

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

AMONG MALAY PIRATES :
A TALE OF ADVENTURE
AND PERIL

George Henty

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Tale of Adventure and Peril**

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Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| AMONG MALAY PIRATES | 5 |
| CHAPTER I | 5 |
| CHAPTER II | 9 |
| CHAPTER III | 13 |
| CHAPTER IV | 17 |
| CHAPTER V | 21 |
| CHAPTER VI | 26 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 27 |

G. A. Henty

Among Malay Pirates : a Tale of Adventure and Peril

AMONG MALAY PIRATES

CHAPTER I

“I wish most heartily that something would happen,” Harry Parkhurst, a midshipman of some sixteen years of age, said to his chum, Dick Balderson, as they leaned on the rail of her majesty’s gunboat *Serpent*, and looked gloomily at the turbid stream that rolled past the ship as she lay at anchor.

“One day is just like another—one is in a state of perspiration from morning till night, and from night till morning. There seems to be always a mist upon the water; and if it were not that we get up steam every three or four days and run out for twenty-four hours for a breath of fresh air, I believe that we should be all eaten up with fever in no time. Of course, they are always talking of Malay pirates up the river kicking up a row; but it never seems to come off.”

“There is one thing, Harry—there is always something to look at, for there are canoes constantly going up and down, and there is plenty of variety among them—from the sluggish dhows, laden with up country produce, to the long canoes with a score of paddlers and some picturesque ruffian sitting in the stern. It adds to the interest when you know that the crews are cutthroats to a man, and would make but the shortest possible work of you if they had got you in their power.”

“Yes, Dick. Look at that canoe coming up stream; what a good looking chap that is in the stern, though by the way he scowls at us I can quite believe he would, as you say, cut our throats if he had the chance. That is a pretty little child sitting by him, and what a gorgeous dress she has! There, you see, he can look pleasant enough when he speaks to her. I fancy they must have come from a long way up the river, for they look wilder than most of the fellows who pass us. If that fool who is steering her does not mind what he is about, Dick, he will either run into that canoe coming down or else get across our chain. There, I told you so.”

The man at the tiller was in fact, looking, with mingled curiosity and hostility, at the gunboat that he was passing but a few yards away, and did not notice a canoe, manned by six rowers, that was coming down with the stream, taking an oblique course across the bows of the *Serpent*, and was indeed hidden from his view by the hull of the vessel, until he had passed beyond her. Then there was a sudden shout and a yell from a dozen throats, as the two canoes came into collision, the one proceeding up the river being struck on the quarter with a force that almost cut her in two, and in an instant her occupants were in the water. As the Malays were to a man almost as much at home in the water as on land, the accident would have had little effect beyond the loss of the boat and its contents, had it not been that the stern of the other craft struck the Malay chief with such force as to completely disable him, and he would have sunk at once had not two of the boatmen grasped him and kept his head above water.

“What has become of the child?” Harry Parkhurst exclaimed, and he and Dick Balderson both leaped on to the rail, throwing off their jackets as they shouted to the men to lower a boat. Nothing could be seen of the child until, after half a minute’s suspense, a little face suddenly appeared in the swirl of the muddy water some fifteen yards from the vessel’s side. It was gone again in an instant, but, as it disappeared, both lads sprang from the side and with a few strokes reached the spot where they had seen the face disappear; then they dived under water and soon grasped her. As soon as they

came to the surface a sailor, who had seized a coil of rope, flung it to them, and, grasping it, they were quickly by the side of the gunboat.

A minute later some sailors, who had at once tumbled into a boat on the alarm being given, came up. The child was first handed into it, then the midshipmen scrambled in, and, by their directions, two of the sailors, standing on the thwarts, lifted the child high above their heads to the hands of the men leaning over the bulwark.

“Take the little thing to the doctor,” Dick said. “Now, lads, row on; let’s pick up some of those Malay fellows.”

A babel of shouts and sounds rose from the water; the bow of the second canoe had been stove in, and she also had sunk to the water level; a fierce fight was going on between several of the Malays; the chief, who was being supported by two of his crew, was shouting furiously; and others of his men, in obedience to his orders, were diving under water. Harry turned to the gunboat, and called to the men to bring Soh Hay, the interpreter, to the side. A minute later the man was hustled to the rail.

“Tell that chief that we have got his child safely on board,” Harry shouted.

Again and again the interpreter called out; but it was some time before he could make the chief pay attention to him. As the latter caught the purport of his words his face changed at once, and, after calling to his men to desist from their search, his head sank on to the shoulder of one of the men supporting him, and he evidently lost consciousness.

“He is badly hurt, Dick; we had better get him on board, too. Old Horsley was wishing this morning that he had something to do beyond administering doses of quinine to the men.”

Taking the tiller, he brought the boat alongside the chief, and four of the sailors, directed by Dick, gently raised him from the water and laid him on the bottom of the boat. Blood was flowing freely from an ugly gash in his face, and it was evident from the manner in which his left arm hung limp, as they lifted him up, that either the shoulder or the arm itself was broken.

“Get him alongside at once, lads,” Dick said. “I expect he is more injured than we see. The other fellows will be all right; they can all swim like fish.”

In two or three minutes the injured man was laid down under an awning over the fore deck of the cruiser, and the surgeon at once came up.

“How is the child, Doctor?”

“She is still insensible,” he said, “but she will soon be all right. I can’t discover any injury, and I think it likely that it was the sudden shock, and perhaps a knock against the side of the boat, that stunned her; for I have no doubt she could swim, small as she is. This is a much more serious affair; he has an ugly gash in his temple, his collarbone is broken, and,” he went on, as he passed his hands down the patient’s side, “he has two, if not more ribs broken.”

“Well, we will leave him to you, Doctor; there are a lot of these fellows in the water, and I suppose they must be brought on board until we can get a boat to take them ashore.”

In a few minutes eighteen Malays were brought to the side, and the two canoes, which were floating level with the water, were towed up and fastened by a rope to the stern of the gunboat. Even when safely on deck, the two parties were still so infuriated that they had to be separated and placed under guards apart from each other. Three or four had been killed by the stabs of the deadly kris, and their bodies could be seen floating astern. Several of those rescued had wounds more or less severe.

“We should not have much chance with those fellows in the water, Mr. Parkhurst,” an old sailor said to Harry.

“No, indeed, Davis; they could swim round and round us, and our cutlasses would be very little good against those ugly looking kris. If we were to leave them to themselves, they would fight to the death; and, after all, it was no one’s fault in particular. Mr. Balderson and I were watching them; one was crossing the ship’s bow just as the other came out from her side, and they were into each other before either had time to hold their boat up.”

“That chap the doctor is bandaging up was in a nice taking about his child, sir; it was a lucky job that you and Mr. Balderson happened to catch sight of her.”

“Yes, poor little thing! It was only just a glimpse we got of her face; but as we were looking for her, and ready to dive, it was enough.”

“Lucky we are inside the bar, Mr. Parkhurst, or the sharks would have had half the fellows.”

“I did not think of it at the time, Davis, and it would not have made any difference if I had; we were only in the water a couple of minutes, and the Malays were making noise enough to frighten away any number of sharks. You will have the job of washing out our trousers again—we had only put them on clean half an hour before.”

“That aint no matter, sir, especially if you go down and change at once; the mud will come out easy enough if I leave them in a bucket of fresh water for half an hour.”

The two midshipmen joined the group of officers who were standing near the doctor; the latter had, on closer examination, announced that four of the ribs were broken. He had finished his work just as the lads came up. News had been brought up by the steward that the little girl had opened her eyes; while he was speaking, the Malay conversed rapidly with the interpreter.

“What is he saying, Soh Hay?” the captain asked.

“He is asking why his daughter is not here, and if she is hurt, and how she came to be saved,” the man replied. “Me tell him she come up to see him soon; the doctor say she no hurt.”

Two minutes later the doctor reappeared, carrying the child in his arms. She looked round fearlessly at the white faces until her eye fell upon her father, when she slipped out of the doctor’s arms like an eel and ran to him. The grim features of the Malay lit up with a pleasant smile as he held out his right hand to her. She was a strange little figure, for the doctor had not waited to obtain any suitable garments for her, but had wrapped her up in one of the signal flags, which the child herself had wound round her waist and over her shoulder like a native sarong.

“You tell him, Soh Hay, that he must not talk to her,” the doctor said. “If he keeps quiet, he will get well in short time: if he talk, he ill many days; but I will let him say a few words to her now.”

