

Fenn George Manville

Jungle and Stream: or, The Adventures of Two Boys in Siam



George Fenn

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CHAPTER I

SIXTY YEARS AGO

"Charlie is my darling, my darling, my darling!" was sung in a good, clear, boyish tenor, and then the singer stopped, to say impatiently, —

"What nonsense it is! My head seems stuffed full of Scotch songs, — 'Wee bit sangs,' as the doctor calls them. Seems funny that so many Scotch people should come out here to the East. I suppose it's because the Irish all go to the West, that they may get as far apart as they can, so that there may not be a fight. I say, though, I want my breakfast."

The speaker, to wit Harry Kenyon, sauntered up to the verandah of the bungalow and looked in at the window of the cool, shaded room, where a man-servant in white drill jacket and trousers was giving the finishing touches to the table.

"Breakfast ready, Mike?"

"Yes, sir; coffee's boiled, curry's made."

"Curry again?"

"Yes, Master Harry; curry again. That heathen of a cook don't believe a meal's complete without curry and rice."

"But I thought we were going to have fried fish this morning."

"So did I, sir. I told him plainly enough; but he won't understand, and he's curried the lot."

"How tiresome!"

"I should like to curry his hide, Master Harry, but it's leather-coloured already. Never mind; there's some fresh potted meat."

"Bother potted meat! I'm sick of potted meat. Look here, next time I bring home any fresh fish you go into the kitchen and cook them yourself."

"What, me go and meddle there! Look here, Master Harry, I'll go with you fishing, and wade into that sticky red mud if you want me to; or I'll go with you shooting or collecting, and get my eyes scratched out in the jungle, and risk being clawed by tigers, or stung by snakes, or squeedged flat by an elephant's neat little foot; but I'm not going to interfere with old Ng's pots and pans. Why, he'd put some poison in my vittles."

"Nonsense!"

"He would, sir, sure as I stand here. He looks wonderful gentle and smiling, with that Chinese face of his; but I know he can bite."

"Poor old Ng; he's as harmless as his name. N. G. — Ng."

"Name? I don't call that a name, Master Harry. Fag end of a pig's grunt; that's about what that is."

"Here, I want my breakfast. Isn't father nearly dressed?"

"No, sir; he hasn't begun to shave yet, and he won't be down for another quarter of an hour."

"Call me when he comes," said the lad, and he went off down the garden again, towards the river which flowed swiftly at the bottom, where the bamboo landing-stage had been made, with its high-peaked attap, or palm-leaf roof. It was all bamboo. Big canes were driven into the mud for supports, others for pillars and beams, and the floor was of smaller ones, split and laid close together, and then bound in their places with long lengths of the rotan cane which grew so plentifully in the

jungle, running up the great forest trees, and after reaching the top, going on growing till it swung down by the yard, and waited till the wind blew it into the next tree, where it held on by its thorns, and went on growing to any length.

The garden was beautiful in its wildness, the trees having been left for shade; and John Kenyon, the East India merchant, who had settled far up one of the rivers of Siam ten years before, after the death of his wife, had found out from long experience that he who tries to make an English garden in a tropical country has worry for crops, while he who encourages the native growths makes his home a place of beauty.

So Harry Kenyon sauntered down, keeping out of the hot rays of the early morning sun – hot enough, though it was only six, for people rise early in the East – and made his way to the bamboo platform beneath which the river, here about a hundred yards wide, looked like a stream whose waters had been transformed into a decoction of coffee and chicory, with the milk left out, or, as Harry once said, muddy soup.

The creepers, crowded with many-coloured blossoms, hung down from the trees and ran over the roof, forming, with the dry palm-leaves, nesting and hiding places for plenty of natural history objects from the neighbouring jungle. Birds nested there, and rats and snakes came birds'-nesting, while lizards of various kinds, from the little active fly-catchers to the great shrieking tokay, found that roof an admirable resting-place.

There were sundry rustlings overhead as Harry stepped on to the slippery, squeaking, yielding bamboos; but use is second nature, and ten years in such company, without reckoning the inhabitants of the jungle, had made the boy so familiar with many of these things that he looked upon them with a calm contempt.

As a matter of course he would have swarmed up a tree fast enough at the sight of a tiger or elephant in either of the forest tracks, or, to use Mike's expression, have made himself scarce if he had encountered a cobra, or seen one of the great boas swaying to and fro from the gigantic limb of a tree. Even at the moment of stepping upon the covered-in summerhouse-like landing-stage, with its fishing-rods laid up overhead in the bamboo rafters, he shrank a little, and then angrily bared his teeth as he stood gazing down at the water a dozen yards away.

"You beast!" he hissed. "Oh, if you'd only stay there while I fetched a gun! Oh, yes, it's all very well to wink one eye at me; I'd make you wink both."

It seemed odd that the lad should address himself like that to a piece of rugged, gnarled tree-trunk floating slowly down the flashing river; but, as aforesaid, Harry Kenyon had been up the country in Siam ever since he was quite a little fellow, and had been accustomed to have the wild creatures of the forest for pets and companions. Where boys at home had had cats or dogs, Harry had more than once petted a tiger cub; lizards had been as common with him as white mice with English lads. Then he had kept squirrels, snakes, monkeys, and birds to any extent. Moreover, he had once contrived to keep alive, until it became wild instead of tame a hideous-looking creature which lived in a fenced-in patch of sand with half a sugar hogshead sunk level with the ground, provided with a central heap formed of an old tree-root, and filled up with water. This creature strangely resembled the efts or newts so common in some ponds, but magnified many times, so that there was no cause for surprise that the boy should speak as he did to the tree-trunk, for his experienced eyes had seen at a glance that this was no half-rotten stem torn out from the bank by the flooded river. He had recognised the two horny prominences over the eyes, and their furtive, ugly gleam, so that he was not at all surprised when one end of the trunk moved slowly, in a wavy fashion, and the object began to part the water.

"Yes, I thought you'd soon go," said Harry. "Stop a minute, though."

He stepped gently back into the garden and snatched up a piece of stone about as big as two fists, from a heap of rockwork, stole back to the bamboo floor till he could just see over the edge, keeping his movements hidden, and launched out the heavy piece of spar with so good an aim that,

after curving through the air just above the surface of the water, it fell with a dull thud right in the centre of the trunk.

The effect was instantaneous. A long muzzle with gaping jaws rose out of the water for a moment, there was a tremendous wallowing which made the water foam, and then a great serrated tail rose several feet above the surface, quivered in a wavy way, delivered a sounding slap on the top of the water, and disappeared.

"I thought that would make you wag your tail, old gentleman. What a whopper! Nearly twenty feet long, and as thick as thick. Pull a man in? Why, it would pull in a young elephant. Oh, how I do hate crocs!"

The boy stood watching the surface for some minutes, but there was no sign of the huge reptile reappearing.

"Gone down," muttered the boy. "Suppose, though, he has swum underneath here, and is waiting to dash out and grab me by the legs. Ugh!" he added, with a shudder, "it does seem such a horrible death, only I suppose the poor people these creatures catch don't feel any more when once they're under the water. Wonder whether they do. Shouldn't like to try."

His thoughts made him peer down through an opening between the warped bamboos, at where the river glided beneath his feet; but all was perfectly quiet there, and he glanced up at the fishing-rods.

"Be no use to try now," he said; "the brute would scare every fish away, and I've got no bait, and – oh, I say, how badly I do want my breakfast! Is father going to lie in bed all day?"

Evidently not, for the minute after a cheery voice cried, "Now, Harry, lad, breakfast!"

CHAPTER II

THE JUNGLE HUNTER

Harry Kenyon did not run up the slope to the house, which was erected upon an elevation to raise it beyond the flood when the river burst its bounds, as it made a point of doing once or twice a year during the heavy rains. People out in sunny Siam do not run much, but make a point of moving deliberately as the natives do, for the simple reason that it takes a very short time to get into a violent perspiration, but a very long time to get cool; besides which, overheating means the risk of chills, and chills mean fever.

He walked gently up to meet the tall, thin, rather stern-featured, grizzly-haired man in white flannel and straw hat with puggaree, who had come out to meet him, and who saluted him heartily.

"Lovely morning, my boy, but quite warm enough already. How sweet the blossoms smell!"

"Yes, father," said Harry, whose brain was full of the great reptile; "but I've just seen such a monster."

"Crocodile?"

"Yes; quite twenty feet long."

"With discount twenty-five per cent., Hal?" said the father, laughing.

"No, father, really."

"One's eyes magnify when they look at savage creatures, especially at snakes."

"Oh yes, I know, father," said the lad impatiently; "but this was the biggest I've seen."

"Then it must have been twenty-four feet long, Hal, for I've shown you one of twenty-two."

"I didn't measure him, father; he wouldn't wait," said the boy, laughing; "but he was a monster."

"You threw something at it, I suppose?"

"Yes, a big piece out of the rockery – and hit him on the back. It sounded like hitting a leather trunk."

"Humph!" said Mr. Kenyon. "Boys are boys all the world round, it seems. Here have you been in Siam almost ever since you were born, and you act just in the same way as an English boy at home."

"Act! How did I act?"

"Began throwing stones. Bit of human nature, I suppose, learnt originally of the monkeys. So you hit the brute?"

"Yes, father, and he went off with a rush!"

"Looking for its breakfast, I suppose. Let's go and get ours."

Harry Kenyon required no second invitation, for the pangs of hunger, forgotten in the excitement, returned with full force, and in a few minutes father and son were seated at table in the well-furnished half-Eastern, half-English-looking home, enjoying a well-cooked breakfast, served on delicate china from the neighbouring country, and with glistening silver tea and coffee pot well worn with long polishing, for they were portions of a set of old family plate which had been sent out to the fairly wealthy merchant trading with England from the East.

