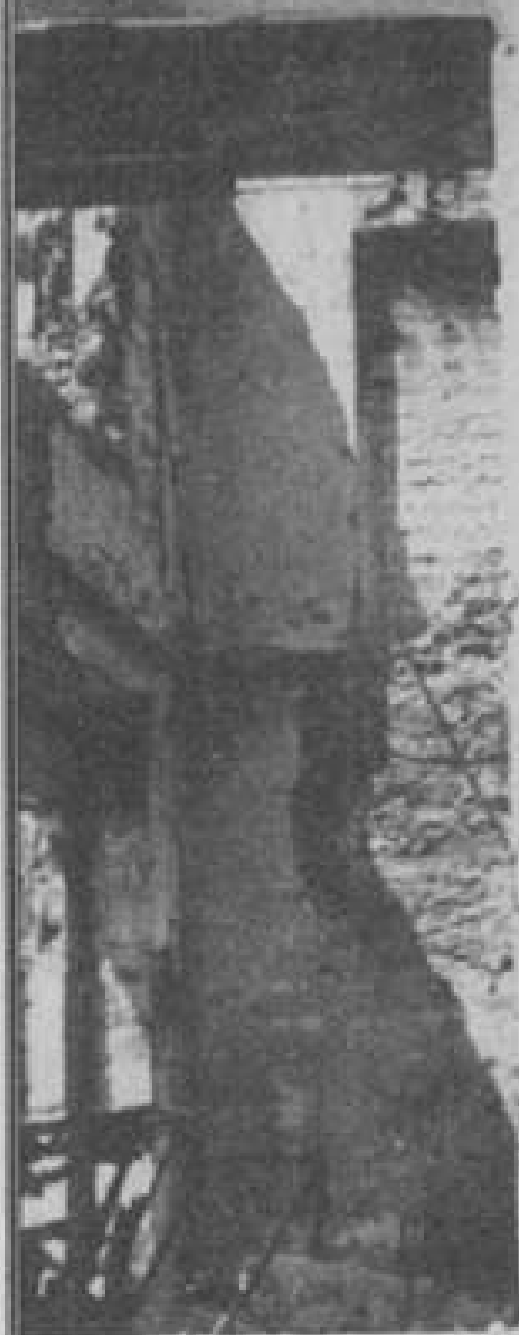




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