The Malay’s eyes passed over the group of officers and rested on the two midshipmen, whose wet clothes showed that they were the officers who had, as the interpreter had told him, dived in and rescued the child. He said something to the interpreter.

“Malay man want to speak to you, young gentlemen,” the man said; “he wish to thank you.”

“Oh, tell him there is nothing to thank us for,” Harry said hastily; “it was nothing more than taking a bath.”

“Yes, officer, but he wishes to speak to you.”

Somewhat reluctantly, the two lads approached the side of the injured man; he took each of them by the hand, and, as he did so, said something which Soh Hay interpreted:

“The chief says that you have given him back what he loved best in the world, and that his life is yours whenever it may be of use to you; he may be of service to you, gentlemen, should you ever go up the river—a Malay never forgives an injury or forgets a service.”

“Tell him we are very glad to have brought his little girl out of the water,” Harry said, “and that if we ever go up the river, we will pay him a visit.”

The chief was now laid in a cot which was swung from the stanchions of the awning, while the little girl was carried away by the doctor, who laid her in a berth, gave her a cup of tea, which she drank obediently to his orders, but evidently regarded as being extremely nasty, and she was then told through the interpreter to go to sleep until her sarong was dried. A couple of hours later she was on deck again in her native garb and ornaments. The interpreter pointed out to her the two midshipmen who had rescued her, and she at once went up to them, and, slipping her hands into theirs, began to prattle freely; they were unable to understand what she said, but they took her round the ship, showing her the guns, and introduced her to Ponto, the captain’s great Newfoundland, who submitted gravely to be patted by her; to Jacko, the monkey, who was by no means disposed to be friendly, but

chattered and showed his teeth; and to Julius Caesar, the negro cook, who grinned from ear to ear, and presented her with some cakes from a batch which he had just made for the captain's table.

The rest of the Malays had already left the ship; two native boats had been hailed, and in these the two parties of Malays had taken their places, and, with their boats towing behind, had been rowed away, the captain giving strict instructions that they were to be landed on opposite sides of the river. The little maid speedily became a general pet on board the *Serpent*, and was soon the proud possessor of several models of ships, two patchwork quilts, several carved tobacco boxes, and other specimens of sailors' handiwork. Small as she was, she had evidently a strong idea of her own importance, and received these presents and attentions with a pretty air of dignity which at once earned for her the title of the Princess.

On the second day after the accident, the chief's boat came off from the shore, the damage having been speedily and neatly repaired. Little Bahi stood on the top of the accommodation ladder as they approached, and addressed them with great asperity, using much gesticulation with her arms.

"What is she saying, Soh Hay?" Dick Balderson asked.

"She is telling them that they are bad men to let the boat be run down; that she is very angry with them, and they will all be punished."

"The men looked very crestfallen under their little mistress' reproaches, and held up their hands in a deprecating manner; while the helmsman stood up and, after salaaming deeply, entered upon a long explanation, which ended in his asking if he might come on board to see his chief. Permission was at once granted by the captain, upon the request being interpreted to him. When he mounted the steps, Bahi led him to the side of her father's cot. The doctor, however, interposed.

"Tell him he must not talk," he said to the interpreter; "the chief is ill and must not be allowed to excite himself. But he can say a few words, if he wants to."

The cot had been lowered to within a few inches of the deck in order that the chief might watch his daughter as she trotted about and romped with Ponto, who had now quite taken her into his friendship. The chief's face expressed alarm when he first saw the great dog; but when he saw how gentle the animal was, and how, when one of the sailors placed the child on his back, it walked gravely up and down the deck, wagging its tail as if pleased with its novel burden, he was satisfied that no harm could come to her from this formidable looking animal. He had first spoken a few words sharply to the man in answer to his excuses, and, indeed, had the helmsman been minding his business instead of looking at the ship, the collision might have been prevented; but Hassan Jebash was at the present moment so well contented with the recovery of his child that he accepted the man's excuses, and the latter went back to his boat evidently greatly relieved.

In a few days the chief began to show signs of impatience, and through the interpreter constantly demanded of the doctor when he would be well enough to leave.

"You ask him, Soh Hay, whether he wishes to be able to lead his tribe in battle again, or to go through life unable to use a kris or hurl a spear. In another ten days, if he remains quiet, he will be able to go, and in a couple of months will be as strong and active as ever, if he will but keep quiet until the bones have knit. Surely a chief is not like an impatient child, ready to risk everything for the sake of avoiding a little trouble."

The chief, on this being translated to him, scowled angrily.

"Tell him it is of no use his scowling at me, Soh Hay. I am not doctoring him for my own amusement, but for his good, and because he is the father of that little child."

The chief, when this was translated to him, lay without speaking for two or three minutes, and then said quietly, "Tell the doctor I am sorry; he is right, and I have been foolish. I will stay till he says I may go."

CHAPTER II

Four or five days later the chief was allowed to get up and to walk quietly up and down the deck, and a week afterwards the doctor said, "You can go now, chief, if you desire it; but you must be content to keep quiet for another couple of months, and not make any great exertions or move quickly. How long will it take you to go up the river to your home?"

"Six days' easy paddling."

"Well, that is in your favor; but do not travel fast. Take it quietly, and be as long as you can on the voyage—lying in a canoe is as good a rest as you can take."

"Thank you, Doctor, I will obey your instructions. You have all been very kind to me, and a Malay chief never forgets benefits. I have been hostile to the white men, but now I see I have been mistaken, and that you are good and kind. Is it true that your boat is going up the river? Soh Hay tells me that it is so."

"Yes; one of the chiefs, Sehi Pandash, wishes to place himself under our protection, and he has sent to ask that the ship might go up and fire her big guns, that the tribes round may see that he has strong friends who can help him."

"It is two days' rowing up the river to my place from his, and when you are there I shall come down to see you. Sehi is not a good chief; he quarrels with his neighbors, and shelters their slaves who run away to him; he is not a good man."

"Well, we shall all be glad to see you, chief, and I hope that you will bring your daughter with you. She has won all our hearts, and we shall miss her sadly."

"I will bring her if I can do so safely," the chief said gravely; "but I am no friends with Sehi; he stops my trade as it comes down the river, and takes payment for all goods that pass down. It is because he knows that many of us are angered that he wishes to put himself under your protection. I think that you do not do well to aid so bad a fellow."

"We did not know that he was a bad fellow, chief. The best plan will be for you and the other chiefs who are aggrieved to send down complaints against him, or to come down yourselves when we are up there and talk it over with our Captain, who will doubtless impress upon Sehi the necessity for abstaining from such practices, and that he cannot expect aid from us if he embroils himself with his neighbors by interfering with their trade. Is he strong?"

"He has many war prahus, which sometimes come down to the sea and return with plunder, either collected from the cultivators near the coast or from trading ships captured and burnt."

"I will mention what you tell me to the Captain, and it will prepare him to listen to any complaint that may be made to him. But you must remember that he is only acting under the orders of the Governor of the Straits Settlements, and must refer all important matters to him."

"I will come when you are there," Hassan said gravely. "If nothing is done, there will be war."

There was general regret on board the *Serpent* when the little princess said goodbye to all her friends and went down the accommodation ladder to the boat with her father. The chief had said but little to the two young midshipmen, for he saw that they preferred that the matter should not be alluded to, but he held their hands at parting, and said:

"I shall see you again before long; but if at any time you should want me, I will come, even if your summons reach me in the middle of a battle."

"It is such nonsense, Doctor," Harry said, as the boat pushed off, "to have so much made of such a thing as jumping into the water. If one had been alone, and had tried to save a man or a woman, in such a state of funk that there was a good chance of their throwing their arms round your neck and pulling you down with them, there might be something in it, though everyone takes his chance of that when he jumps in to save anyone from drowning; but with a little child, and two of us to do it, and the ship close at hand, it was not worth thinking of for a moment."

“No, Parkhurst, from your point of view the thing was not, as you say, worth giving a thought to; but, you see, that is not the point of view of the chief. To him it is nothing whether your exploit was a gallant one or not, or whether you ran any danger; the point simply is, his child would have been drowned had you not seen her and fished her out, and that it is to you that he owes her life. I think you have reason to congratulate yourselves on having made a friend who may be very useful to you. It may be that there will be trouble up the river; and if so, he might possibly be of real service to you. But in any case he may be able to give you some good hunting and fishing, and show you things that you would never have had an opportunity of seeing without his friendship and assistance.”

“I did not think of that, Doctor; yes, that would certainly be a great thing.”

