The Historical Jesus
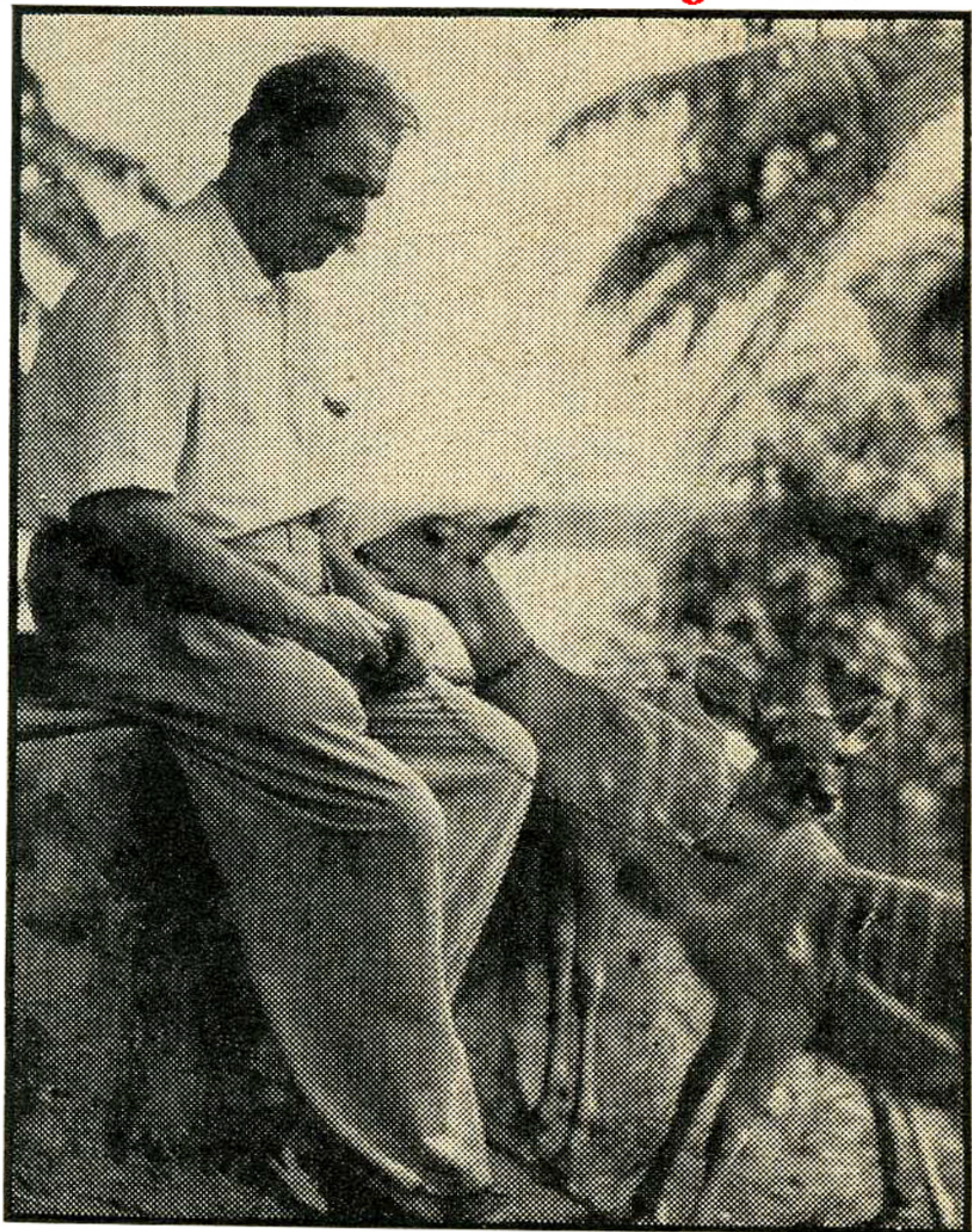

Schweitzer. A face in the dust might glimpse heaven.

In the fall of 1911 the state medical examiner at Strassburg, Germany, nodded sadly as he graduated a student who seemed a bit old to begin a career.

His worry was completely unfounded. For, at 36, new doctor Albert Schweitzer had already achieved more than most men do in their lives and was going on to serve God as few men are able.

Behind him, as he left Strassburg, was world fame as (1) the greatest interpreter of Bach's organ music; (2) an essayist, music and literary critic; (3) philosopher—teacher and (4) a Bible scholar with few peers.

Ahead of him was the hottest pest-hole in all French Equatorial Africa; the mission post at Lambarene where, for 40 years, Albert Schweitzer has served as preacher-doctor for the French Protestant Missionary Society.

Why? During all those years many a puzzled Christian has wondered about the concept of faith that could lead a man to the crest of a personal Mount Sinai in a world humped with the hills of practicality and personal ambition.

Last week, in the first English translation of Schweitzer's doctoral thesis, *The Psychiatric Study of Jesus* (Beacon Press, Boston: $2) Americans could glimpse the Christ whom Schweitzer follows.

Written primarily as a rebuttal of 19th Century medical claims that Christ suffered from hallucinations, the book and its excellent introduction nevertheless has much of the heart-matter of Schweitzer's concept of Christ as an heroic and, above all, historical—not hazily mystic—figure.

He feels that Christ expected the end of the world and was wrong, that he must be studied against the backdrop of Biblical times, not forced to conform with an age he had not even envisioned: "We must go back to the point where we can feel again the heroic in Jesus . . . we must be forced to lay our faces in the dust without daring even to wish to understand his nature" . . . just his mighty historical lesson.

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