



1873
G. O. A.

Portal to Abyssinia

WE SELDOM HAVE CHANCES TO SAMPLE FOREIGN WORLDS. When we step out of our everyday worlds, do we discover possibilities we would never have expected? Imagine, for instance, a young boy exploring a spacious house in Belfast, Maine, where he finds the treasures of a great-uncle who returned to America after years abroad. Near the top of a grand staircase, mounted on wood-paneled walls, are two oblong African shields and a pair of crossed spears. Guarding the landing is the tawny, black-striped fur of a tiger skin. Its head rises from the parquet floor in a perpetual snarl.

Other mementos from a long career in the diplomatic service cover walls, tables, and desks. A young prince with a dark beard and moustache and curly black hair stares regally from a framed picture. There are signed photographs of U.S. presidents from McKinley to FDR; a group picture taken at the American Club of Paris, 1924, the men dressed in formal tail coats and white vests; a picture of Greek soldiers marching in regulation pleated skirts, white stockings, and tasseled shoes in front of the American embassy in Athens; and the boy's favorite: an architectural chart showing some of the world's most noted buildings as of 1927, placed side by side—including the Eiffel Tower, Karnak, the Pyramid of Cheops, and the Woolworth Building.

The boy, this editor, is called downstairs for dinner and is seated at one end of a very long dining table. A crystal goblet of milk awaits on his right. Then an unusual meal ensues on beautiful plates with gold edging. One item is served at a time—green beans cut in half and on the diagonal, mashed potatoes baked in their skins, meat cut in slivers with a white sauce. Afterward, lemon tarts. Exotic dishes in-

Opposite:
As emperor of Ethiopia
from 1930 to 1974
and during his long life,
Haile Selassie
(1892–1975) must have
experienced many worlds.

deed. His great, great-uncle Rob, retired diplomat, first American ambassador to Abyssinia (now called Ethiopia) in 1903, sits at the other end of the table, barely visible in the dim light, his bald head bowed as he eats.

There are so many questions I want to ask: *Tell me about the spears. Were you on safari? Did you shoot the tiger? Who is the dark-haired prince? Did you meet Tarzan?*

Years later I will understand the importance of Uncle Rob's mission to Ethiopia to establish trade relations for the U.S. I will be fascinated by his friendship with the prince Ras Tafari, heir to the throne. But most of all I will admire my uncle's model of wise diplomacy, allowing a young boy from the Midwest to visit him, allowing me to move between different worlds, honoring the cultures of each.

Yet at a primal level, I was transported to the heartbeat of Africa as I knelt before the gleaming yellow eyes of the tiger, as I traced with my finger the blood-red pattern on one of the shields, as I met the gaze of the future king, who would change his name to Emperor Haile Selassie. I did not need to know his name. His imperial look said everything, and the allure of Africa has stayed with me ever since.

Imagine That! Breaking Through to Other Worlds provides portals to worlds that surround us and are within us. This collection of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry illustrates that we each live a double life with one foot in the natural and the other in the spiritual world. *Imagine That!* explores this multi-dimensional force field. We discover that travel agents among us may appear suddenly, providing unexpected breakthroughs or unwanted intrusions.

In such a fluid state, time and space may melt away. As Swedenborg points out from his experiences, concepts of time are replaced by spiritual states in the next life. Likewise, in a heavenly world whose sun, moon, and stars correspond directly to the influx of the divine, the quality of light and heat depends on one's receptivity. And since no one is perfect, no matter which world we are in, according to Swedenborg, even angels have their dark days!

One writer in this issue on other worlds entertains the paradox that opposites need each other to exist. He concludes that without the inner tension of doubts to test one's beliefs, our spiritual life would become hard and brittle. Another writer reexamines, thirty years after the fact, his interview of a woman who claimed to have been abducted by aliens. Ultimately, for the emerging spirit in each of us, *Imagine That!* highlights the importance of love and compassion, enabling us to embrace the varieties of existence—both the here and now and the hint of something more—reminding us that as fellow travelers, we are indeed not alone in the universe.