“I can assure you I look at it in that light myself, Parkhurst, and I am looking forward to paying him a visit, as, under his protection, I should get opportunities of collecting which I could never have in the ordinary way; for, unless they are greatly maligned, one could not trust one’s self among the Malays without some special protection.”

“But they are not savages, Doctor. Hassan is a perfect gentleman in manner, and in that silk jacket of his and handsome sarong he really looks like a prince. I could not help thinking that all of us looked poor creatures by his side.”

“They certainly cannot be called savages, though from our point of view many of their customs are of a very savage nature. Piracy is very general among those living on the seacoast or on the great rivers; but it must be remembered that it is not so very many centuries ago that a toll was demanded of all passersby by the barons having castles on the Rhine and other navigable rivers; the crews of wrecked ships were plundered on every coast of Europe, our own included, not so very long ago; and in the days of Elizabeth, Drake and Hawkins were regarded by the Spaniards as pirates of the worst class, and I fear that there was a good deal of justice in the accusation. But the Malays are people with a history; they believe themselves that they were the original inhabitants of the island of Sumatra; however, it is certain that in the twelfth century they had extended their rule over the whole of that island and many of its neighbors, and in the thirteenth had established themselves on this peninsula and had founded an empire extending over the greater part of the islands down to the coast of Australia. They had by this time acquired the civilization of India, and their sultans were powerful monarchs. They carried on a great trade with China, Hindoostan, and Siam, and their maritime code was regulated and confirmed, as early as 1276, by Mohammed Shah.”

“How is it that they have come to such grief, Doctor?”

“Principally by the fact that they had the feudal, or you may call it the tribal, system. Each petty chief and his followers made war on his neighbors if he was strong enough; and as some tribes conquered others, the empire became split up into an indefinite number of clans, whose chiefs paid but a very nominal allegiance to the sultan. So islands broke off from the empire until it had practically ceased to exist, and the Malays were a people united only by similar customs and language, but in no other respect, and were, therefore, able to offer but slight resistance on the arrival of the Dutch and Portuguese in these regions. Still, the upper classes preserve the memory of their former greatness. The people are intelligent, and most of the trade in this part of the world is carried on by them. They are enterprising, and ready to emigrate if they see a chance of improving their fortunes. You know we saw many of them at the Cape when we touched there. Nominally they are Mohammedans in religion; but they do not strictly observe the ordinances of the Koran, and their Mohammedanism is mixed up with traces of their original religion.”

“Ah, that explains why the chief’s name was Hassan. I wondered that a Malay should have a Mohammedan name. They are not much like Arabs in figure. Of course, Hassan is a very fine looking man, and some of the other chiefs we saw at Penang were so; but most of them are shorter than we are, and very ugly.”

“Yes, in figure and some other points they much resemble the Burmese, who are probably blood relations of theirs. The chiefs are finer men, as you will always find in the case in savage or

semi savage peoples, for, of course, they have the pick of the women, and naturally choose the best looking. Their food, too, is better and their work less rough than that of the people at large.

“The sons and daughters of the chiefs naturally intermarry, and the result is that in most cases you will find the upper classes taller, better formed, lighter in color, and of greater intelligence than the rest of the people. This would be specially the case in a trading people like the Malays; their ships would bring over girls purchased in India, just as the ruling classes in Turkey used to obtain their wives from Circassia; and this, no doubt, has helped to modify the original Malay type.”

“Thank you, Doctor; I think I shall like the Malays now I know something about them. Is it true that they are so treacherous?”

“I don’t know, Parkhurst; doubtless they are treacherous in their wars; that is to say that they consider any means fair to deceive an enemy; but I do not think that they are so, beyond that. The Dutch have never had any very great difficulty with them, nor have we in the portion of the peninsula where we have established our rule. Of course, I know little about them myself, as I have only been out here a few months; but I am told that as traders they can be trusted, and that the word of a Malay chief can be taken with absolute confidence. Of course, among the majority of the people of the peninsula we are regarded with jealousy and hostility—they dread that we should extend our dominion over them, and it is not surprising that they should by every means in their power strive to prevent our coming far inland. The chiefs on the rivers are, as a rule, specially hostile.

“In the first place, because their towns and villages are more accessible to us, and they know more of our power than those dwelling in the hill country; and, secondly, because they depend largely upon the revenue that they derive from taxing all goods passing up and down, and which they not unreasonably think they might lose if we were to become paramount. No doubt there is much that Hassan said of Sehi that is true and is applicable to other chiefs who have placed themselves under our protection—namely, that they have so injured trade by their exactions as to incur the hostility of their neighbors. Of course, I am not speaking of such men as the Rajahs of Johore and Perac, who are enlightened men, and have seen the benefits to be derived from intercourse with us. Their people are agriculturists, and they are really on a par with the protected states in India.

“There is a great future before the country; gold is found in many of the rivers, tin is probably more abundant than in any other part of the world, and the exports are now very large; there are immense quantities of valuable timber, such as teak, sandalwood, and ebony. The climate is, except on the low land near the rivers, very healthy; nutmegs, cloves, and other spices can be grown there, and indigo, chocolate, pepper, opium, the sugarcane, coffee, and cotton, are all successfully cultivated. Some day, probably, the whole peninsula will fall under our protection, and when the constant tribal feuds are put a stop to, the forests cleared, and the ground cultivated, as is the case in our own settlement of Malacca, it will be found one of the most valuable of our possessions. Any amount of labor can be obtained from China, and it is probable that the races who inhabit the mountainous districts, who are said to be industrious and peaceable, will also readily adapt themselves to the changed conditions. They are not Malays like the people of the lowlands, but are a black race with curly wool, like the natives of Africa, and probably inhabited the whole peninsula before the arrival of the Malays.”

“How funny that there should be niggers here,” Harry said.

“They are not exactly negroes, but one of the races known as negritos, having, of course, many negro characteristics, but differing from the African negroes in some important particulars. To them our supremacy would be an unmixed blessing; their products would reach the coast untaxed, and they would obtain all European goods at vastly cheaper rates. A minor benefit to be obtained by our supremacy is that our sportsmen would certainly speedily diminish the number of wild beasts that at present are a scourge to cultivators; the tigers would be killed down, the elephants captured and utilized, and the poor people would not see their plantations ravaged, but would be able to travel through their forests without the constant danger of being carried off by tigers and panthers, and

possibly be able to cross their rivers without the risk of being snapped up by alligators; though, doubtless, it would take some time before this would be brought about.”

“And when do you think that we shall be going up the river, Doctor?”

“That I cannot say. The Captain has been expecting orders ever since we came here, six weeks ago; but possibly something may have been learned of Sehi’s characteristics, and there may be doubts as to the expediency of taking under our protection a chief whose conduct appears to be anything but satisfactory. On the other hand, it may be considered that by so doing we may establish some sort of influence over the surrounding tribes, and so make a step towards promoting trade and putting a stop to these tribal wars, that are the curse of the country.”

“It would be an awful sell if they were to change their minds,” Harry exclaimed.

“I should be sorry myself, Parkhurst, for you know I am a collector. But I can tell you that you won’t find it all sport and pleasure. You will have no cool sea breezes; there will be occasion for continual watchfulness, and perhaps long boat expeditions up sluggish streams, in an atmosphere laden with moisture and miasma.”

“One expects some drawbacks, Doctor.”

“You will find a good many, I can tell you, youngster. Still, I hope we shall go up; and I think that we shall do so, for it will be the Captain’s report that will help the authorities to decide whether to appoint a Resident there or not.”

A fortnight later a small dispatch boat steamed in and the news soon spread through the ship that the *Serpent* was to ascend the river on the following day. All was at once bustle and animation. Sailors like anything for a change, and all were impatient at the long delay that had occurred.

CHAPTER III

The gunboat was a large one, and carried two midshipmen besides Parkhurst and Balderson, who were, however, their seniors. The mess consisted of the four lads, a master's mate, the doctor's assistant, and the paymaster's clerk. In the gun room were the three lieutenants, the doctor, the lieutenant of the marines, and the chief engineer. The crew consisted of a hundred and fifty seamen and forty marines; the *Serpent* having a somewhat strong complement. She had been sent out specially for service in the rivers, being of lighter draught than usual, with unusually airy and spacious decks, and so was well fitted for the work. The conversation in the junior mess of the *Serpent* was very lively that evening. The vessel since her arrival on the station had made two runs between Singapore and Penang, but those on board had seen but little of the country, and were delighted at the thought of a possibility of active service, and the talk was all of boat expeditions, attacks from piratical prahus, of the merits of the bayonet and rifle opposed to kris and spear, and of sporting expeditions in which elephants, tigers, and other wild beasts were to fall victims of their prowess.