"Hullo!" said Mr. Kenyon; "why, you are not eating any of your fish!"

"No, father. Ng has spoiled them."

"Spoiled? Nonsense; the curry is delicious."

"But I don't want to be always eating curry, father. I told him to fry them."

"Better leave him to do things his own way, my boy, and have some. They are very good. The Chinese are a wonderfully conservative people. They begin life running in the groove their fathers ran in before them, and go on following it up to the end of their days, and then leave the groove to their sons. Did you catch all these?"

"No; Phra caught more than I did. He is more patient than I am."

"A great deal, and with his studies too."

"Yes, father; I say, the fish are better than I thought."

"I was talking about the Prince being more patient over his studies than you are, Hal," said Mr. Kenyon drily.

"Yes, father," said the lad, reddening.

Mike just then brought in a dish of hot bread-cakes, and no more was said until he had left the room, when Mr. Kenyon continued: —

"Take it altogether, Hal, you are not such a bad sort of boy, and I like the way in which you devote yourself to the collecting for the museum; but I do wonder at an English lad calmly letting one of these Siamese boys leave him behind."

"Oh, but he's the son of a king," said Harry, smiling.

"Tchah! What of that? Suppose he is a prince by birth, like a score more of them, that is no reason why he should beat you."

"He can't, father," said Harry sturdily.

"Well, he seems to."

"If I liked to try hard, I could leave him all behind nowhere."

"Then, why don't you try hard, sir?"

"It's so hot, father."

"And you are so lazy, sir."

"Yes, father. I'll have a little more curry, please."

"I wish I could have your classics and mathematics curried, sir, so as to make you want more of them," said Mr. Kenyon, helping his son to more of the savoury dish. "Yes, Mike?"

"Old Sree is here, sir, with two bearers and a big basket."

"Oh!" cried Harry, jumping up; "what has he got now?"

"Sit down and finish your breakfast, Hal," said his father sternly. "Don't be such a young savage, even if you are obliged to live out here in these uncivilized parts."

The lad sat down promptly, but felt annoyed, and anxious to know what the old hunter employed by his father to collect specimens had brought.

"What has he in the big basket, Mike?" asked Mr. Kenyon.

"Don't know, sir; he wouldn't tell me. Said the Sahibs must know first."

"Then he must have got something good, I know," said Harry excitedly.

"I expect it's a coo-ah."

"One o' them big, speckled peacocks with no colour in 'em, Master Harry?" said Mike respectfully. "No, it isn't one o' them; the basket's too small."

"What is it, then?"

"Don't know, sir; but I think it's one o' those funny little bears, like fat monkeys."

"May I send on for Phra, father?"

"Yes, if you like; but perhaps they will not let him come."

"Oh, I think they will; and I promised always to send on to him when anything good was brought in."

"Very well," said his father quietly; "send."

"Run, Mike," said the boy excitedly, and the man made a grimace at him. "Well, then, walk fast, and ask to see him. They'll let you pass. Then tell him we've got a big specimen brought in, and ask him, with my compliments, if he'd like to come on and see it."

"Yes, sir;" and the man hurried out, while Mr. Kenyon, who had just helped himself to a fresh cup of coffee, leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"What are you laughing at, father?" said the boy, with his bronzed face reddening again. "Did I make some stupid blunder?"

"Well, I hardly like to call it a blunder, Hal, because it was done knowingly. I was smiling at the impudence of you, an ordinary British merchant's son, coolly sending a message to a palace and telling a king's son to come on here."

"Palace! Why, it's only a palm-tree house, not much better than this, father; not a bit like a palace we see in books. And as to his being a king's son, and a prince, well, he's only a boy like myself."

"Of the royal blood, Hal."

"He can't help that, father, and I'm sure he likes to come here and read English and Latin with me, and then go out collecting. He said the King liked it too."

"Oh yes, he likes it, or he would not let his son come."

"Phra said his father wanted him to talk English as well as we do."

"And very wise of him too, my boy. This country will have more and more dealing with England as the time goes on."

Harry sat watching his father impatiently, longing the while to get out into the verandah, where he expected that the old hunter would be.

"You are not eating, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon; "go on with your breakfast."

"I've done, thank you, father."

"Nonsense. You always have two cups of coffee. Get on with the meal. It is better to make a good breakfast than to wait till the middle of the day, when it is so hot."

Harry began again unwillingly, and his father remarked upon it.

"You want to get out there, but you told me you did not wish to see what the man has brought till your friend came."

"Yes, I said so, father; but I should like Sree to tell me."

"Finish your breakfast, and you will have plenty of time."

Harry went on, and after the first few mouthfuls his healthy young appetite prevailed, and he concluded a hearty meal.

"There, you can go now," said his father. "Call me when the Prince comes."

Harry Kenyon hurried out into the broad verandah, and then along two sides of the square bungalow so as to reach the back, where sat a little, wrinkled-faced, square-shaped, yellow-skinned man, with his face and head shaved along the sides as high as the tips of his ears, leaving a short, stubby tuft of grizzled hair extended backward from the man's low forehead to the nape of his neck, looking for all the world like the hair out of a blacking-brush stretched over the top of his head.

His dress was as scanty as that of his two muscular young companions, consisting as it did of a cotton plaid sarong or scarf of once bright colours, but now dull in hue from long usage, and a good deal torn and tattered by forcing a way through the jungle. This was doubled lengthwise and drawn round the loins, and then tightened at the waist by giving the edge of the sarong a peculiar twist and tuck in, thus forming a waist-belt in which in each case was stuck a dagger-like kris, with pistol-shaped handle and wooden sheath to hold the wavy blade, and a parang or heavy sword used in travelling to hack a way through the jungle and form a path by chopping through tangled rotan or tufts of bamboo, or lawyer cane.

The three men were squatted on their heels, with their mouths distended and lips scarlet, chewing away at pieces of betel-nut previously rolled in a pepper-leaf, which had first been smeared with what looked like so much white paste, but which was in fact lime, made by burning the white coral, abundant along some portion of the shores, and rising inland to quite mountainous height.

As soon as Harry came in sight, all rose up, smiling, and the elder man wanted to exhibit the prize contained within the great square basket standing on the bamboo flooring, while two stout bamboos, each about eight feet long, were stood up against the house, a couple of loops on either side of the basket showing where the bamboo poles had been thrust through so that the basket could hang dependent from the two men's shoulders.

"What have you got, Sree?" asked Harry, in English, which from long service with Mr. Kenyon, and mixing with other colonists, Sree spoke plainly enough to make himself understood.

"Big thing, Sahib. Very heavy."

"Bear?"

The man made a sign, and his two followers grinned with enjoyment, and seated themselves on the basket, which squeaked loudly.

"What did you do that for?" cried Harry.

"The young Sahib must wait till the old Sahib comes, and then he see."

"Old Sahib, indeed!" cried Harry; "why, my father isn't half so old as you."

"The young Sahib wait."

"Of course I can wait," said Harry pettishly, "and I was going to wait. I only asked you what it was."

The man smiled, and shook his head mysteriously, and just then Mike thrust his head out of the door.

"Ah, got back, Mike!" cried Harry. "What did the Prince say?"

"Come on almost directly, sir; but I had no end of a job to get to see him."

"How was that?"

"Oh, those guard chaps; soldiers, I s'pose they call themselves. They're a deal too handy with those spears of theirs. They ought to be told that they mustn't point them at an Englishman's breast."

"Oh, it's only because they're on duty, Mike," replied Harry.

"Wouldn't make any difference to me, sir, whether it was on dooty or off dooty if one of them was to go inside my chest."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of that."

"Afraid! Oh, come, I like that, Master Harry – afraid! Not likely to be afraid of any number of the squatty, yellow-skinned chaps, but they oughtn't to be allowed to carry such things. Fancy Englishmen at home all going about carrying area railings in their hands."

Harry shook his head, for his recollections of spear-pointed area railings were very vague.

"Don't matter, sir," said Mike, "they don't know any better; but I know I shall get in a row one of these days for giving one of 'em a smeller right on the nose."

"Nonsense! you mustn't do that, Mike."

"Why not, sir? Couldn't do no harm; they're as flat as flat as it is."

"You know what my father said about keeping on good terms with the natives."

"Yes, sir, I know, sir, but fair play's a jewel; if I keep on good terms with them they ought to keep on good terms with me, and sticking a spear-point into a man's wesket aren't the sort o' terms I like. 'Specially when you know the things are poisoned."

"Nonsense! The Prince assured me they were not."

"Well, those ugly, twisty crises are, sir."

"No. The only danger from them is their sharp point."

"Well, that's bad enough, sir; but how about the thing you've got yonder? What is it, Master Harry?" he asked.

"Come out and see. Don't stand there with your head just stuck out like a snake in a hole looking to see if it's safe."

"Well, but is it safe, sir?"

"Come and see. If it's safe enough for me to be out here, it's safe enough for you."

Mike evidently considered this reply unanswerable, for he came out slowly and cautiously, the two men seated on the hamper-like basket evidently enjoying the man's timidity. They glanced at Harry inquiringly, and he gave them a quick nod of assent, with the result that as Mike was passing them, with divers suspicious glances at their seat, they made a sudden spring together, as if the

occupant of the bamboo covering had suddenly and by a tremendous effort raised the lid. There was a loud creaking, and with a rush Mike was back through the door, which he banged to.

