranji felt sure it was going to spring at them.

Kishan Singh and Ranji both shouted together. Their voices rang through the tunnel. And the leopard, uncertain as to how many terrifying humans were there in front of him, turned swiftly and disappeared into the darkness.

To make sure it had gone, Ranji and the watchman walked the length of the tunnel. When they returned to the entrance, the rails were beginning to hum. They knew the train was coming.

Ranji put his hand to one of the rails and felt its tremor. He heard the distant rumble of the train. And then the engine came round the bend, hissing at them, scattering sparks into the darkness, defying the jungle as it roared through the steep sides of the cutting. It charged straight into the tunnel, thundering past Ranji like the beautiful dragon of his dreams.

And when it had gone, the silence returned and the forest seemed to breathe, to live again. Only the rails still trembled with the passing of the train.

They trembled again to the passing of the same train, almost a week later, when Ranji and his father were both travelling in it.

Ranji's father was scribbling in a notebook, doing his accounts. How boring of him, thought Ranji as he sat near an open window staring out at the darkness. His father was going to Delhi on a business trip and had decided to take the boy along. 'It's time you learnt something about the business,' he had said, to Ranji's dismay.

The Night Mail rushed through the forest with its hundreds of passengers. The carriage wheels beat out a steady rhythm on the rails. Tiny flickering lights came and went, as they passed small villages on the fringe of the jungle.

Ranji heard the rumble as the train passed over a small bridge. It was too dark to see the hut near the cutting, but he knew they must be approaching the tunnel. He strained his eyes looking out into the night; and then, just as the engine let out a shrill whistle, Ranji saw the lamp.

He couldn't see Kishan Singh, but he saw the lamp, and he knew that his friend was out there.

The train went into the tunnel and out again, it left the jungle behind and thundered across the endless plains. And Ranji stared out at the darkness, thinking of the lonely cutting in the forest, and the watchman with the lamp who would always remain a firefly for those travelling thousands, as he lit up the darkness for steam-engines and leopards.

Answer the following questions in about 50 words

1. Describe the place where Kishan Singh lived.
2. What was Kishan Singh's job at night?
3. Explain why Ranji came to the tunnel.
4. Describe the evening when Ranji went to meet Kishan Singh to watch the train pass the tunnel.
5. Comment on Ranji's relationship with his father.

Answer the following questions in about 50 words

1. Describe how Kishan Singh and Ranji manage to drive away the leopard from the tunnel?
2. Explain why Ranji felt nostalgic when he was travelling in the train at night with his father?
3. What does their method of scaring the leopard reveal about their characters?

Glossary:

1. Inspection: To check
2. Prey: victim
3. Chatter: talk endlessly
4. Quaint: old-fashioned

5. Nightjar: a small nocturnal bird
6. Creaking: screeching
7. Flexing: loosen up
8. Crouching: bend down
9. Twitching: jerk
10. Rumble: roar
11. Flicker: shine unsteadily

The Civilization of Today

- C.E.M. JOAD



Pre-reading activity:

1. Who according to you is a civilized person?
2. What are the factors required to behave in a civilized manner?
3. Are civilized nations really refined and cultured in their behavior and attitude?
4. Is there a difference between modern and ancient civilization? Can you list the same with reference to our country?
5. Are people today more civilized in any way than in the past?

About the Author:

Cyril Edwin Mitchinson Joad (August 12, 1891 – April 9, 1953) was an English philosopher and broadcasting personality. Joad was born in England, the only son of Edwin and Mary Joad. In 1892 his father became an Inspector of Education and the family moved to Southampton, where he received a very strict Christian upbringing. In 1910, Joad studied at Oxford where he developed his skills as a philosopher and a debater. By 1912, he was a first class sportsman and Oxford Union debater. Joad was as famous as British intellectuals, like George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell. He popularized Philosophy by his writings and speeches.

His achievement consists in evolving a simple and old style in which he interpreted the most complex ideas.

Some of his important books are: 'A Guide to philosophy', 'A Guide to Modern Thought' and 'The Story of Civilization'. The present extract is taken from the last mentioned book.

About the lesson:

In this essay, C.E.M. Joad praises the remarkable progress mankind has made in the field of civilization like order, safety, health and security. He also points out the dangers of our civilization in the form of war and machines. The author feels that machines are not civilization, but aids to civilization. If man will give his time and energy to making more beautiful things, removing the cause of quarrels between nations, and, discovering how to remove poverty, then, our civilization would be the greatest and the most lasting that has ever been.

THE CIVILIZATION OF TODAY [Text]

Praise of our civilization: order and safety

1. First and foremost there are order and safety. If to-day I have a quarrel with another man, I do not get beaten merely because I am physically weaker and he can knock me down. I go to law, and the law will decide as fairly as it can between the two of us. Thus in disputes between man and man, right has taken the place of might. Moreover, the law protects me from robbery and violence. Nobody may come and break into my house, steal my goods or run off with my children. Of course there are burglars, but they are very rare, and the law punishes them whenever it catches them.

2. It is difficult for us to realize how much this safety means. Without safety those higher activities of mankind which make up civilization could not go on. The inventor could not invent, the scientist find out or the artist make beautiful things. Hence order and safety, although they are not themselves civilization, are things without which civilization would be impossible, They are as necessary to our civilization as the air we breathe is to us: and we have grown so used to them that we do not notice them any more than we notice the air.