"You will find that you won't get much of that," the mate, who was president of the mess, said, after listening to their anticipations of sport. "I have been on the west coast of Africa and know what it is poking about in muddy creeks in boats, tramping through the jungle, knee deep in mud, half the crew down with fever, and the rest worn out with work and heat. I can tell you it is not all fun, as you youngsters seem to think, but downright hard work."

"Ah, well! any amount of work is better than standing here doing nothing," Dick said cheerfully, for the mate was known as a proverbial grumbler. He had been unfortunate, and, as is usually the case, his misfortunes were in some degree due to himself, for he was fond of liquor, and although, when on board, he took no more than his share, he was often somewhat unsteady in his speech when he returned from a run ashore; and although the matter was not grave enough for his captains to report altogether unfavorably of him, it was sufficiently so for them to shrink from recommending him for promotion, and in consequence he had seen scores of younger men raised over his head. He had been for some time unemployed before he had joined the *Serpent*, and had been appointed to her only because Captain Forest, who was a friend of his family, had used his interest on his behalf. He had, however, when he joined, spoken frankly to him.

"I have asked for you, Morrison," he said, "simply for the sake of your father; but I tell you frankly, that unless my report is a thoroughly favorable one, you are not likely to be again employed. I was told that there was nothing special against you, but that in no case since you passed have you been warmly spoken of. It has been said that you know your duty well; but they had privately learned that you were fond of liquor; and although no charge of absolute drunkenness had been brought against you, it was considered that you would not make a desirable officer in a higher rank. Now your future depends upon yourself; if you have the resolution to give up the habit, you may yet retrieve yourself. If I find that you do so, I shall certainly take the opportunity of giving you a chance to distinguish yourself, and shall strongly urge your claim to promotion. If I am not able to do this, you must make up your mind to be permanently put upon the shelf."

The admonition had not been in vain, and since joining the *Serpent* Morrison had made a successful effort to break himself of the habit. He had very seldom gone ashore, and when he did so, never went alone, and always returned at an early hour, and without having taken more than he would have done in the ordinary way on board. He had not, however, given up his habit of grumbling, and his messmates were so accustomed to his taking a somber view of everything that his prognostication as to the nature of their work up the river had but little effect upon them.

"What do you think, Sandy?" Harry Parkhurst asked the Scotch assistant surgeon.

"I know nothing about it, except what I have read. They say that the country is healthy; but it stands to reason that this cannot be so while you have got rivers with swamps and jungles and such

heat as this. However, we have a good supply of quinine on board, and with that and our allowance of spirits, I hope that we shan't, as Morrison says, have half the ship's company down with the fever. It is all in our favor that we have only just come out, for they say that newcomers can resist the effects of these tropical rivers much better than those whose constitution has been weakened by a residence in the country. As to the sport, I have no desire to kill any animal that does not meddle with me. My business is all the other way, and if any of you get mauled, I will do my best to help the doctor to pull you through; but I am very well on board the ship, and have no desire to go tramping about among the swamps, whether it be to hunt animals or fight Malays."

"You think that everyone should stick to his last, Sandy," Dick said with a laugh. "Well, I only wish there were more on board of your opinion, for that would give more chances to us who like to stretch our legs ashore for a change."

"I can stretch my legs here if I want to," the Scotchman said quietly, "and am not anxious to do more. I suppose, if there are expeditions against the Malays, I shall have to go with them; but the fewer of them there are the better I shall be pleased."

The talk was more serious aft, where the doctor and first lieutenant were dining with the captain. It ended by the latter saying, "Well, Doctor, if what your friend Hassan said be true, we are likely enough to have our hands pretty full, and shall have to watch this fellow Sehi as sharply as we do his neighbors. He is not under our protection yet, and if he sends his prahus down the river to plunder on the coast, as Hassan says, he is not the sort of character likely to do us credit, and the position of a British Resident with him would be the reverse of a pleasant one. However, we must hope that he is not as black as he is painted. He has evidently put the other chiefs' backs up, and we must receive their reports of him with some doubt. However, I have no doubt that, if he turns out badly, we shall be able to give him a lesson that will be of benefit to him."

The first day's voyage up the river by no means came up to the anticipations of the midshipmen as to the country through which they were to pass. The width of the river varied from a quarter of a mile to three hundred yards; the banks on each side were lined with mangroves, presenting a dreary and monotonous aspect. Progress was slow, the steam launch going ahead and sounding the depth of water, the captain having but little faith in the assertion of the native pilot that he was perfectly acquainted with every bank and shallow. Being now the dry season, the tops of many of these shoals were dry, and numbers of alligators were lying half in and half out of the water, basking in the sun.

Several of the officers who possessed rifles amused themselves by shooting at these creatures, but it was very rarely that any attention was paid to their firing, the balls glancing off the scaly armor without the alligators appearing to be conscious of anything unusual. There was more amusement in watching how, when the swell of the steamer rushed through the shallow water and broke on the shoals, the reptiles turned and scrambled back into the river, evidently alarmed at this, to them, strange phenomenon.

"I should not care about bathing here, Davis," Harry Parkhurst remarked to the old sailor.

"You are right, sir; I would rather have a stand up fight with the Malays than trust myself for two minutes in this muddy water. Why, they are worse than sharks, sir; a shark does hoist his fin as a signal that he is cruising about, but these chaps come sneaking along underneath the water, and the first you know about them is that they have got you by the leg."

"Which is the worse, Davis, a bite from an alligator or a shark?"

"Well, as far as the bite goes, Mr. Parkhurst, the shark is the worst. He will take your leg off, or a big 'un will bite a man in two halves. The alligator don't go to work that way: he gets hold of your leg, and no doubt he mangles it a bit; but he don't bite right through the bone; he just takes hold of you and drags you down to the bottom of the river, and keeps you there until you are drowned; then he polishes you off at his leisure."

“The brutes!” Harry exclaimed, with deep emphasis. “See, the first lieutenant has hit that big fellow there in the eye or the soft skin behind the leg; anyhow, he has got it hard; look how he is roaring and lashing his tail.”

“What is the best way of killing them?” Dick asked.

“I have heard, sir, that in Africa the natives bait a big hook with a lump of pork, or something of that sort; then, when an alligator has swallowed it, they haul him up, holus bolus. I should say a good plan to kill them would be with ‘tricity. The last ship I was in, we had an officer of the Marine Artillery who knew about such things, and he put a big cartridge into a lump of pork, with two wires, and as soon as the shark had swallowed it he would touch a spring or something, and there would be an explosion. There was not as much fun in it as having a hook, but it was quicker, and he did not do it for sport, but because he hated the sharks. I heard say that he had had a young brother killed by one of them. He would sit there on the taffrail for hours on the lookout for them, with three or four loaded lumps of pork. Why, I have known him kill as many as a dozen in a day. I expect the best part of his pay must have gone in dynamite.

“He had a narrow escape one day; somehow the thing went wrong, and in trying to set it right he fell over the taffrail. The shark had bolted the bait, but this was not enough for his appetite, and he went straight at the officer. He had had a young ensign sitting beside him, who had often watched his work, and knew how the thing went. I was standing near at the time, and he began twisting some screws and things as cool as a cucumber, though I could see as his hand shook a bit. Well, he got it right just in time, for the shark was not half a length away from the captain, and was turning himself over for a bite, when the thing went off, and there was an end of the shark. The captain was a bit shaken up, but he made a grab at the rope, and held on to it till we lowered a boat and picked him up. He had to be got up on deck in a chair, and it was two or three days before he was himself again. When he got round he set to work again more earnestly than ever; and I believe that if we had stopped in the West Indies long enough, there would not have been a shark left in those waters.”

“It was a capital plan, Davis, and if we ever take possession of these rivers, we shall have to do something of that sort to get rid of the brutes. Are the Malays afraid of them?”

“I don’t know, Mr. Parkhurst, but I think they are. I had a chat with a mate I met in the Myrtle, which went home the day after we relieved them here. He had been up some of the rivers, and told me that every village had a bathing place palisaded off so that the alligators could not get at the bathers.”

“Well, there is one thing—we shall have to be very careful when we are out in boats, for if we were to run upon a sunken log and knock a hole in the boat’s bottom, there would not be much chance of our ever reaching the shore.”