The old hunter, who had seated himself to prepare a fresh piece of betel-nut for chewing, laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, while his two bearers drew their feet up and squatted now upon the basket lid, chuckling with delight, and looking to Harry as if expecting a fresh hint for startling Mike.

Harry went to the door and pushed at it, finding it give a little, but only to be pressed to directly, as if by Mike's shoulder.

"Here, it's all right; open the door," cried Harry. "He didn't get out."

The door was opened cautiously, and Mike's head slowly appeared, to look from one to the other and encounter faces that were serious now almost to solemnity.

"I thought he'd got out, sir," said Mike.

"Oh no, he's safe enough; look how they've fastened the lid down with bamboo skewers."

"Yes, sir, but some o' them things is so awful strong. What is it – tiger?"

"Oh no, it's not a tiger, Mike. A tiger would scratch and kick a basket like that to pieces in no time."

"Of course he would, sir. I say, Master Harry, hadn't you better tell old Sree to get up and sit on the basket too?"

"Hardly room, is there?" said Harry seriously.

"Plenty, sir, if you make those chaps squeedge up together a bit."

"But the basket's so tickle, Mike, and their weight might send it over sidewise. If it did the basket would go nearly flat, the lid would be burst off, and where should be we then?"

"I know where I should be, sir," said Mike – "indoors."

"You wouldn't have time, for those beasts are so wonderfully active that this one would be out of the basket like a flash of lightning."

"Would he, sir? Then don't you do it. Let him be. What is it, sir – a leopard?"

"Oh no, not a leopard, Mike."

"What, then? One of those big monkeys we've never yet got a sight of?"

"Monkey? Oh no."

"What is it, then, sir?"

"Well, you see, Mike, I don't know myself yet," said Harry, laughing.

Mike looked at him sharply, then at the three Siamese, whose faces were contorted with mirth, and back at his young master.

"Humbugging me," he said sharply. "That's it, is it, Master Harry?"

Yah! I don't believe there's anything in the old hamper at all."

He went round the basket from the other direction, so as to reach the door, and as he got behind the two men on the lid, he turned.

"I do wonder at you, Master Harry, laughing at a fellow like that, and setting these niggers to make fun of me. Yah!"

He raised one foot and delivered a tremendous kick at the bottom of the basket, startling the two squatting men on the lid so that one sprang up and the other leaped off on to the bamboo floor of the verandah, while a violent commotion inside the basket showed that its occupant had also been disturbed.

"Something else for you to laugh at," said Mike, and he slipped in and closed the door.

Harry smiled, the man returned to his perch on the lid, frowning and looking very serious, while the occupant of the basket settled down quietly again, making Harry more curious than ever as to what it might be; but he mastered his desire to go and peer through the split bamboo so tightly woven together, and waited impatiently for the coming of his friend and companion.

"I believe it's a big monkey, after all," he said to himself. "Sree always said he was sure there were monsters right away in the jungle, just about the same as the one father saw at Singapore, brought from Borneo. It was precious quiet, though, till Mike kicked the basket. How savage it made him to be laughed at!"

He glanced at the basket again, and then at the old hunter and his men, all three squatting down on their heels, chewing away at their betel-nut, and evidently in calm, restful enjoyment of the habit.

"Just like three cows chewing their cud," said Harry to himself, and then feeling that it was the best way to avoid the temptation to look into the basket, he went along the verandah to the corner of the house, just as his father reached the next corner, coming to join them.

"Well, has Phra come?" he cried.

"No, father, not yet."

"Found out what's in the basket?" said Mr. Kenyon, smiling.

"No; haven't looked."

"Well done, Hal; I didn't give you credit for so much self-denial. But there, I think we have waited long enough. Let's go and see now what we've got."

"No, no, don't do that," said Harry excitedly. "Phra would be so disappointed if we began before he had time to get here."

"Ah well, he will not be disappointed," said Mr. Kenyon, "for here he is."

As he spoke a boat came in sight, gliding along the river at the bottom of the garden – a handsomely made boat, propelled by a couple of rowers standing one in the bow, the other astern, facing the way they were going, and propelling the vessel after the fashion of Venetian gondoliers, their oars being secured to a stout peg in the side by a loop of hemp.

Harry started off down the garden to meet the passenger, who was seated amidships beneath an awning; and as the men ran the craft deftly up to the landing-place, a dark-complexioned, black-haired lad sprang on to the bamboo platform, looking wonderfully European as to his dress, for it was simply of white flannel. It was the little scarlet military cap and the brightly tinted plaid sarong with kris at the waist which gave the Eastern tinge to his appearance.

"Well," he said, in excellent English, as he joined Harry, "what have they got? Something from their traps in the jungle?"

"Don't know anything. There they are yonder. We waited till you came."

"Oh," said the Siamese lad, with a gratified look, "I like that. I'm afraid I shouldn't have waited, Hal."

"Oh, but then you're a prince," said Harry.

The Siamese lad stopped short.

"If you're going to chaff me about that, I shall go back," he said.

"All right; I won't then," said Harry. "You can't help it, can you?"

"Of course I can't, and I shan't be able to help it when I'm king some day."

"Poor fellow, no; how horrible!" said Harry mockingly.

"There you go again. You've got one of your teasing fits on to-day."

"No, no, I haven't. It's all right, Phra, and I won't say another word of that sort. Come along."

"Good-morning," said Mr. Kenyon, as the boys reached the verandah.

"Come to see our prize?"

"Yes, Mr. Kenyon. What is it you have this time?"

"We are waiting to see. Harry here wanted it to be kept for you."

The new-comer turned to give Harry a grateful nod and a smile, and then walked with his host along the verandah, and turned the corner.

The moment he appeared, the hunter and the two men leaped up excitedly and dropped upon their knees, raising their hands to the sides of their faces and lowering their heads till their foreheads nearly touched the bamboo floor.

The young Prince said a few words sharply in his own language, and the men sprang up.

"Now then, Mr. Kenyon," he said, "let's see what is in the basket."

"What have you got, Sree?" asked Mr. Kenyon.

"Very fine, big snake, Sahib," was the reply.

"A snake?" cried Harry excitedly. "Ugh!"

"A big one?" said the merchant uneasily. Then, recalling the habit of exaggeration so freely indulged in by these people as a rule, he asked the size.

"Long as two men and a half, Sahib," said Sree. "Very thick, like man's leg. Very heavy to carry."

"Humph! Twelve or fourteen feet long, I suppose," said Mr. Kenyon. "Is it dangerous?"

"No, Sahib. I find him asleep in the jungle. He eat too much; go to sleep for long time. Didn't try to bite when we lift him into the basket. Very heavy."

"What do you say, Prince?" said the merchant. "Shall we have the lid off and look at it?"

"Yes. I won't be afraid," was the reply. "Will you, Hal?"

"Not if the brute's asleep; but if it's awake and pops out at us, I shall run for your boat."

"And leave your poor father in the lurch?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"But you'd run too, wouldn't you, father?"

"Not if the snake threw one of its coils round me."

"Then I suppose I shall have to stay," said Harry slowly.

"Perhaps it would be as well," said Mr. Kenyon drily – "You won't run, will you?"

The young Siamese laughed merrily, and showed his white teeth.

"I don't know," he said; "I'm afraid I should. Snakes are so strong, and they bite. I think it would be best to go with Harry."

The hunter said something very humbly in the native tongue.

"He says that he and his men would hold tight on to the snake if it were angry, and shut it up again; but I don't believe they could. They would all run away too."

"I don't think there is any danger," said Mr. Kenyon gravely. "These things always try to escape back to the jungle, and they are, I believe, more frightened of us than we are of them. We'll have a look at the creature, then, out here, for I have no suitable place for it at present."

"You could turn the birds out of the little aviary and let it loose there, father."

"Good idea, Hal; but let's see it first. Look here, Sree; you and your men must lay hold of the brute if it tries to escape."

"Yes, Sahib; we catch it and shut the lid down again."

"That's right," said the merchant. "Yes, who's that? Oh, you, Mike. Come to see the prisoner set free? Come and stand a little farther this way."

"Thank you, sir; yes, sir," said the man.

Harry nudged the Prince, and the nudge was returned, with a laughing glance.

"No danger, is there, sir?" said Mike respectfully.

"I hope not," said Mr. Kenyon; "but you will be no worse off than we are. Like to go back before the basket is opened?"

"Isn't time, sir; they've nearly got it open now."

"Run round the other way, Mike," cried Harry.

"Me, sir? No, thank you," replied the man. "I don't want to run."

Meanwhile the two bearers were holding the lid of the basket firmly down while Sree pulled out eight stout elastic skewers of bamboo, which had held the lid tightly in place. And as one after the other was slowly and carefully extracted with as little movement of the basket as possible, so as not to irritate the snake if awake, or to disturb it if asleep, the interest and excitement increased till only one was left, when Harry glanced at Mike, who stood with eyes widely staring, cheeks puffed out, and fists clenched, as if about to start off at full speed.

Sree looked up at Mr. Kenyon as the two men pressed down harder and he stood ready to pull out the last skewer.

"Out with it," said Mr. Kenyon, and a thrill ran through all present as the last piece of bamboo was withdrawn.

But still the lid was pressed down, and of this the hunter took hold, said a few words to his two men, who stood back right and left, ready to help if necessary, while their master had stationed himself at the back of the basket, facing his employer and the two boys. He held the lid with outstretched hands, and once more he paused and looked at Mr. Kenyon as if waiting for orders to proceed, his aim of course being to make the whole business as impressive as possible.

"Now then, off with it," cried Harry, and in spite of their excitement, to the amusement of the two boys the hunters took off the lid with a tremendous flourish, and stood back smiling with triumph.

