

Essay on Some Country Characters I Had Met

Ah Chan is a rubber tapper. He lives in a five-acre rubber estate with his wife and three children. He is about forty years old.

The first time I met him was when I was out looking for tropical fish in the small stream than runs by his estate. At that time, I was quite perplexed about where to find the fishes. I had spent the good part of an hour getting my feet wet without anything to show for my effort when he appeared, he watched me silently for a few seconds. Then he remarked that I was wasting my time. My mood was not too good at that moment and I nearly flared out. Quite matter-of-factly he told me where I could get the fishes I was looking for. He even offered to lead me to the place.

Half-heartedly I followed him. After walking a few hundred meters he pointed to a spot in the stream. I descended and started probing the stream with my net. He was right! When I pulled up the net there were dozens of tiny colorful fishes wiggling about. I thanked him. He did not acknowledge me but carried on in a non-stop monologue about the types of fish in the stream. He rattled on about how one could catch turtles, snakes, large edible frogs, edible fish, eels, shrimps and other things in the stream. I was astounded by his vast knowledge. I was also astounded by his unlimited capacity to talk non-stop.

As much as Ah Chan was talkative, he was also infinitely helpful. After my first encounter with him, I often visited him to learn from him the many things he knew. He was always pleased to see me and taught me eagerly. I suppose that he needed someone to talk to since he was alone most of the time tapping rubber trees and doing odd jobs here and there. I am still learning. He is still teaching me.

The exact opposite of the talkative Ah Chan was a police corporal who hardly opened his mouth. I do not know his name because I never asked him and he never told me. I met him one dark night along a lonely country road when the car I was traveling in ran out of fuel. I was a passenger in the car driven by my cousin. We were on our way home after visiting some friends. Anyway, there we were wondering what to do in the quiet darkness when we saw a light shining at us. The light came from a torchlight held by a huge man on a bicycle. He stopped and asked me what was wrong. We told him and he identified himself as a police corporal. He then offered to take me to the station to make a telephone call for help from my family.

I sat side-saddle on the bar of his bicycle as he labored to reach the station two miles away. I felt awkward because it was an offense to carry any passenger on a bicycle, and there I was being carried by a policeman!

Furthermore, his bicycle had no headlamp! He carried a torch in his hand which he switched on every time a car approached. We were committing two offenses at the same time, but who was I to argue. He was the police and nobody was about to book him!

Presently we reached the tiny station in the middle of a small town. Not a word had been exchanged all the way from the stalled car to the station. At the station, the corporal motioned me to a telephone. He then disappeared. I made a call to my brother to get us some petrol. After that, I thanked the constable on duty and waited outside the station for my brother to arrive.

I never saw this corporal again. Even if I did I doubt if I would recognize him and me. We were brought together only for a few minutes on a dark night. Nothing is left except the memory of a shared experience. Wherever he is I wish to thank him for his help.

There are other countries folks have met besides Ah Chan and the corporal. These people are invariably helpful, although in different ways. They are simple people yet unblemished by the ways of city people. It is wonderful to be with them and to share their experiences.