“You are about right there, sir. I aint afraid of Malays, but it gives me the creeps down my back when I think of one of them chaps getting hold of me by the leg. Bob Pearson told me that the only chance you have is to send your knife, or if you can’t get at that, your thumbs, into the creature’s eyes. But it would require a mighty cool hand to find the eyes, with the brute’s teeth in one’s leg, and the water so thick with mud that you could not see an inch beyond your nose.”

“Well, I will make a note of that, anyhow, Davis, and I will take a good look at the next alligator I see dead, so as to know exactly where to feel for its eyes.”

On the second day the scenery changed. In place of the mangroves a dense forest lined the river. Birds of lovely plumage occasionally flew across it, and after they had anchored in the evening, the air became full of strange noises; great beasts rose and snorted near the banks; sounds of roaring and growling were heard in the wood; and the lads, who had been so eager before to take part in a hunt on shore, listened with something like awe to the various strange and often mysterious noises.

“What in the world does it all mean, Doctor?” Dick Balderson asked, as the surgeon came up to the spot where the four midshipmen were leaning on the rail.

“It means that there is a good deal of life in the woods. That splashing sound you hear with deep grunts and snorts, is probably made by a hippopotamus wallowing in shallow water; but it may be a

rhinoceros, or even a buffalo. That roar is either a tiger or a panther, and that snarling sound on the other bank is, no doubt, made by smaller animals of the same family, indulging in a domestic quarrel. Some of the other sounds are made by night birds of some kind or other and perhaps by monkeys, and I fancy that distant vibrating sound that goes on without intermission is a concert of a party of frogs.”

“What is that?” as a shrill cry, as from a child, followed by a confused outburst of cries, chattering, and, as it seemed to them, a barking sound, followed.

“I fancy that is the death cry of a monkey. Probably some python or other snake has seized it in its sleep; and the other noise is the outcry of its companions heaping abuse upon the snake, but unable to do anything to rescue their friend.”

“I don’t think, Doctor,” Harry Parkhurst said, in a tone that was half in earnest, “that I feel so anxious as I did for sport in the forest; and certainly I should decline to take part in it after nightfall.”

“I can quite understand that, lad. At night all the sounds of a tropical forest seem mysterious and weird, but in the broad daylight the bush will be comparatively still. The nocturnal animals will slink away to their lairs, and there will seem nothing strange to you in the songs and calls of the birds. I should recommend you all to take a sound dose of quinine tonight; I have a two and a half gallon keg of the stuff mixed, and any officer or man can go and take a glass whenever he feels he wants it. It would be good for your nerves, as well as neutralize the effect of the damp rising from the river. I should advise you who are not on the watch to turn in early; it is of no use your exposing yourselves more than is necessary to the miasma.”

The next day progress was more rapid, for the captain found that the assurance of the pilot that there was amply sufficient water for the *Serpent* had been verified, and he therefore steamed forward at half speed, without sending the launch on ahead to take soundings. Several villages were passed by the way, but though the inhabitants assembled on the banks and watched the steamer, no boats were put out, nor were any attempts made to barter their products with the strangers.

“It does not look as if we were popular, Mr. Ferguson,” the captain said to the first lieutenant. “It may be that they object to our presence altogether, or it may be because they believe that we are going to the assistance of this Rajah Sehi. It certainly does not look well for the future.”

“Not at all, sir. However, we shall be at the rajah’s place tomorrow morning, and shall then have a better opportunity of seeing how things are likely to go. At any rate, he is sure to be civil for a time, and we shall be likely to procure fruit and vegetables, which, as the doctor says, are absolute necessities if the men are to be kept in good health.”

The next morning they anchored about ten o’clock opposite the campong of the rajah. It was a good deal larger than any that they had passed on the way up, but the houses were mere huts, with the exception of a large wooden structure, which they at once concluded was the residence of the rajah. As soon as the *Serpent* turned the last bend of the river before reaching the place, the sound of drums and gongs was heard, and a large boat, manned by eighteen rowers, shot out from the bank as the anchor was dropped. The two officials on board at once mounted the accommodation ladder, and on reaching the deck were received by the first lieutenant, behind whom stood a guard of honor of the marines.

Upon stating that they came to express, on behalf of the rajah, the pleasure he felt at their arrival, they were conducted to the captain’s cabin. Compliments were exchanged through the medium of the interpreter, and a bottle of champagne was opened, and its contents appeared to gratify the visitors. They announced that the rajah would receive the captain that afternoon at his palace.

CHAPTER IV

Neither of the midshipmen was present at the interview between the captain and the rajah. The second lieutenant, the captain of the marines, and the doctor alone accompanied him, with an escort of twenty bluejackets and as many marines. A large crowd of people had collected to see them pass along to the palace, which was a bare, barn-like structure, but they looked on sullenly and silently as the party passed through them on their way. They were kept waiting some little time outside the building, then entered through a doorway which led them into a large, unfurnished room, at the end of which the rajah was seated. He rose when the officers entered, and received them with an appearance of great cordiality, his chiefs standing behind him.

The conversation was wholly of a complimentary character; the subject of the business on which the British ship had come was not even touched upon; refreshments, consisting of native sweets and palm wine, were then passed round, and the captain, seeing that all business talk was to be deferred, took his leave.

The doctor, who was fond of the two midshipmen, was always ready to chat freely with them.

"What did you think of our ally, Dr. Horsley?" Dick asked him, when, having changed his full uniform for a suit of undress, he came up on deck.

"Between you and me, Balderson, I have seldom seen a more unmitigated looking ruffian in my life; even for a Malay, he is ugly. Soh Hay tells me that in his young days he was a great fighter, and his face and shoulders are seamed with scars. I asked how he came to be rajah; for he does not look at all the type of the better class of people. Soh told me that, in the first place, he took to the jungle, owing to his having kried in a quarrel the son of the chief here. He was joined by other fugitives, set up as a pirate, and captured by surprise one of the chief's prahus. His force grew rapidly, and he made a night attack on the chief's campong, killed him and all the members of his family, and caused himself to be elected chief of the tribe, which was then a small one. Gradually he swallowed up one after another of his weaker neighbors, sometimes by force, sometimes by treachery. I believe he is now confronted by more powerful chiefs, and that it is only because he is possessed of some six or eight piratical prahus that he has been able to maintain his position. No doubt he has become alarmed by a prospect of a combination against him, and has so invited us to support him. Such a step will, of course, greatly add to his unpopularity, but doubtless he thinks that, with our help, he could defy his enemies."

"But, he cannot suppose, Doctor," Harry said indignantly, "that we are going to fight for such a rascal as he is against the men he has been plundering."

"I don't expect he does think that we are going to fight for him, unless he can show us that it is to our interest to do so. I should imagine that he hopes that the effect of our appearance here will be to either induce his neighbors to come to some arrangement with him, or that he will endeavor to make peace with them by offering to throw us over, and to join with them against us."

"Then, I should say, Doctor, that the best thing would be to hang the ruffian up at once."

"Well, yes, that might be a good plan, Parkhurst," the doctor said with a smile, "and might save us a good deal of trouble; but, you see, we have come up here at his invitation; we have just been eating his food and drinking his liquor, and it would scarcely place us in a favorable position in the eyes of the natives in general were we to commence our alliance with him by hanging him."

Harry laughed. "No, I suppose not, Doctor. Still, what are we to do?"

"We must wait, lad. We are here to ascertain the precise situation, and it will be some time before that will be cleared up. Certainly for the present there will be nothing for us to do but to keep quiet and see how matters turn out, and to get through the time as best we may. We shall have fine opportunities for shooting and botanizing, for whatever the chief's designs may be, it is certain that at present he will do all in his power to please us. The captain today, at my suggestion, said that, in

order to keep the men in good health, it would be desirable that they should have every opportunity of going ashore, and that the officers should make expeditions in search of game into the interior. He promised at once to afford us every facility, and to provide us with guides and beaters.”

The next day permission was granted to several of the officers and to twenty sailors and a dozen marines to go on shore. Before starting, the whole ship’s company were drawn up, and the captain addressed them upon the absolute necessity for good behavior.