"Just like Mike taking the dish-cover off a roast peacock," as Harry afterwards said.

It was too much for the last-mentioned personage. As the basket was laid open for the gentlemen to see its contents, Mike took half a dozen steps backward as fast as he could, and with his eye fixed upon the open basket he was in the act of turning to run, when he saw everyone else stand fast.

"Lies pretty quiet at the bottom," said Harry, advancing with Phra, Mr. Kenyon keeping close behind.

"Only a little one," said the young Prince, rather contemptuously.

"Here! I say, Sree; what do you mean by this?" cried Harry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Phra. "This is one of your tricks, Hal."

"That it isn't," cried the boy.

"Where is the snake, Sree?" said Mr. Kenyon. "The basket's empty."

CHAPTER III

SREE'S PRISONER

The hunter took a couple of steps forward, looked down into the basket, looked up, half stunned with astonishment, looked in the lid, then outside it, lifted up the basket and peered under it, threw down the lid, felt in his sarong, and then, as there was no heavy boa twelve or fourteen feet long in its folds, he turned fiercely to the two men in turn to ask them angrily in their own tongue what they had done with the snake.

Both of them felt in their sarongs and began to protest volubly that they had not touched it; that it was there just now, for they had heard it and felt the weight. It was there – it must be there – and their master had better look again.

"It's a conjuring trick," said Phra, who looked annoyed.

"I had nothing to do with it, then," said Harry. "I hadn't, honour bright," he added hurriedly as his companion looked doubtingly at him. "Here, Sree, have you begun to learn juggling?"

"No, Sahib; it was a lovely snake, all yellow, with big brown spots and purple shadows all over the dark parts. One of these sons of wickedness must have taken it out to sell it to some ship captain to carry away. Surely Sree would not try to cheat the good Sahibs and his Prince by playing tricks like an Indian juggler. Here, Michael; you heard the snake inside before the master came?"

"Yes," said Mike, who looked quite brave now, as he approached and looked into the basket searchingly. "I'm sure I heard it plainly, but there's no snake here now. There has been one here, though, for you can smell it."

"Yes, there has been one here," cried Harry eagerly. "Then where is it gone?"

"Something dreadful has blinded all our eyes, Sahib, so that we cannot see. Thrust in your hand and feel if it is there."

Harry shrank for the moment, for the idea of feeling after a snake that had been rendered invisible was startling; but feeling ashamed the next moment of his superstitious folly, he plunged his hand down into the basket, felt round it, and stood up.

"There's nothing in there," he said.

"Well, you could see that there was not," said his father shortly.

"But there has been one there quite lately," said Harry. "Smell my fingers, Phra."

"Pouf! Serpent!" cried the young Prince, with a gesture of disgust.

"It must have got away."

Sree took hold of the basket, bent down into it, looked all round, and then to the surprise of all he stood it up again, turned it round a little, and then jumped in, to stand upright.

The surprise came to an end directly, for Sree pointed downward, and as he did so he thrust his toes through the bottom of the basket, where no hole had been apparent, but which gave way easily to the pressure of the man's foot from within, thus showing that it must have been broken at that one particular place.

"What! A hole in the bottom for the reptile to crawl out? That was wise of you, Sree!"

"I was wise, Sahib, and the basket had no hole in it when we put the snake in."

"Then it must have made one, and forced its way through."

Sree was silent, and looked at Mike as if waiting for him to speak. But Mike had not the least intention of speaking, and stood with his lips pinched together, perfectly dumb.

"Why, of course!" cried Harry excitedly; "I see now. Mike gave the basket a tremendous kick as he went by it, and startled the serpent, and made it swing about. Why, Mike, you must have broken a hole through then."

"Master Harry, I – " began Mike.

"Yes, Sahib, that was it; he broke a hole through, and once the snake's head was through he would force his way right out."

"One minute," said Mr. Kenyon rather anxiously; "tell me, Harry: are you perfectly sure that the snake was there?"

"Certain, father."

"And you saw Michael kick the basket?"

"Oh yes, father; and Michael knows he did."

"That's right enough, sir; but I didn't mean to let the brute out."

"No, no, of course not," said Mr. Kenyon anxiously: "but if the serpent was in that basket a short time ago and is gone now, it must either be in one of the rooms here by the verandah or just beneath the house."

"Ow!" ejaculated Mike, with a look of horror, as he glanced round; and then he shouted as he pointed to an opening in one corner of the verandah, where a great bamboo had been shortened for the purpose of ventilating the woodwork beneath the bungalow, "That's the way he has gone, sir; that's the way he has gone."

It seemed only too probable, for it was just the kind of place in which a fugitive, gloom-loving reptile would seek for a hiding-place; while as if to prove the truth of Mike's guess there was a sharp, squeaking sound heard somewhere below the house, and one after the other three rats dashed out of the opening, darted across the verandah, and sprang into the garden, disappearing directly amongst the plants.

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon; "the reptile seems to have gone under the house."

"And he will clear away all the rats, Sahib," said Sree, in a tone of voice which seemed to add, "and what could you wish for better than that?"

"But I think that my son and I would rather have the rats, my man."

What do you say, Hal?"

"Yes, father; of course. We can't live here with a horrible thing like that always lying in wait for us. How long did you say it was, Sree?"

"Two men and a half, Sahib."

"And that's a man and a half too long, Sree. What's to be done?"

Sree looked disconsolately at the merchant, and slowly rubbed his blacking-brush-like hair.

"The Sahib told me to bring everything I could find in the jungle, and this was a lovely snake, all yellow and brown and purple like tortoiseshell. The Sahib would have been so pleased."

"No doubt, if I could have got it shut up safely in some kind of cage; but you see you have let it go."

"If the Sahib will pardon me," said the man humbly.

"Of course; yes, it was not your fault, but Michael's. Well, Michael, how are you going to catch this great snake?"

"Me catch it, sir?" said Mike mildly.

"Yes, of course; we can't leave it at liberty here."

"I thought perhaps you would shoot at it, sir, or Master Harry would have a pop at it with his gun."

"That's all very well, Mike; but it's of no use to shoot till you can see it," cried Harry.

"How can we drive it out, Sree?" said Mr. Kenyon. "We must get rid of it somehow."

Sree shook his head.

"I'm afraid it will go to sleep now, Sahib," he said.

"For how long?"

"Three weeks or a month, Sahib. Until it gets hungry again."

"Why not get guns and two of us stand near here to see if it comes out of this hole, while the others go from room to room hammering on the floor?"

"That sounds well," said the merchant.

"And it would be good to try first if a cat would go down. Snakes do not like cats or the mongoose, and the cat might drive it out. Cats hate snakes."

"That sounds like a good plan, too, Sree. Suppose we try that first.

We have a cat, but what about a mongoose? Have you got one?"

"I had one when I was in Hindooland, Sahib, but perhaps it is dead now."

"If not, it's of no use to us now," said Mr. Kenyon sarcastically. "Here, Hal, go in and get the two guns hanging in my room. Bring the powder-flasks and pouches too. Be careful, my lad; the guns are loaded."

"Come along, Phra," said Harry.

"No, I am going back for my gun."

"I meant to lend you one of mine," said the merchant quietly. "You two lads ought to be able to shoot that reptile if we succeed in driving it out."

"Ah!" cried the young Siamese eagerly. "Thank you."

He looked gratefully at Mr. Kenyon, and then followed Harry into the bungalow.

"This is a nice job," said the latter. "We shall never drive the brute out. This place was built as if they wanted to make a snug, comfortable home for a boa constrictor. There are double floors, double ceilings, and double walls. There's every convenience for the brute, whether he wants to stay a week or a year."

"Never mind; it will be good fun hunting him. Where are the guns?"

"Here, in father's room," said the boy, leading the way into the lightly furnished bed-chamber with its matted floor and walls, bath, and couch well draped with mosquito net.

One side was turned into quite a little armoury, guns and swords being hung against the wall, while pouches, shot-belts, and powder-flasks had places to themselves.

"Take care," said Harry, as he took down and handed a gun to his companion, who smiled and nodded.

"Yes," he said; "but it isn't the first time I've had hold of a gun."

"Well, I know that, Phra. You needn't turn rusty about it. I only said so because it comes natural to warn any one to be careful."

"Hist! Listen," said the Prince, holding up his hand.

Harry had heard the sound at the same moment. It was a strange, rustling, creeping sound, as of horny scales passing over wood in the wall to their right.

A look of intelligence passed between the boys, and they stood listening for a few moments, which were quite sufficient to satisfy them that the object of their visit within was gliding slowly up between the bamboos of the open wall, probably to reach the palm-thatched roof.

But it was not to do so without hindrance, for after darting another look at his companion Phra cocked his gun, walked close to the wall, and after listening again and again he placed the muzzle of his piece about six inches from the thin teak matting-covered boarding, and fired.

The result was immediate. Whether hit or only startled by the shot, the reptile fell with a loud thud and there was the evident sound of writhing and twisting about.

"Well done, Phra! You've shot him!" cried Harry; "but if he dies there we shall have to take the floor up to get him out."

"What is it, boys? Have you seen the snake?"

"No, sir. I heard it in the wall, and fired."

"Yes, and you have hit it, too," said the merchant. "Listen."

The boys were quite ready to obey, and all stood attentively trying to analyse the meaning of the movements below the floor.

It proved to be easy enough, for the violent writhings ceased, and the serpent began to ascend the side of the room again in the hollow wall.

They went on tip-toe to the spot they had marked down, and as soon as they were still again they could hear the faint *crick, crick, crick* of the scales on the wood, as the serpent crawled from beneath the floor and extended itself more and more up the side, so that it was plain enough to trace the length upward, till evidently a good six feet had been reached.