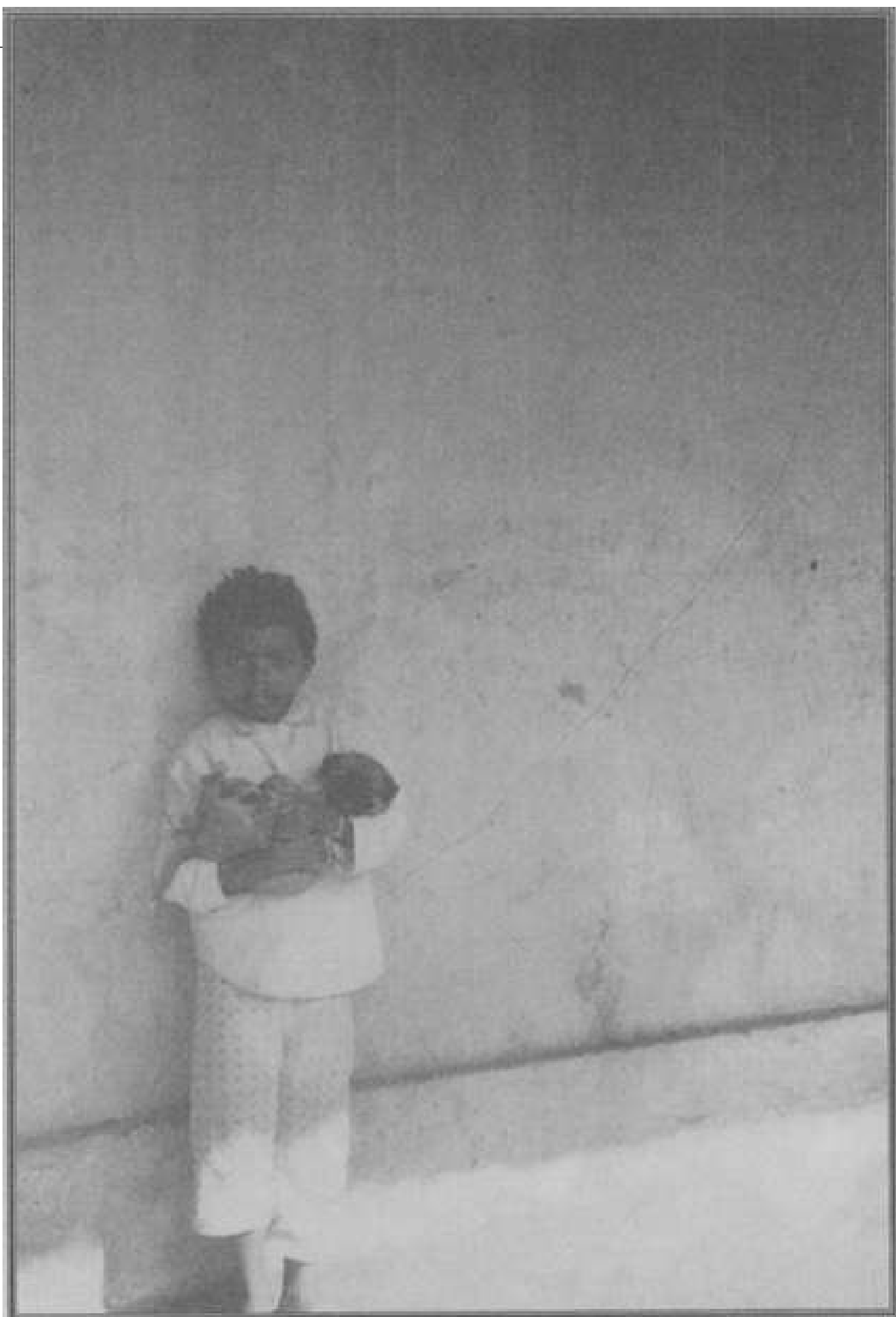
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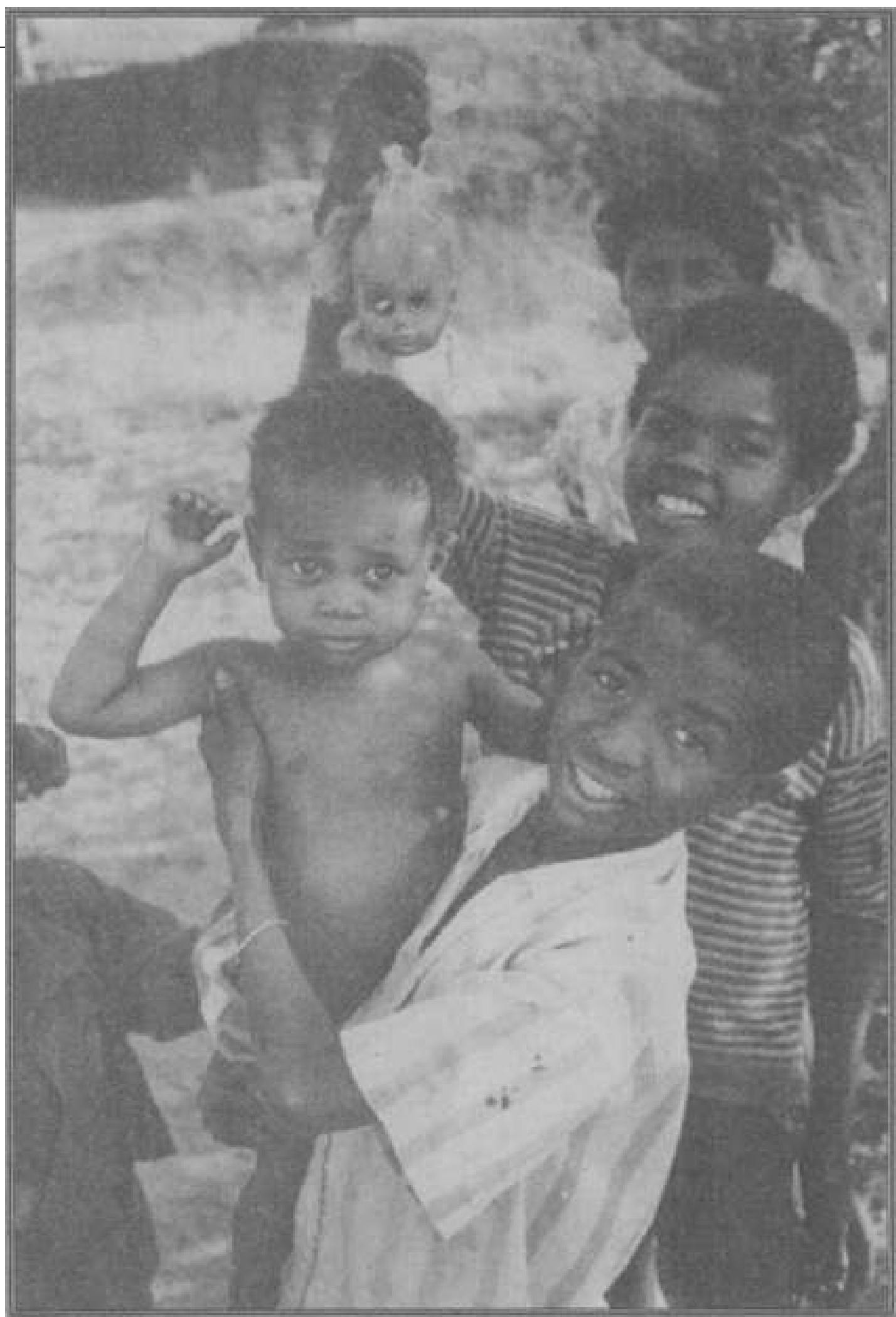