“The Malays,” he said, “are a fierce race, very proud and independent, and quick to resent the smallest insult. Each man carries a kris, and is ready to use it on the slightest provocation. Every man who goes ashore must remember that not only his own life, but those of many others, and the success of the mission on which we have come hither, may be forfeited by any careless act of aggression. Many of you have served on the coast of Africa, but you must remember that the Malays are not to be treated in the same free and easy manner that may go down with negroes. You must comport yourselves with the same decency of behavior that you would were you in the port of a friendly European Power. Any breach of these orders will be most severely punished; and I appeal to every officer and man to use his utmost efforts to keep on good terms with these people, and to behave as if the honor and credit of the ship depended upon him personally. Any man who comes on board in the slightest degree the worse for liquor will not be allowed to land again, even if we are stationed here for six months; and if there is any misbehavior on shore, all leave will be stopped.”

Two days later, the captain, with the second lieutenant and doctor, again paid a visit to the rajah, and this time business matters were entered upon. The chief began by stating that he rejoiced at the thought of being under the protection of the great English Queen. The captain replied that her Majesty was anxious to be on good terms with all the Malay chiefs; that those rajahs and sultans who had accepted her protection had greatly benefited by so doing, and by listening to the advice of the officers whom she sent to reside at their seat of government; but that, of course, before receiving his state under her protection it was necessary that her representative, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, should be thoroughly satisfied that the rajah intended to be guided by the advice so given.

He said that it was thoroughly necessary this should be understood, for that the allegiance offered to the Queen could not be lightly thrown off. If a chief once owned her as his sovereign, he could not change his mind afterwards; and should he disobey the advice and orders of the Resident, he would be liable to be dethroned, and his government bestowed upon one better fitted for it. He could not, for instance, be allowed to engage in hostilities against his neighbors without the consent of the Resident, for it was clear that the English could not assist him in wars in which they considered that he was in the wrong. In these matters there must be benefits on both sides: the chief would obtain protection against warlike neighbors, would benefit by the presence and advice of a British officer, and by the trade that would spring up; while, in return for these benefits, he must acknowledge the Queen as his sovereign, and must obey the orders of her officers just as her native born subjects would do.

The chief looked very serious at this. “Cannot,” he asked at last, “a chief obtain the protection of the British, and afterwards remain as an ally of theirs?”

“Not so,” the captain said; “he cannot come to us when he is in danger and ask us to send ships and men to aid him, and afterwards, when the danger has passed, wish us good morning, and give us nothing in return for the benefits he had received.”

“What orders would a Resident give?” the rajah asked, after a pause.

“He would give such orders as would be necessary for the good of the state; without interfering in matters of home government, he would not allow acts of tyranny and cruelty that would imperil the peace of the state, and perhaps bring about a rising. He would not suffer trade passing through the dominions to be hampered and injured by heavy and unjust exactions; although, doubtless, he would allow legitimate tolls to be taken. He would not permit expeditions to be fitted out for attacks upon harmless neighbors. His interference would always be for the good of the state, and, consequently, for the good of its prince. The incomes of the various rulers who have placed themselves under British

protection have always been largely augmented by the prosperity and well doing of the state, the increase in its population, the extension of its trade and agriculture, all of which enabled the people to pay a larger amount of taxation.

“You see, Rajah, we force no one to place himself under our protection; we war with no one unless, by attack upon ourselves or upon princes under our protection, he compels us to punish him, and, in extreme cases, to take possession of his dominions. I am explaining all this to you because I wish you thoroughly to understand what your position will be if the Queen takes you under her protection—which she certainly will not do unless it is found that you are likely, on your part, to carry out faithfully the obligations you have assumed in return for that protection.”

When this had been translated to the rajah by the interpreter, the chief sat for some time silent. It was evident that he was ill pleased, and that he had reckoned upon obtaining the British aid without undertaking any responsibilities whatever.

“And the officer who will come up,” he said at last, “would he reside on shore?”

“Certainly he would. A portion of ground would be allotted for the Residency; on this a fort would be erected, which would be manned by a small force for his protection; and he might either reside in the fort or in a residence erected for him close to it, and under shelter of its guns. The fort would, of course, be used for the protection of the town against enemies, as well as for the protection of the officer against any rising on the part of your people; in which case you, as well as himself, would find a refuge in it.”

“Then I should no longer be a ruler,” the rajah said angrily. “I should not be able to order those who offended me to be punished.”

“Not at all,” the captain replied quietly. “Your powers as a ruler would not be interfered with in any way, as long as they were properly exercised. You would have the power of executing ill doers in accordance with the custom of your country; but the murder of a person who had committed no crime whatever is not to be permitted, and anything like wholesale cruelty and tyranny would be sternly repressed.”

For some time the rajah sat without speaking; then he said, with an evident effort of self control, “I must think all this over; it is all new to me.”

“By all means do so,” the captain replied. “The matter is an important one, and you will do well to consider it in all lights before you take a step that, once taken, cannot be undone.”

“I don’t like the fellow’s looks, Doctor,” the captain said; “he intended to use us as a cat’s paw against his neighbors.”

“I think that he is a thoroughly bad lot, sir; and if he accepted the terms, I should be very sorry to be appointed Resident, for I should not feel that my life was worth a day’s purchase.”

“Well, there is nothing to do but to wait until we get a definite answer from him; and my instructions are that, if I find that he is not a desirable man to have to deal with, I am to enter into negotiations with other rajahs, and to endeavor to do something to open the trade of the river and to render it safe for merchants who come up to trade. If Hassan’s account of this man’s doings is correct, he is the main cause of the falling off in the trade, and, moreover, the author of the piracies of which we have had so many complaints; indeed, it is possible that when the Governor learns the true state of things, I may get an order to present an ultimatum to this fellow and to sink his piratical craft. At any rate, we may make up our minds to be here for some time.”

On the following day a message was received from the rajah, saying that if any of the officers wished to go on excursions for sport, guides would be placed at their disposal, and that all who wished to do so could at any time travel through the country without the slightest fear of molestation. For some time affairs remained in the same condition. The doctor went daily on shore with butterfly and beetle nets, tin boxes, and other paraphernalia. He was generally accompanied by a couple of bluejackets, and always took a native guide to prevent the risk of being lost in the jungle, and also because the man was able to take him to places where villages had stood, and it was in these clearings

that insect life, especially among the lepidoptera, was most abundant. The Malay he first engaged was a young fellow who proved so intelligent and willing that he was permanently retained for the service as long as the Serpent remained on the station.

The officers obtained no sport with big game; for although at night the forest was full of sounds, showing the number of wild animals that abounded, these never were met with during the daytime, and it would have been hopeless endeavoring to penetrate the thick jungle in search of them. There was, however, an abundance of birds, for the most part of brilliant plumage, and the doctor was delighted with the spoils they brought in, while the messes were kept well supplied with jungle fowl and other edible birds. The natives, learning from the guide of the doctor's passion for insects, brought in large numbers for sale, and he was able to purchase a great many specimens altogether new to science.

The two midshipmen made excursions with their guns whenever they could get leave. Davis and two other sailors always accompanied them, as the captain's orders were strict that no officer or man should go outside the limits of the campong unless accompanied by two armed seamen.

Sometimes they took a native canoe and went up the river fishing; but as an abundance of fish could be caught by lines from the ship's side, they only did this as a change, and often in the cool of the evening they lay lazily in the canoe, while the fishermen were employed rowing them up one or other of the numerous streams which flowed into the river. The doctor's prognostications as to the health of the crew were only partially verified, for the precautions taken, if they did not secure a perfect immunity against fever, at least greatly diminished the number of those who suffered from it. The abundance of fish either caught from the ship or purchased from the natives formed a wholesome diet, aided by the fruit, of which the natives brought off a very large quantity. It was very varied, and much of it delicious; the mangosteens were specially appreciated, and those who could overcome their repugnance to the disgusting odor of the durians found them delicious eating. Besides these were custard apples, bananas, and many other kinds of fruit; all were very cheap and, upon the doctor's suggestion, a supply was purchased daily for the use of the ship's company, and the sailors, who had no other use for their money, laid out no small portion of their pay on these luxuries.

The captain had taken every opportunity, when boats passed up the river, to send messages and presents to the chiefs of the tribes higher up, with assurances that he had not come up as an enemy, but that he desired to be on good terms with all, and would gladly see any of them who would come down to pay him a visit, and would guarantee their safe return without molestation on the part of Sehi. No answers had, however, been received to these overtures, and a proposal he made to the rajah to send some of the ship's boats up the river to endeavor to bring about an understanding between him and his neighbors was received with extreme disfavor.

