

pleased him and he decided to study for the British Mercantile Marine, and to take out his naturalization papers. He obtained his mate's certificate as a result of an oral examination in English, and his master's certificate in 1884. In the course of long voyages he became familiar with the men and places that spring to vivid life in his books. His six years' connection with the East was ended in March, 1889. It was in September of that year, while he was loafing about London waiting for a command, that, following an impulse he could scarcely understand, he began to write *Almayer's Folly*, the story of people he had met two years before on the East coast of Borneo. This was the initiation into authorship of a sea captain who says of himself in *A Personal Record*:

I never made a note of a fact, of an impression or of an anecdote in my life. The conception of a planned book was entirely outside my mental range when I sat down to write; the ambition of being an author had never turned up among those gracious imaginary existences one creates fondly for oneself at times in the stillness and immobility of a day dream.

He left the sea for good in 1894, and from that time became a professional writer, choosing English as his vehicle. Of that choice he has two things to say. First, "English, the speech of my secret choice, of my future, of long friendships, of the deepest affections, of hours of toil and hours of ease, and of solitary hours, too, of books read, of thoughts pursued, of remembered emotions, of my very dreams." And again: "The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. As to adoption—well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language which, directly