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THE ATLAS

William T. Vollmann's books include *You Bright and Risen Angels*, *The Rainbow Stories*, *Whores for Gloria*, *An Afghanistan Picture Show*, *Thirteen Stories and Thirteen Epitaphs*, *Butterfly Stories*, and three of the projected seven novels in his "Seven Dreams" series: *The Ice-Shirt*, *Fathers and Crows*, and *The Rifles*. The recipient of a Whiting Foundation Award, he lives in California.





THE ATLAS

WILLIAM T. VOLLMANN

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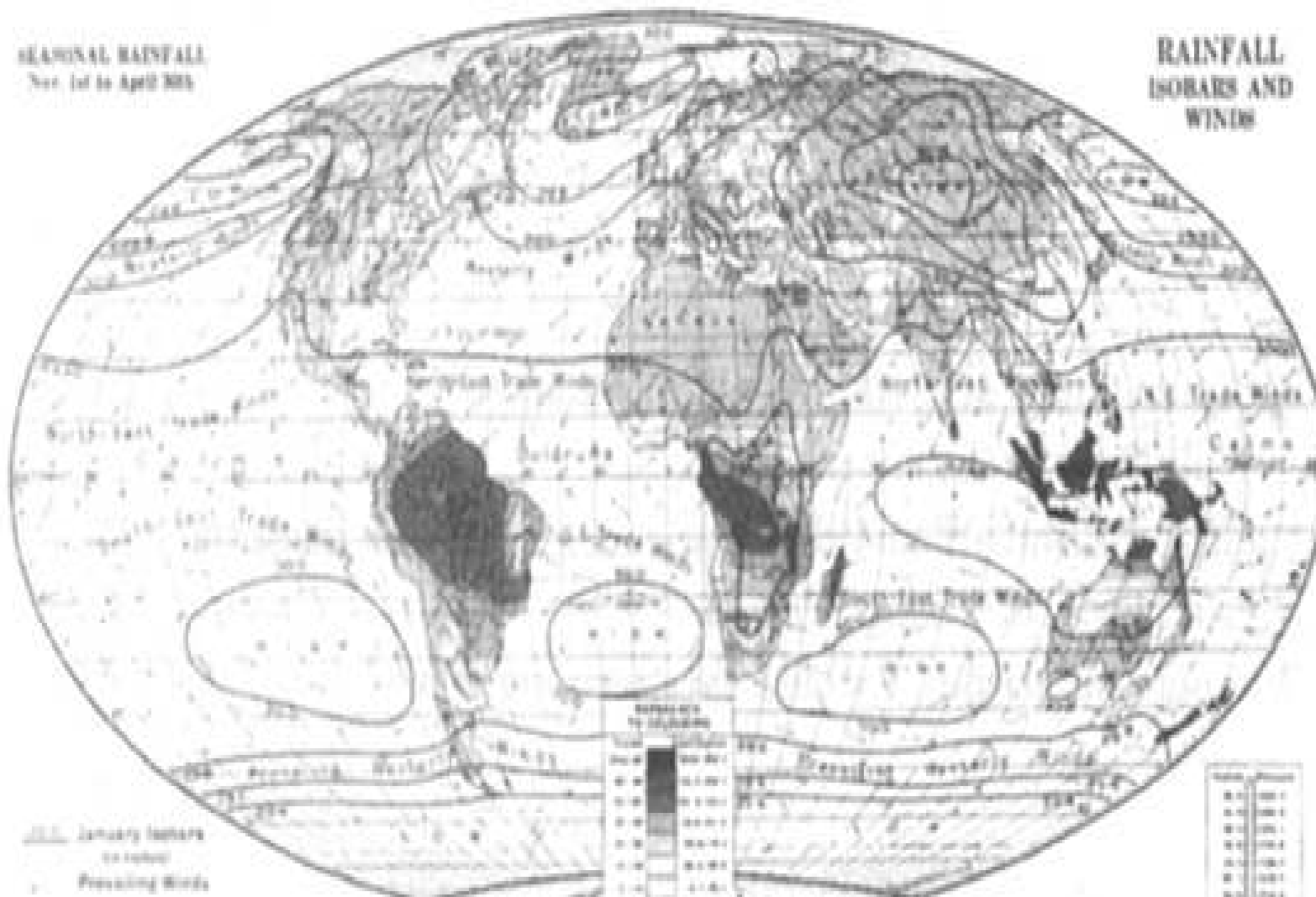
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W.T.V.

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COMPILER'S NOTE

This book was inspired by Yasunari Kawabata's "palm-of-the-hand stories," which I enjoy rereading at bedtime, in the five minutes between lying down and turning off the light. It is equally pleasurable for me to page through a certain great atlas that I have, idling over unknown countries while I wait for my companion of the evening to finish brushing her teeth. The writing of these stories has given me the same sort of desultory joy. As James Branch Cabell remarked, "Toward no one of those pre-eminent topics of my era do I feel incited to direct an intelligent and broad-minded concern." What you hold, then, is but a piecemeal atlas of the world I think in. I hope that you like it, in spite of its omission of a continent or two. And if you were to keep it by you as a pillow-book, reading through it in no particular order, skipping the tales you find tedious, dozing amidst my somniferous paragraphs, I'd feel that at last I'd done as much good in the world