3. For all that, they are both new things and rare things. Except for a short period under the Roman Empire, there have been order and safety in Europe only during the last two hundred years, and even during that time there have been two revolutions and a great many wars; thus it is a great achievement of our civilization that to-day civilized men should in their ordinary daily lives be practically free from the fear of violence.

Health

4. They are also largely free from the fear of pain. They still feel ill, but, since the use of anaesthetics became common, illness is no longer the terrible thing it used to be. And people are ill much less often. To be healthy,

is not to be civilized— savages are often healthy, although not so often as is usually supposed—but unless you have good health, you cannot enjoy anything or achieve anything. There have, it is true, been great men who have been invalids, but their work was done in spite of their ill-health, and, good as it was, it would have been better had they been well. Not only do men and women enjoy better health; they live longer than they ever did before, and they have a much better chance of growing

It spreads everywhere

5. Thirdly, our civilization is more secure than any that have gone before it. This is because it is much more widely spread. Most of the previous civilizations known to history came to an end because vigorous but uncivilized peoples broke in upon them and destroyed them. This was the fate of Babylon and Assyria; it has happened over and over again in India and China; it brought about the end of Greece and the fall of Rome.

6. Now, whatever the dangers which threaten our civilization, and they are many, it seems likely to escape this one. Previous civilizations, as I have said before, were specialised -and limited; they were like an oasis in a surrounding desert of savagery. Sooner or later the desert closed in and the oasis was no more. But to-day it is the oasis which is spreading over the desert. Modern civilization is a far-flung thing, it spreads over Europe and America and parts of Asia and Africa. Practically no part of the world is untouched by it. And, owing to the powers of destruction with which science has armed it, it is exceedingly unlikely that such savages or uncivilized peoples as are left in the world could prevail against it.

The world as one

7. Thus the world has now for the first time a chance of becoming a single whole, a unity. So far as buying and selling and the exchange of goods are concerned, it is a unity already. I did not mention my meals when I described my ordinary day; if I had done so, I might have taken note of the fact that the food I eat comes from all over the world. The things in a grocer's shop, for instance, are from the ends of the earth; they come out of strange countries and over far-off seas. There are oranges from Brazil, dates from Africa, rice from India, tea from China, sugar from Demerara. No great Caliph, no Eastern king, not even Solomon in all his glory, could draw on such rich stores of varied produce as the housewife who does her shopping at the grocer's. The fact that these things come to us from all over the world means that for the first time the world is becoming a single place, instead of a lot of separate places shut off from one another.

8. Until quite recently the nations of mankind lived in a number of separate boxes holding no communication with each other except when the people in one box invaded those in the next, and some of the boxes were never opened at all. To-day there is constant coming and going between the boxes, so much so that the sides of the boxes are breaking down, and the world is beginning to look more like one enormous box. And by now all

the boxes have been opened, so that there is little danger of unknown people breaking in upon our civilization from outside and destroying it. The danger comes rather from within; it is a danger from among ourselves. This brings me to other defects.

Defects of our civilization

9. Today, with certain exceptions, there is little political oppression; men are equal before the law and in many countries have a voice in deciding how and by whom they shall be governed. But the sharing-out of money—which means the sharing-out of food and clothing and houses and books and so on—is still very unfair. In England alone one half of all the money which is divided every year (called the national income) is received by one-seventeenth of the population; which means that one half is divided among every sixteen people, and the seventeenth person gets the other half. So, while some few people live in luxury, many have not even enough to eat and drink and wear. Again, in England to-day thousands of people live in dreadful surroundings. There are many families of five or six persons who live in a single room; in this room they sleep and dress and eat their meals; in this same room they are born, and in this same room they die. And they live like this not for fun, but because they are too poor to afford another room.

10. It is, I think; clear that until everyone gets his proper share of necessary and delightful things, our civilization will be far from perfect.

The danger of war

11. A still greater danger comes from war. Although the world is, so far as the buying and selling and exchanging of goods are concerned, a single whole, there are still barriers between nation and nation, barriers erected by the governments. For four years, from 1914 to 1918, the most destructive war that the world has known took place between the great nations of Western Europe. The causes of that war were very many, but chief among them were fear and pride. Each nation was afraid of the power of the other nations, and each nation was too proud to admit it. And because of this fear the nations spent great quantities of money in making rifles and cannons, in building battleships and in training soldiers, until Europe was like a big armed camp. A single match will set a hayrick ablaze, and, with all this war material lying about, Europe was like a hayrick waiting for its match. Almost any match would do; presently somebody struck one, and Europe blew up.

12. In spite of this last explosion there are to-day many more trained soldiers in the world than there were before the last war, and the nations are spending still more money on war preparation. They still pride themselves on being good at fighting more than on anything else, and each nation always thinks that it is going to win.

13. A little while ago an Eastern king, friendly to England, King Amanullah of Afghanistan, paid a visit to London to see what Western civilization



The English Spectrum is a thoughtfully curated volume for undergraduate learners, bringing together language, literature, and communication in a single accessible text. The book offers selected prose, poetry, and practical language components designed to strengthen literary appreciation, critical thinking, writing ability, and communication skills. With its balanced academic approach and learner-friendly presentation, this book serves as a valuable companion for students seeking clarity, confidence, and competence in English studies.



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