"My turn now," said Harry, cocking his piece. "Shall I fire father?"

"No; it would only bring it down again, and if it dies beneath the floor or in the wall it will be a great nuisance to get it out. It will mean picking the place to pieces."

"Let it go on up into the roof, then."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon; "if it gets up there it will be sure to descend to the eaves, and if we keep a pretty good watch we shall see it coming down slowly, and you will both get a good shot at it."

They stood listening for a few minutes longer, and then the *crick, crick* in the wall ceased, and it was evident that a long and heavy body was gliding along over the ceiling.

"Now then, boys, out with you, and I think I'll bring a gun too; but you shall have the honour of shooting the brute if you can. By the way, I don't think Sree has exaggerated as to the reptile's length, and I shall be glad to get rid of such a neighbour."

"It's not moving now," said Harry, in a whisper.

"Yes, I can hear it," said Phra, whose ears were preternaturally sharp; "it's creeping towards where it can see the light shine through, and it will come out right on the roof."

The little party hurried out to where Mike and the three Siamese were anxiously watching the hole in the corner of the verandah, the three latter armed with bamboo poles, and their long knives in their waist-folds, while Mike had furnished himself with a rusty old cavalry sword which he had bought in London, and brought with him because he thought it might some day prove to be useful.

Their watching in the verandah came to an end on the appearance of the little party, and they were posted ready to rush in to the attack of the reptile if it should be shot and come wriggling down off the attap thatch.

But for some minutes after the whole party had commenced their watching there was no sign of the escaped prize, not the faintest rustle or crackle of the crisp, sun-dried roof.

Phra began to grow impatient at having to stand in the hot sun holding a heavy gun ready for firing, and Harry was little better, for the effort of watching in the dazzling glare affected his eyes.

"Can't you send somebody inside to bang the ceiling with a stick, Mr.

Kenyon?" said Phra at last.

"Yes," said that gentleman. "This is getting rather weary work. Here, Mike, go indoors and listen till you hear the snake rustling over the ceiling of my room, and then thump loudly with a bamboo."

"Yes, sir," said Mike promptly, and he took two steps towards the house, and then stopped and coughed.

"Well, what is it?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"I beg pardon, sir; but suppose the beast has taken fright at seeing you all waiting for him, and got into the house to hide."

"Yes?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"And is scrawming about all over the floor. What shall I do then?"

"Don't lose a chance; hit it over the head or tail with all your might."

Mike looked warmer than ever, and began to wipe the great drops of perspiration off his forehead.

"Yes, sir," he said respectfully.

"We must not stop to be nice now, for it seems to be hopeless to think of capturing the reptile again, and I can't have such a brute as that haunting the place."

"No, sir, of course not," said Mike.

"Well go on," said Mr. Kenyon sharply. "You are not afraid, are you?"

"Oh no, sir, not a bit; but –"

Mr. Kenyon shrugged his shoulders and strode into the house, while the two lads burst out laughing.

"I say, Mike, you are a brave one!" cried Harry.

"Now, look here," cried the man, "don't you go making the same mistake as the master. I'm not a bit afraid."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Phra.

"No, sir," said the man angrily; "not a bit afraid; but I've got a mother in England, and I don't like to be rash."

"You never are, Mike."

"No, sir, and I won't be. I'm sure every one ought to look before he leaps when it's over a dangerous place, and – Ah! look out; here he comes."

There was a yell, too, from Sree and his two men, who dashed forward together, as all at once the great serpent seemed to dart suddenly from under a fold of the palm-leaf thatch, make an effort to glide along the slope from the neighbourhood of those who were waiting for it, and then failing from the steepness of the incline, rolled over and over, writhing and twining, towards the edge where the bamboo supports formed the pillars of the verandah.

"Here, hi! stop!" roared the boys; but it was all in vain, for the excited Siamese men were deaf to everything save their own impulses, which prompted them to recover the escaped prize, and obtain their promised reward.

"Here, I don't want to shoot one of them," cried Phra, stamping in his disappointment.

"No, no, don't fire," cried Harry, throwing up his gun. "Here, hi, Mike! Now's your time; go and help. Lay hold of his tail, but don't be rash."

For the serpent had rapidly reached the edge of the thatch and fallen into one of the flower beds with a heavy thud which proclaimed its weight. But the next minute that was a flower bed no longer.

The serpent began the work of destruction by struggling violently as it drew itself up into a knot, and the three Siamese finished the work. They seemed to have not the slightest fear of the great glistening creature whose scales shone in the sun, but dashed at it to try and pinion it down to the ground.

There was a furious hissing, mingled with loud shouts, panting, rustling, and the sound of heavy blows delivered on the earth and the bamboo flooring of the verandah, as the serpent freed its tail and lashed about furiously. Then there was a confused knot composed of reptile and men, rolling over, heaving and straining, and a gaily coloured sarong was thrown out, to fall a few yards away.

"Can't you get a shot at it, boys?" cried Mr. Kenyon, as he rushed out.

"Impossible, father."

"Yes, impossible," repeated Mr. Kenyon.

"What fun!" cried Phra excitedly. "They want to catch him alive. Look, Hal, look."

Harry was doing nothing else, and forgetful of all his repugnance he approached so near the struggling knot that he had a narrow escape from a heavy flogging blow delivered by the serpent's tail, one which indented the soft earth with a furrow.

"Ugh! you beast!" cried Harry, kicking at one of the reptile's folds, which just then offered itself temptingly; but before the boy's foot could reach it the fold was a yard away and the struggle going on more fiercely than ever.

It was the fight of three stout, strong men against that elongated, tapering mass of bone and muscle, with fierce jaws at one end, a thick, whip-like portion at the other, and the men seemed to be comparatively helpless, being thrown here and there in spite of the brave way in which they clung to the writhing form. The end soon arrived, for the reptile made one tremendous effort to escape, wrenched itself free enough to throw a couple of folds of its tail round the thick bamboo pillar which supported the roof, took advantage of the purchase afforded, and threw off its three adversaries, to

cling there with half its body undulating and quivering in the air, its head with its eyes glittering fiercely, and its forked tongue darting in and out, menacing its enemies and preparing to strike.

The men were up again in an instant, ready to resume the attack, Sree giving his orders in their native tongue.

"I'll get hold of his neck," he panted, "and you two catch his tail. Keep him tight to the bamboo, and I'll hold his head close up and ask the master to tie it to the upright."

"Stand back, all of you!" cried Mr. Kenyon. "Now, boys, get into the verandah and fire outward. You have a fine chance."

"No, no, Sahib," cried the hunter imploringly. "The snake is nearly tired out now, and in another minute we shall have caught it fast."

"Nonsense," cried Mr. Kenyon; "it is far too strong for you. You are all hurt now."

"A few scratches only, Sahib, and we could not bear to see so fine a snake, which the master would love to have, killed like that."

"Thinking of reward, Sree?" said the merchant, smiling.

Harry whispered something to Phra, who nodded.

"Let them have another try, father," cried the boy. "Phra and I don't mind missing a shot apiece."

"Very well," said Mr. Kenyon, and turning to the men – "Take it alive, then, if you can."

From wearing a dull, heavy look of disappointment the faces of the Siamese were all smiles once more, and they prepared to rush in at their enemy on receiving a word from Sree, who now advanced with one of the bamboo poles he had picked up, and held out the end toward the quivering, menacing head of the snake.

The latter accepted the challenge directly and struck at the end of the thick pole, its jaws opening and closing, and the dart of the drawn-back head being quicker than the eye could follow.

Sree was as quick, though. The slightest movement of the wrist threw the end of the pole aside, and the serpent missed it three times running. After that it refused to strike, but drew back its head and swung it from side to side till it was teased into striking once more.

This time there was a sharp jar of the bamboo, as the reptile's teeth closed upon the wood, and the pole was nearly jerked out of the man's hands. But he held on firmly without displaying the slightest fear, swaying to and fro as the reptile dragged and gave.

"Better kill it at once, Sree," cried Mr. Kenyon.

"Pray no, Sahib. He is very strong, but we shall tire him out. I am going to have his neck bound to the great bamboo pillar with a sarong."

"My good fellow," cried the merchant, "if you do it will drag the pillar down."

"And pull half the roof off," said Phra. "Yes, they are very strong, these big serpents."

"I'm afraid he would, Sahib," said the hunter mildly. "Now, if I had time I could go into the jungle and get leaves to pound up and give him, and he would be asleep so that we could put him in the basket."

"Well, hadn't you better go and fetch some?" cried Harry mischievously. "Here, Mike, come and hold this bamboo while Sree goes."

There was a burst of laughter at this, in which the Siamese joined, for Mike's features were for a moment convulsed with horror; the next he grasped the fact that a joke was being made at his expense, and stood shaking his head and pretending to be amused.

"We had better have a shot, my lads," said Mr. Kenyon. "It is too unmanageable a specimen to keep, and I shall be quite content with the skin."

"Let them have another try, Mr. Kenyon," said Phra eagerly. "It is grand to see them fight. Perhaps they will win this time."

"Very well," said Mr. Kenyon, smiling.

"Go and help them, Phra," said Harry, laughing.

"It's so hot," said the young Siamese, "and one would be knocked about so, and have all one's clothes torn off. Besides, you can't take hold, only by clinging round it with your arms, and snakes are not nice. But I will, if you will."

"All right," said Harry; "only let's have the tail."

Mike looked at the boys in horror, as if he thought they had gone mad.