CHAPTER V

So far, nothing had been seen of the rajah's prahus. When questioned on the subject, he replied that they were all down on the coast, trading with the natives; but it was so improbable that they should have been sent away while the rajah was in fear of an attack by his neighbors that no credence was given to the assertion. The ship's boats often went out for long rows on the river, ostensibly—as the captain told the rajah, who inquired suspiciously as to the meaning of these excursions—for the sake of giving the crews active exercise, but principally in order to take soundings of the river, and to investigate the size and positions of the creeks running into it. One day the gig and cutter had proceeded farther than usual; they had started at daybreak, and had turned off into what seemed a very small creek, that had hitherto been unexplored, as from the width of its mouth it was supposed to extend but a short distance into the forest. The master's mate was in command of one boat, the second lieutenant of the other; Harry Parkhurst accompanied the latter. After pushing through the screen of foliage that almost closed the entrance to the creek, the boats rowed on for some distance. For half a mile the width was but some fifteen yards, and the trees met in an arch overhead, then it widened considerably.

"This is just the sort of place," the lieutenant said to Harry, "where the rajah's prahus may be hidden away. We had best go along as noiselessly as possible. If we were to come upon them suddenly they might fire upon us, and that would bring on a general row. If we should catch sight of them, it would be best to take the news to the captain, and let him act as he thinks fit."

He ordered the men to cease rowing until the gig came alongside.

"Mr. Morrison," he said, "it seems to me that this is a likely place for the prahus to be hidden. We had better try and discover if this is the case, without being ourselves seen; therefore have all the oars, except four, laid in, and let the men muffle those with their stockings, and be most careful to dip them into the water without making a splash. Let absolute silence be preserved in the boat. I will lead the way as before, and if I hold up my hand stop rowing instantly."

"Aye, aye, sir!" the mate replied.

The same precautions were taken by the cutter, and the boats proceeded noiselessly. Presently the stream narrowed again, until it seemed that they were approaching its termination, and the boat stopped rowing.

"I fancy we have come to the end of it, Mr. Morrison," the lieutenant said in a low voice.

"I am afraid so too, sir; there is no room for the oars, and we shall either have to punt the boats, or to drag them by the bushes."

The lieutenant was about to give the order to turn when Harry said, suddenly, "There is a current, sir. I have had my eye upon that root, and we have drifted backwards a couple of feet since we lost way, so there must be a stretch of water above us."

The lieutenant watched the root of the tree to which Harry had pointed, for a minute in silence, then he said, "You are right, my lad, there is a current, and, as you say, there must be a stretch of water above us. Lay in your oars, lads; stand up, and pull her along by the boughs and bushes, but don't make the slightest sound."

Twenty yards farther the creek widened, and the oars were again got out.

"Take your place in the bow, Mr. Parkhurst, and hold up your hand the instant you see anything unusual, and do you, men, be ready to hold her up the instant I give the order."

They proceeded for a quarter of a mile, the gig following close behind. Suddenly, at a bend in the stream, a glare of light was seen ahead. Harry held up his hand, and passed the word down in a whisper that just ahead the creek widened into a broad sheet of water. The lieutenant stopped the gig by holding up his hand, passed the order for the men to lay in their oars noiselessly, and told the coxswain to keep in well under the bushes on the left hand side; then he made his way forward, and

joined Harry, telling the men to pull the boat forward by means of the branches overhead which were well within reach, but to avoid breaking even a twig.

In a minute or two the bow of the boat arrived at the end of the screen of bushes, and a low exclamation broke from the lieutenant and Harry simultaneously; they were looking out on to an almost circular pool some two hundred yards in diameter. In the center were moored six prahus. Two of them lay broadside on to the creek, the other four were in a line behind these, and it seemed that their broadsides were directed to the opposite side of the pool, for the other two boats were in the way of their firing at the creek. They were long, low vessels, rowing some twenty oars on each side. Each carried a number of small brass guns, and they were evidently full of men, for numbers could be seen on deck, and boats were passing to and fro between them and a small village at the edge of the pool. Having taken in all the details of the scene, the lieutenant passed the word for the mate to leave his own boat and join him. When he did so, he whispered to him: "I thought it was as well that you should have a view of these fellows' position too, Morrison, as it would be of use to you if you have to take a boat in to attack them."

Two minutes later the boats were drawn back again to the open water in their rear, and rowed as noiselessly as before down the creek, no word being spoken until they were half a mile away from the pool.

"That is a snug hiding place, Mr. Morrison," the lieutenant said.

"It is indeed, sir. Who would have thought the scoundrels were so close to us, or that they lay up this narrow creek, which I have passed half a dozen times and never thought worth examining? I should not have dreamt that one of those craft could have passed through."

"I doubt whether they did pass through. They hardly could have done so without breaking down a good many of these branches, and we must have seen signs of that. I think they must have got into that pool by some creek coming in on the opposite side. You see four out of the six boats were anchored in line so as to bring their broadsides to bear on some point opposite to them, while the other two guarded them against any attack from this side. Naturally, they thought it unlikely that any boat would come up here, and so directed their main attention to the other opening. The next thing to find out will be where the other stream joins the river, otherwise, as soon as we make our appearance, they will escape that way, and there is not the least doubt that they could row away from our fastest boats. However, it is a great thing that we have discovered their whereabouts without their having the least notion that we have done so, and I am sure the captain will be very pleased when he hears that we have found them. It will give him the whip hand over that lying rascal Sehi."

Captain Forest smiled grimly when the lieutenant made his report of the discovery that he had made.

"Thank you, Mr. Hopkins; that is a very valuable discovery. Just at present matters have not come to a point when we can turn it to account. The next thing will be to find out where the other passage comes out. It will be a serious business to attack them in the boats alone; these prahus carry a tremendous lot of men, and the Malays will fight desperately. I do not say that we might not succeed, but we should lose a lot of men in the attempt; it would be hot work even with the ship, attacked by six of these fellows at once. If it was in the night, we might fail to see any of them before they were upon us, and we should have hard work to beat back four or five hundred of them if they all came swarming on deck together. However, we can wait, and the first time the rajah shows any signs of treachery we can pounce upon his fleet. He will not dream that we have discovered their hiding place, and will therefore let them hide there without movement. However, we must try to find the other end of the entrance to the creek.

"Please impress upon Mr. Morrison and young Parkhurst that it is of the highest importance no words shall be spoken about it; and it might be advisable, also, to give notice to the men who were in the boats, to keep their mouths shut. I have no reason to believe that the interpreter is not faithful to our interests, but it is just as well not to trust anyone. Moreover, it may be that some of these Malays

who come on board with fruit may have been for a time at Singapore or Penang, and picked up a little English, and a chance word might let them know that we have discovered the prahus.”

“I wonder why our friend Hassan has not turned up,” Dick Balderson said to his chum one day, after they had been lying for a month opposite the town.

“I expect something has occurred to keep him,” Harry said. “I am quite convinced that he would have come if he could. He may be in trouble himself with some of his neighbors, or he may have tried to exert himself too soon and done himself damage. I am quite convinced that he meant what he said. At any rate, till this business here comes to a head, we are not likely to be able to go up and pay a visit to him.”

“No, I am quite sure that the captain would not let us go now, and indeed, I would not ask him, even if I were sure he would, for we may get to blows with the rajah any day; he cannot put off giving a final answer much longer. I wonder the captain stood his shilly shallying so long as he has.”

It was but two evenings after this that, as the two midshipmen were leaning against the bulwarks, watching the reflection of the stars in the sluggish stream, a native sampan stole silently out from the shadow of the shore and dropped down alongside the Serpent. So noiseless was the movement that the two men on the lookout in the bow did not notice it, and the midshipmen thought it was a shadow of some dark object floating down stream, when it came alongside and a man stood up.

“Hello!” Harry said, “you must not come alongside like this: what do you want?”

“Dick, Harry, Doctor; come from Hassan.”

“Oh, that is it; all right, come on board,” and, leaning over, he stretched out his hand to the native, who seized it, and in a moment stood by his side on the deck, holding the head rope of his sampan in his mouth.

“Davis,” Harry said to the sailor who was standing two paces away, “just go down to the wardroom, and tell the doctor, with my compliments, that I shall be obliged if he will come on deck at once. Say that it is something particular.”

A minute later the doctor appeared. “I was just in the middle of a rubber, Dick, and if you have not an uncommonly good reason for calling me up I will make you smart for it, the first time you get under my hands. Whom have we got here?”

“He is a messenger from Hassan; he mentioned our names and yours.”