as the manufacturers of our drowsiest codeine syrups. Slide it under your buttocks when commencing the night's revels. Slay the nightmarish flies of sleep with its hard covers. Lay it across your eyes to guard yourself from light. And may your soul flit freely across this world! For, despite the opinion of a certain Transcendentalist, who informed us that "traveling is a fool's paradise," other philosophers reverence the salubriousness of a change of clime. Consider the school essay of a second grader of Cambodian origin. The children were asked to expound upon the topic "The Future." This boy wrote:

IN the Future I would like the world to be a WAR zone IN CHINA. I hope I will be in the NAVY to help the USA NAVY to Kill ALLIES. I will Kill polpot and his men and famliy. I will come back as a heor. I will be the only CAMBOADIAO on the ship.

May we all kill our best allies before they kill us. And so, reader, good night.*

W.T.

*For those who require games and calculations in order to drowse, I should state that this collection is arranged palindromically: the motif in the first story is taken up again in the last; the second story finds its echo in the second to last, and so on. In addition, certain tales have titles in common with books I have previously written; they are thematic reductions in the manner of Kawabata's short "Snow Country," derived from his novel Snow Country. (However, while Kawabata's metonym contains material present in the parent tale, my own attempts use new material, because we Americans like new things.) As for the title story, that contains a little something from each of the others.

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