But at that moment Sree gave a sign to his two followers, after finding that the reptile was so much exhausted that he could force its head in any direction, for it still held on tightly with its teeth.

There was a rush, and the two men seized the creature's tail and began to unwind it from the pillar by walking round and round.

"Hurrah! they've mastered it," cried Harry, and they drew back as the last fold was untwined from the pillar, Mike drawing much farther back than any one else, so as to give plenty of room.

But the tight clasp of the teeth-armed jaws did not relax in the slightest degree, and the next minute, by the efforts of the three men, the creature was half dragged, half carried out into the open garden, limp apparently and completely worn out.

"Why, they'll manage it yet, father," cried Harry. "Here, Mike, bring that basket out here."

"Yes," cried Mr. Kenyon, "quick!"

Mike looked horrified, but he felt compelled to obey, and, hurrying into the verandah, he was half-way to the men with the basket, when he uttered a yell, dropped it, and darted back.

"It was frightened of Mike," said Phra afterwards.

Frightened or no, all at once when its captors were quite off their guard, the serpent suddenly brought its tremendous muscles into full play, contracted itself with a sudden snatch as if about to tie itself in a knot, and before the men could seize it again, for it was quite free, it went down the garden at a tremendous rate, making at first for the river, then turning off towards the jungle.

The men, as they recovered from their astonishment, darted in pursuit, but stopped short, for Mr. Kenyon's gun rang out with a loud report, making the serpent start violently, but without checking its course, and it was half out of sight among the low-growing bushes when, in rapid succession, Phra and Harry fired, with the effect of making the reptile draw itself into a knot again, roll, and twine right back into the garden, give a few convulsive throes, and then slowly straighten itself out at full length and lie heaving gently, as a slight quiver ran from head to tail.

The boys cheered, and after reloading in the slow, old-fashioned way of fifty years ago, went close up to the reptile.

"Shall I give him another shot in the head, Mr. Kenyon?" cried Phra.

"No, no, my lad; it would be only waste of powder and shot. The brute is beyond the reach of pain now. Well, Hal, how long do you make it?" he cried, as that young gentleman finished pacing the ground close up to the great reptile.

"Five of my steps," said Harry; "and he's as thick round as I can span – a little thicker. I say, isn't he beautifully marked, father?"

"Splendidly, my boy."

"But who'd have thought a thing like that could be so strong?"

"They are wonderfully powerful," said Mr. Kenyon. "It is a splendid specimen, Sree," he continued to that personage, who, with his companions – all three looking sullen and out of heart – was rearranging dragged-off or discarded loin-cloths, and looking dirty, torn, and in one or two places bleeding, from the reptile's teeth.

"Yes, Sahib," said the man sadly; "he would have been a prize, and I should have been proud, and the Sahib would have been grateful in the way he always is to his servants."

"Oh, I see," said Harry, who whispered to his father and then to Phra, both nodding.

"I could not have kept such a monster as that alive, Sree," said the merchant; "but you men behaved splendidly. You were brave to a degree, and of course I shall pay you as much or more than I should have given you if it had been prisoned alive."

"Oh, Sahib!" cried the man, whose face became transformed, his eyes brightened, and with a look of delight he brought a smile to his lips.

Turning quickly to his two men, he whispered to them in their own tongue, and the change was magical. They uttered a shout of joy, threw themselves on their knees, raised their hands to the sides of their heads, and shuffled along towards the master.

"That will do, Sree," cried Mr. Kenyon impatiently; "make them get up.

You know I do not like to be treated like that."

"Yes, Sahib; I know," said the hunter, and at a word the two men started up, beaming and grinning at the two lads.

"Brave boys," said Phra, speaking in his own tongue; and, thrusting his hand in his pocket, he brought out and gave each of the men one of the silver coins of the country.

The next moment all three were grovelling on the earth before their young Prince.

He waved his hand and they rose.

"I don't much like it now, Hal," said Phra apologetically; "but it is the custom, you know. I like to be English, though, when I am with you."

"Oh, it's all right," said Harry; "but you do improve wonderfully, lad. You'll be quite an English gentleman some day. I say, father, give me some silver; I want to do as Phra did."

Mr. Kenyon smiled and handed his son some money, nodding his satisfaction as he saw him give each of the Siamese a coin, and check them when they were about to prostrate themselves.

"No, no," he shouted; "be English. Pull your blacking-brushes – so."

The men grinned, and gave a tug at what would have been their forelocks if they had not been cropped short.

"Skin the snake very carefully, Sree," said Mr. Kenyon quietly, after liberally rewarding the men, whose gloom gave place to the exuberance of satisfaction.

"Yes, Sahib; there shall not be a tear in the skin," cried the old hunter eagerly.

"Where shall they do it, father?" said Harry. "It will make such a mess here."

"Let them drag it down to the landing-stage, my boy, and they can sluice the bamboo flooring afterwards, and then peg out the skin to dry on the side. You will stay and see it done?"

"Yes, father," replied the boy, and he turned to Phra.

"Will you stop?"

"Of course. I came to stay," was the reply; "didn't you see that I sent the boatmen back?"

CHAPTER IV

FISHING WITH A WORM

"I say, Sree, hadn't you and your fellows better have a wash?" said Harry, as soon as Mr. Kenyon had re-entered the bungalow to go to his office on the other side for his regular morning work connected with the dispatching of rice and coffee down to the principal city.

"What good, Sahib?" said the man, looking up with so much wonder in his amiable, simple face, that both Phra and Harry burst out laughing, in which the men joined.

"Why, you are all so dirty, and you smell nasty and musky of that great snake."

"But we are going to skin it, Sahib, and we shall be much worse then."

"Oh yes, I forgot," said Harry.

"When we have done we shall all bathe and be quite clean, and go and thank the good Sahib before we depart."

He said a few words to his two men, and, gun in hand, the boys walked with them towards the boa, when a thought occurred to Harry.

"I say," he cried, "mind what you are about when you bathe, for there's a crocodile yonder, half as long again as that snake."

"Ah!" ejaculated the man, "then we must take care."

"So will we, Phra. We'll look out for him and try and get a shot."

"A big one?" said the Siamese lad.

"Yes, I think it is the biggest I have seen."

"Then we'll shoot him. But how bad you have made me! Before we became friends I followed our people's rule – never killing anything. Now this morning I am going to try and kill a crocodile, after helping to kill a snake."

"Well," said Harry, "I don't care about arguing who's right, but it seems to be very stupid not to kill those horrible great monsters which drag people who are bathing under water and eat them, and to be afraid to kill a tiger that springs upon the poor rice and coffee growers at the edges of the plantations."

"So it does," said Phra, with a dry look; "and I am trying not to be stupid. All, look there!"

Harry was already looking, for as one of the men took hold of the serpent's tail, in order to drag it down to the landing-place, it was snatched away, then raised up and brought down again heavily to lie heaving and undulating, the movement being continued right up to the head.

"You don't seem to have killed that," said Harry drily.

"No," replied Phra; "but I will," and he cocked his gun.

But Sree addressed a few words to him in his native tongue, and the lad nodded.

"What does he say?" asked Harry; "he can kill it more easily, without spoiling the skin?"

"Yes. Look. What a while these things take to die!"

"My father says that at home in England the country people say you can't kill a snake directly. It always lives till the sun sets."

"You haven't got snakes like that in England?"

"Oh no; the biggest are only a little more than a yard long."

"But how can they live like that? What has the sun to do with it?"

"Nothing. Father says it's only an old-fashioned superstition."

"Look! Sree's going to kill the snake now. He's a bad Buddhist."

"Never mind; he's a capital hunter. See what splendid things we've found when we've been with him," said Harry enthusiastically. "He seems to know the habits of everything in the jungle."

Harry ceased speaking, for Sree drew a knife from its sheath in the band of his sarong, or padung, whetted it on one of the stones of the rockery, and went to the head of the serpent, which was moving gently.

Sree bent down, extending his left hand to grip the reptile softly behind the head, and give it a mortal wound which would afterwards serve as the beginning of the cut to take off the beautifully marked skin.

But at the first touch, the reptile seemed to be galvanized into life, and coiling and knotting itself up, it began to twine and writhe with apparently as much vigour as before receiving the shots.

"Did you ever see such a brute?" cried Harry. "Take care, or you'll lose him."

"Oh, no, Sahib; I will not do that. Only let me get one cut, and I will soon make him still."

He waited for a few minutes till the reptile straightened itself out again, and then at a sign the two men followed their leader's example, throwing themselves down upon the fore part of the boa, which began to heave again, the lower part of the body writhing and flogging the earth.

But Sree was quite equal to the occasion. He had pinned the reptile's neck down with one hand, and managed to hold it till with all the skill of an old huntsman, he had slit up the skin, inserted his knife, and cleverly divided the vertebrae just behind the creature's head.

The moment this was done the tremendous thrashing of the tail part began to grow less violent, then grew more gentle still, and finally it lay undulating gently.

"He will die now," said the man, and the long, lithe body was dragged to the bottom of the garden and stretched out on the bamboo landing-stage beneath the attap roofing.

As soon as this was done, the three men went down to the water's edge, stripped off their sarongs, washed them, and spread them in the hot sun to dry, while, gun in hand, the two lads stood carefully scanning the river in search of enemies, so as to get a shot.

But no great reptile was in sight then, and they remained looking on while Sree and his men cleverly stripped off the boa's skin and stretched it out to dry, before fetching a couple of brass vessels from the back of the bungalow and using them to thoroughly remove all traces of their late work.

Their next duty was to take a couple of bamboos and thrust off the body of the serpent.

Sree, however, undertook to do this himself, telling his men to refill the brass vessels to sluice down the bamboo stage.