“Ah, I am glad of that,” the doctor said, rubbing his hands together; “they have been chaffing me in the wardroom about it, and prophesying that I should never hear of him again. Well, what does he say?”

“He has not said anything except our names, Doctor, and that he comes from Hassan. I don’t suppose he knows any more English, and I thought we had better consult you, whether it would be best to send for Soh Hay; he may have brought some message of importance.”

“Right, lad. I think the most prudent thing will be to tell the captain first. It may only be a message to say why he has not come, or it may be a matter of some importance. I will go to him at once.”

Two or three minutes later he returned. “You are to bring him to the captain’s cabin. Here, Davis, pass the word forward that the captain wants to see Soh Hay in his cabin.”

Harry touched the native, who had been standing quietly by his side, and signed him to accompany them, and with Dr. Horsley and Dick went direct to the cabin.

“So your friend has sent a message at last, lad?” Captain Forest said. “I am glad of that, for I own that I had doubts whether we should hear any more of him.”

“You come from the chief Hassan?” the captain, who had been working at the Malay language, with the interpreter, since he had arrived at the mouth of the river, asked in that tongue. The man’s face brightened.

“Yes, my lord,” he said.

“Is he well?”

“The chief is quite well.”

“I wish I knew enough to question him without Soh Hay’s interference, but I shall only make a mess of it, and, perhaps, get a wrong idea altogether of his message. Now, Soh Hay,” he broke off as the interpreter entered, “you will ask this man the questions exactly as I put them, and tell me his answer word for word. It may be of importance. Now ask him first what message he brings from his chief to the officers.”

The question was put, and the native, speaking slowly and quietly, and evidently repeating a lesson that he had learned by heart, said, “The chief sends his greeting to his three friends, Harry, Dick, and Doctor, also to Captain. He is well in body; he is cured, and can throw a spear and lead his men to battle. He has sent four messengers one after another, but none have returned with an answer; they have no doubt been kried. Now he sends me.”

“Tell him that no messenger has arrived until now,” the captain said, when this was interpreted to him.

The man nodded. “All kried. I travel at night, hide in trees all day, float down at night in shadow of bushes, and have got through safe. Chief Hassan says not been able to come down. Other chiefs very angry because English warship come. Send message to Hassan to join them. When he say no, they threaten to kill him and destroy tribe when warship go away. Two of Rajah Sehi’s prahus go up and down river; stop all boats. Sehi send message to all chiefs; say that English war boat here. English come take his country, and after they done that take the countries of the others; make themselves kings of the river. He ask them to join him in killing English, every man, then he would have no more quarrel with them, no trouble trade any more; be good friends with all neighbors. Some chiefs say one thing, some another. Some more afraid of rajah than of English; some think better have English here than rajah.

“Hassan says must take great care. Sehi very treacherous; attack when they do not expect it. He thinks his prahus can easily take English ship; but Hassan says Sehi wants the other chiefs to aid, so that if the English send up more ships, then, can all join him in fighting them. Hassan says he will do what he can. He has eight war canoes, but no good against prahus—they run at canoes, and cut them in half; but will come to help if English attack. He does not know where prahus are. Begs Captain to attack these first; it is they that make Sehi master of the river. If they destroyed, other chiefs not afraid of Sehi, and he might get some of them to join against him. Hassan said tell Harry, and Dick, and Doctor he does not forget their kindness, and will do what he can to watch over them. Such is Hassan’s message.”

“Ask him when he is going back to his chief,” the captain said.

“He go now,” the interpreter said, after asking the question. “He get as far as he can before morning. He sure many eyes watch ship night and day to see that no message comes, or any word of what rajah is doing. He float down stream in sampan some distance, then paddle to opposite bank, then keep in shadow of bushes up the river, and hide away till night comes again.”

“Very well, then, tell him that he is to thank his master for sending us warning; that we had already found out that what he told us before he went away was true, and that Sehi is a very bad man. Say that we are not afraid of prahus, and will make short work of them when we get a chance. Tell him we will take great care, and not let ourselves be surprised, and that when we have finished with this fellow here, the ship will come as far up the river as she can go, and show the chiefs that the English have no evil intentions against them, and will send his three friends with a strong boat party to pay him a visit. By the way, ask the man if he knows this part of the country.”

“Yes, Captain; he says that he has been since his boyhood a boatman, and has worked for some years with a trader, who used to go up the creeks, and trade with the villagers.”

“Ask him if he knows a creek that turns off from the river four or five miles above this; it is a very small one, but it leads into a pool on which is a large village.”

The man nodded at once, when the question was put, then spoke for a minute or two.

“He says, Captain, that he knows the pool and village; but he has never been up the small creek that you speak of. Did not know that a boat could get through. He has been there by a large creek that runs into the other branch of the river, the one that turns off twelve miles below this; from that river it is an hour’s paddle in a sampan to the pool.”

“How should we know the entrance?” the captain asked.

“Entrance difficult to find,” the native replied; “strip of land runs out from both sides, covered with trees. One goes a little beyond the other, so that anyone who did not know it would pass the entrance without noticing it. It is just wide enough for a large craft to go in and out. There is a village stands a hundred yards below the entrance; it would be known by a big tree that grows before a large house close to the bank. The water is deep on that side. You have only, after passing the village, to keep close in shore, and you will then see the entrance to the creek. It is called Alligator Creek, because, more than any place, it swarms with these creatures.”

“Thank you,” the captain said. “Will you tell the chief that I say you have rendered me a valuable service?”

He opened a case in which he kept presents intended for the chiefs, and took out a brace of handsome pistols, a powder flask, and a bullet mold.

“Take these,” he said, “in token of the service you have rendered. When I see your chief, you shall be well recompensed for the risk that you have run in bearing me his message.”

The Malay looked longingly at the pistols, and then said, “I came by order of my chief, and not for reward.”

“Quite so. I understand that, and am not offering you a reward for that service, but for the information that you have given me, which may be of value if I have trouble with the rajah here.”

The man bowed and took the pistols offered. “I will use them against your enemies,” he said warmly; “but all of us know the creek, for it is that which renders it so difficult for us to fight against Sehi. He is master of the water, and we cannot attack him without first crossing that creek. We should have to carry canoes with us, to do it, for the creek is too full of alligators for anyone to swim across, and our small canoes would have no chance of passing the creek when his war boats were there.”

The captain nodded when this was translated to him.

“Sehi’s place, in fact, stands upon an island formed by the two branches of the river and this creek. As soon as he became master of the river, he could hardly be assailed, while at any time he could sally out and fall upon his enemies. Ask the man if he will take any refreshment before he goes.”

The man declined. He had, he said, sufficient fruit and dried fish for his journey back. A few minutes later he took his place in the little canoe and drifted away into the darkness, and was soon lost to sight.

CHAPTER VI

“Things are coming to a crisis, Harry,” Dick Balderson said, in a tone of delight, as they left the captain’s cabin. “We now know what we all along suspected—the rajah is a rascal, and we have not only found out where his prahus are hidden, but have them corked up in a bottle.”

“Nothing could be better, Dick, and I expect we shall have some pretty hot work. Of course the Serpent cannot get up that creek, though she can place herself at the entrance and prevent their getting away; but there still remains the work of capturing or driving them down the creek, and that is likely to be a very tough job.”

The next morning the second lieutenant, the mate, and Harry Parkhurst were sent for to the captain’s cabin. The first lieutenant was there. They were each asked their opinion as to whether the prahus could force their way through the creek by which they had ascended.

“It is a most important point,” the captain said: “and indeed, everything might depend upon it.”

“I am sure, sir,” Mr. Hopkins said, “that they could not go straight down it. They might cut their way through, but it would be a work of considerable time, for with their masts they would have to clear away the branches to a considerable height. Down near the water the branches by which we pushed ourselves along were those of the undergrowth, with many rattans and other creepers varying from the thickness of one’s thumb to that of one’s wrist, and these would take a great deal of chopping before one of their war boats could be pushed through, but higher up they would probably have much thicker branches to contend with. It may be that they can lower their masts; but even if they could do so, I should think that it would take them over an hour’s work, even with the number of hands they carry, to get a passage through that bit of thick undergrowth, fifty or sixty yards up the mouth of the creek. There are two or three other places where some chopping would have to be done, but that would be comparatively easy work.”

The mate and Harry both agreed with the lieutenant.

“Practically, then,” the captain said, “the Malays have but one mode of escape, while we have two of attack. At any rate, if we send up a boat beforehand, and fasten two or three iron chains from side to side among the branches, that passage would be securely sealed.

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