

Conrad and *The Palestine*

On September 21, 1881, Conrad, then twenty-four years of age, sailed as second mate on board *The Palestine*, a London barque of 425 tons. The story of *The Palestine*, rechristened *The Judea*, is told in almost precise detail in *Youth*, which, therefore, is really a record or a chronicle, and not an invention. On September 17, 1882, *The Palestine* finally left Falmouth, the year having been occupied as definitely narrated in *Youth*, even to the detail of the visit to London and the return, after five days' leave, "with nothing but a complete set of Byron's works and a new railway rug to show for three months' work."

After leaving Falmouth, the ship had a good wind and calm sea as far as the Tropics. She lumbered along at about three miles an hour, but at last she entered the Indian Ocean and turned north toward Java Head. On March 11, 1883, the cargo was discovered to be on fire, and after four days the vessel was abandoned. (Conrad has lengthened this time a little in *Youth*). It is not certain how long the crew were in the open boats, but it is known that Conrad was in Singapore early in April, for the certificate of discharge of *The Palestine* is dated Singapore, April 3. At the beginning of May he embarked for Europe as a passenger.

The whole adventure seemed to him the glory, the enchantment, of his youth. There was an actual exaltation in the writing of the story which fifteen years later rushed from his pen in a few days. *Youth: A Narrative* is the modest title of this "bit of life" which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in September, 1898.