But instead of thrusting the repulsive-looking reptile off, he stopped, thinking for a few moments.

"What is it?" said Phra; "why don't you throw that nasty thing in to be swept out to sea?"

Sree gave him a peculiar look, and turned to Harry.

"Was it a very big crocodile, Sahib?" he said.

"Yes. Why?"

"Would you like to have a shot at it?"

"Of course; but these big ones are so cunning."

"Let's see," said the man. "Perhaps I could get you a shot."

The boys were interested at once.

"What are you going to do?" said Phra.

"See if I can bring one up where you can shoot."

"How?" asked Harry.

"Is there a big hook in the house?" said Sree.

"Do you want one?"

"Yes, Sahib."

"Go up, then, and tell Mike to give you one of the biggest meat-hooks.

Say I want it directly, and then he will."

The two men squatted down at the end of the landing-place, smiling, behind their vessels of water, as Sree hurried up the garden, while the two boys stood, gun in hand, scanning the surface of the river.

"He's going to make a bait of the snake, I suppose; but I don't expect the croc will be about here now. If the water were clear we could see."

But, as before said, the stream was flowing of a rich coffee or chocolate hue, deeply laden as it was with the fine mud of the low flats so often flooded after rains in the mountains, and it was impossible to see a fish, save when now and then some tiny, silvery scrap of a thing sprang out, to fall back with a splash.

"We're only going to make ourselves hot for nothing," said Harry. "I don't believe we shall see the beast. Now, if you had been here when I saw him."

"And both of us had had guns," said Phra. "What nonsense it is to talk like that! One never is at a place at the right time."

"Fortunately for the crocs," said Harry, laughing. "Here he is."

"What, the croc?" cried Phra, cocking his gun.

"No, no; Sree. – Got it?"

"Yes, Sahib. A good big one."

The man came on to the landing-stage, smiling, with the bright new double hook in his hand and a stout piece of string. Then taking down a little coil of rope used for mooring boats at one of the posts, he thrust one of the hooks through the hemp, bound it fast with string, leaving a long piece after knotting off, and then passed the other hook well through the vertebrae and muscles behind the snake's head, using the remaining string to bind the shank of the hook firmly to the serpent's neck so as to strengthen the hold.

There were about twenty yards of strong rope, and Sree fastened the other end of this to the post used to secure the boats, before looking up at the boys.

"Large big fishing," he said, with a dry smile. "Fish too strong to hold."

"And that's rather a big worm to put on the hook," said Harry, laughing. "There, throw it out, and let's see if we get a bite. Are you going to fish, Phra?"

"No," said the Prince; "I am going to shoot. You can hold the line."

"Thankye, but I'm going to fish too. Throw out, Sree."

The old hunter's throwing out was to push one end of the serpent off the end of the bamboo stage, with the result that the rest glided after it, and with their guns at the ready the two boys waited to see if there was a rush made at the bait as it disappeared beneath the muddy stream.

But all they saw was a gleam or two of the white part of the serpent, as it rolled over and over, then went down, drawing the rope slowly out till the last coil had gone; and then nothing was visible save a few yards of rope going down from the post into the water, and rising and falling with the action of the current.

Sree squatted down by the post and went on chewing his betel, his two men by the brass vessels doing the same.

So five, ten, fifteen minutes passed away, with the boys watching, ready to fire if there was a chance.

"Oh, I say, this is horribly stupid," cried Harry at last. "Let's give it up."

"No," said Phra; "you want patience to fish for big things as well as for little. You have no patience at all."

"Well, I'm not a Siamese," said Harry, laughing. "We English folk are not always squatting down on our heels chewing nut and pepper-leaf, and thinking about nothing."

"Neither am I," said Phra; "but I have patience to wait."

"It is your nature to," said Harry. "You're all alike here; never in a hurry about anything."

"Why should we be?" replied Phra quietly. "We could not in a hot country like ours. You always want to be in a hurry to do something else. Look at Sree and his men; see how they wait."

"Yes, I suppose they're comfortable; but I'm not. I want to go and lie down under a tree. Think it's any good, Sree? Won't come, will he?"

"Who can say, Sahib?" replied the man. "He ought to if he is about here. That bait is big and long; the bait must go far down the stream, and it smells well."

"Smells well, eh?" said Harry.

"Beautiful for a bait, Sahib. You are sure you saw one this morning?"

"Saw it, and hit it a fine crack with a big stone."

"Then he ought to be there and take that bait; and he will, too, if you have not offended him by making his back too sore."

"Offended him! Made his back too sore!" said Harry, with a chuckle. "What a rum old chap you are, Sree! You talk about animals just as if they felt and thought as we do."

"Yes, Sahib, and that is what the bonzes teach. They say that when people die they become crocodiles, or elephants, or birds, or serpents, or monkeys, or some other kind of creature."

"And that's all stuff and nonsense, Sree. You don't believe all that, I know."

"It's what I was taught, Sahib," said the man, with a queer twinkle of the eye.

"But you don't believe it, Sree. You don't think that some one turned when he died into that old snake, or else you wouldn't have caught it to sell to my father as a specimen."

"And then skinned it and made a bait of it on a hook to catch a crocodile," said Phra.

"Not he. Look at him," cried Harry. "See how he's laughing in his sleeve."

"He isn't. Hasn't got any sleeves."

"Well, inside, then. His eyes are all of a twinkle. He doesn't believe it a bit. There, I shan't stand here any longer cuddling this gun, with nothing to shoot at."

"It is rather stupid, Hal."

"Yes. Here, jump up, Sree, and take us where we can have a shoot at something, or go and fish; I don't care which."

"Come and see the elephants," suggested Phra.

"No, I want to be under the shady trees. What's the good of going to see the tame elephants? They're not white, after all. Chained by one leg and nodding their old heads up and down, up and down, till they see you, and then they begin sticking out their leeches."

"Sticking out their leeches?" said Phra, looking at him wonderingly.

"Trunks, then. They always look to me like jolly great leeches ready to hold on to you. Let's go. Pull up the hook and line, Sree, and get rid of that nasty snake."

"Yes, Sahib," said the old hunter, beginning to haul on the rope, which came in heavily for a few feet.

"It comes in slowly," said Phra; "has something taken the bait?"

Whush! went the line through Sree's hands, and then *whang!* as it was snapped tight with such violence that the man started from it, for the stout post was jarred so that it quivered and seemed about to be pulled down, while the light bamboo and palm roof swayed, and the whole structure seemed as if it were going to be dragged over into the river.

There was no doubting the violence of the wrench and the danger, for the two men sprang off on to the shore and stood staring, till Sree shouted to them to come back and help haul.

"Why, we've caught him, Phra," cried Harry, as soon as he had recovered from his astonishment. "Look out, lad, and be ready to fire as soon as he shows upon the surface. Pull, Sree; don't let him drag like that at the post again."

"I can't move him, Sahib," said the man, who looked startled; and he was already hauling with all his might, but doing nothing more than slightly ease the strain on the post.

But first one and then the other man got a grip of the rope, pulling together with such effect that whatever had seized the bait and become hooked began to jerk the line violently, as if it were throwing its head from side to side.

"Be ready to shoot, Master Harry," said Sree. "He may rush up to the top of the water and come at us, or try to sweep us off here with his tail."

"Nonsense!" cried Harry.

"Tisn't," said Phra calmly, as he stood like a bronze statue, ready to fire. "I saw a man swept off a boat once like that."

"By a croc?"

"Yes."

"What then?" said Harry huskily.

"I don't know. He was never seen again. Ah, look out!"

As Phra spoke there was a violent eddying in the water where the end of the line must have been.

"He's coming up," cried Harry, raising his gun to his shoulder. "Hold on, all of you. Ah, here he is. Fire!"

The two guns went off almost like one, for all at once the hideous knotted head of a crocodile appeared at the surface and came rapidly towards the stage slackening the rope and making the two men quit their hold and, in spite of an angry cry from Sree, tumble one over the other ashore.

The hunter behaved bravely enough, but the moment had arrived when he felt that discretion was the better part of valour – when it was evident that the hideous reptile, enraged at finding such a finale to the delicious repast of musky boa, neatly skinned apparently for its benefit, but followed by a horrible tearing sensation in its throat and the pressure of a long rope which could not be swallowed nor bitten through because it persisted in getting between the teeth, had risen to the surface, caught sight of a man dragging at the rope, had aimed straight at him as being the cause of all the pain, and was about to rush at and sweep him from the platform.

Under the circumstances Sree was about to let go and follow the example of his men, but the firing checked the crocodile's charge, sending it rushing down below with a tremendous wallow and splash on the surface with its tail; the rope ran out again, and Sree proudly held on, congratulating himself on not having let go, but repenting directly after, for there was a jerk which seemed as if it would drag his arms out of their sockets, and if he had not let the rope slide he must have gone head first into the river.

Then came another drag at the post which supported the roof, and once more everything quivered, but not so violently as before, while Sree tightened his hold again and roared to his men to come.

The movement of the rope now showed that the great reptile was swimming here and there deep down in the muddy water, while the two lads with hands trembling from excitement reloaded as quickly as they could; and as the two men resumed their places on the stage and took hold of the rope, the sharp clicking of gun-locks told that a couple more charges were ready.

"Think we can kill him, Sree?" cried Harry.

"I daren't say, Sahib. The rope may break by his teeth at any time, but we'll drag and make him come up again, so that you can have another shot. What are you loaded with?"

"Big slugs," cried Phra.

"Ought to be bullets," said the hunter.

"But we are very near, Sree," chimed in Harry.

"Yes, Sahib; but an old crocodile like this is so horny. Never mind; you must try. Say when you're ready."

"Now," said Phra hoarsely, and Harry stood with his lips pinched and his forehead a maze of wrinkles.

Sree turned fiercely to his two followers, who had hold of the rope close behind him.

"If you let go this time, I'll knock you both in," he cried, "and then you'll be killed and eaten, and come to life again as crocodiles."

The men shivered at this to them horrible threat, and Harry and Phra exchanged glances.

Meanwhile Sree was, so to speak, just feeling the crocodile's head, and as no extra strain was put upon the rope the reptile kept on swimming to and fro; but the moment the rope was tightened and the three men gave a steady drag there was a violent eddying of the water, the rope slackened, and the huge head and shoulders shot out as if the brute meant to reach its enemies in one bound.

But once more the reports of the two guns came nearly together, and the gaping jaws of the reptile snapped together as the head disappeared.

"Load again," cried Harry excitedly. "Let him run, Sree."

The hunter nodded, and as soon as the guns were loaded the drag and reappearance of the beast took place, another couple of shots were received, and this time the reptile whirled itself round and making good use of its favourite weapon struck at the occupants of the landing-stage, its tail sweeping along with terrific force.

But the brute had miscalculated the distance. Six feet nearer, and the two lads would have been swept into the river. As it was they felt the wind of the passing tail and heard the loud humming *whish* as it passed.

"That was near, Phra," said Harry.

"Yes; the hideous wretch! the beast!" hissed the Siamese lad through his teeth, and followed it up with another loud, hollow, hissing noise from the barrel of his gun, as he rammed a wad down upon the powder. "Let's go on and kill him. Such a wretch ought not to live and destroy everything he can reach along the banks. Oh, how I wish we had some big bullets! I'd half fill the gun."

"Then I'm glad you have none, old chap," said Harry.

"Why?" cried Phra, pausing, ramrod in hand.

"You ought to know by now. Burst the gun."

"Nearly ready, Sahib?" cried Sree. "He's pulling harder, and I'm afraid of the rope breaking."

"Not quite," said Phra, but a minute later, "Let's stand a bit farther back, Hal. Now, Sree, pull."

There was another steady draw upon the rope, which ran out now quite at right angles with the stage, and in an instant it was responded to by a tremendous rush. The water rose in a wave, then parted, as the open jaws of the crocodile appeared, coming right at them. The next moment the landing-stage quivered and rocked, for it was as if a tree-trunk had struck it right at the edge. Then there was a splash which sent the water flying all over the edifice, and all was still.

The reptile's charge had its effect, for as it fell back into the water the three Siamese rose to their feet from where they had flung themselves off from the staging in among the flowering bushes, and Harry and Phra sat up on the path which led into the garden.

"Oh, what a beast!" cried Phra, rubbing himself. "I hate him, oh, ten thousand times worse now!"

"Lucky we didn't shoot one another," said Harry. "I say, see how I've scratched the stock of father's gun."

"Why didn't you fire, Sahib?" said Sree ruefully, as he began picking thorns out of his left arm.

"Come, I like that!" cried Harry. "Why didn't you three hold on by the rope? I say, Sree, this is a one-er."

"You see, he doesn't like that hook, Sahib," said the hunter.

"But he has got to like it," said Harry. "There, we're not beaten."

Come on again. We must kill him now."

"I'm afraid, Sahib, he is one of those old savage crocodiles that are enchanted, and can't be killed."

"Oh, are you?" said Harry drily; "then I'm not. And if that rope doesn't break, we're going to kill him for being so impudent, aren't we, Phra?"

"Yes," said the lad, with his dark eyes flashing. "We will kill him now if it takes pounds of powder."

"And hundredweights of shot," said Harry. "Now then, look at the primings, and then stir the wretch up again, Sree, before he jigs that post down."

The jerking of the post was transferred to the arms of the men as the two lads stepped back to the bamboo floor, ready once more, and laughingly now, as they trusted to their own activity to escape the reptile's jaws. The men began to haul at the rope, with the same result as before.

But the boys were more ready this time. They watched the approaching wave, and as the open jaws of the enemy appeared, they fired right in between them, as if moved by the same impulse; and this time the creature dropped back at once.

"That was a good one, Sree," cried Harry, beginning to reload.

"It was great and wonderful, Sahib. How glad I am to see you both trying to slay the old murderer! A few more shots like that, and he will never again drag little children and poor weak women down to his holes in the muddy banks. It is a grand thing to do; but the bullets should be heavier than those."

"Never mind," said Phra; "we'll make these do."

Once more the order was given to pull, and the rope was tightened as it descended just in the same place, showing that the reptile was lying still in the same spot – probably a hole in the muddy bed – which had formed its lurking-place during the last few minutes.

It was a complete repetition in every respect of the last rush, and, taught by experience, the lads were as quick in the repetition of their last tactics. The wave rose in response to the heavy drag, the water eddied and parted, and once more a couple of heavy charges of slugs were poured between the hideous, gaping jaws, which closed with a snap, and the head sank down out of sight.

But this time there was a fresh surprise. The monster's tail rose high in the air, and delivered three or four tremendous smacks on the surface, raising such a foam and shower that it was only dimly seen how the reptile must have tried to evade its enemies by shooting up stream.

But it was apparent by the direction of the rope, to which the three men held on as long as they could, the final jerk making them let go for a few minutes, but only for Sree to seize hold again.

"He must have got that last badly, Sahib," said the hunter gravely, as he began to pull in the slack, which showed that the reptile was no longer straining at the line.

"Bring him back then directly we're ready," cried Harry, "and we'll give him another dose. But I say," he added, as he went on loading quickly, "that line comes in very easily."

"Yes, Sahib, and we must be on the look-out. I thought he had rushed up stream, but he must be close here."

"I know," cried Phra; "it's just like the cunning beast. He has come back, and is hiding under the floor. We must look out."

"Yes, Sahib," replied the hunter; "very likely, for they are cunning things. I will not pull in more rope till you are ready for him."

"Ready!" cried Phra a minute later, and Harry echoed the cry.

"Better stand on my other side, Sahibs," said Sree; and the lads took up the more advantageous place – one, too, which made the hunter more safe from proving the resting-place of the next volley of bullets.

The two men eagerly took their places at the rope, for familiarity with the danger incurred had thoroughly bred contempt; and the hauling began slowly and steadily, every one being on the *qui vive*, and ready to spring back.

But the first yard came without the slightest resistance.

"Look out!" said Harry, holding his gun to his shoulder, and aiming down at the water; "he must be very near."

Another yard came without the crocodile being felt.

"He must be close in," whispered Phra, and the excitement now became intense; for their enemy seemed to be playing a very artful game under cover of the thick water, which completely shielded the approach.

"Better stand farther back, Sahibs," said Sree, ceasing to pull,

"But we couldn't see to shoot," said Harry.

"Better not shoot than be seized by this child of a horrible mother, Sahib."

"We should have time to spring back," said Phra; "for we should see the water move. Go on pulling in the rope."

"Yes, go on," said Harry excitedly. "I can't bear this waiting. Haul quicker, and let's have it over."

The men obeyed, and another yard was easily and slowly drawn in, the Siamese in their excitement opening their eyelids widely so as to show the opalescent eyeballs; but still there was no check, and the curve of the rope now showed that the hook end must be close under the stage.

"Now, Sahibs, mind," whispered Sree hoarsely; "he is down there by your feet, or else right under the floor."

The lads glanced down at the frail, split bamboos, through whose interstices they could just catch the gleam of the flowing water, while the same idea came to both.

Suppose the brute were to dash its head upward? It would break through as easily as if the flooring had been of laths.

But all was still save the rippling whisper of the water and the hum of insect life outside in the blistering sunshine, as the men drew on cautiously, inch by inch, in momentary expectation of the development of a cunning attack.

It was almost in breathless awe now that the men ceased pulling for a few moments in response to an order from Sree, who whispered to his superiors, —

"We are just at the end, Sahibs; be quite ready to fire."

"We are," they replied, in a husky whisper.

"Then we shall pull now sharply, Sahibs."

"Pull," said Harry. "Quick!"

The men gave two rapid heaves, and the boys started back with a shout.

"Oh!" roared Harry, stamping about the floor, "only to think of that!"

For Sree was standing holding out the frayed and untwisted end of the rope, worn through at last by the crocodile's teeth, and parted in the last rush.

"Oh, I say!" cried Phra.

"Mind! Look out!" yelled Harry, making a dash for the shore, and immediately there was a regular stampede, which ended in the Prince seizing his friend by the arm, and thumping his back with the butt of the gun he held.

"Oh, I say, don't – don't!" panted Harry, who was choking with laughter.

"Then will you leave off playing such tricks?"

"Yes, yes – please, please!" cried Harry. "Oh, don't; it hurts."

"I know: it'll be like that fable of the shepherd boy and the wolf.

Some day he'll come and no one will run."

"I don't care, so long as you leave off thumping me with that gun. Don't, Phra, old chap," he added, growing serious; "it's dangerous to play with guns."

"It's too bad," said Phra. "I thought the beast was jumping on to us.

What a pity, though! All that powder and shot wasted for nothing."

"The bullets were too small, Sahib," said Sree; "but I'm afraid you could never have killed that crocodile."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Harry; "bullets would have done it."

Sree shook his head solemnly.

"Look at him, Phra. I did think he was sensible."

"No; he's nearly as superstitious as any of them," replied the lad.

"No, Sahib," said Sree; "I only think it's strange that you fired shot after shot into that thing, and still he was as strong as ever. I hope he will not stop about here, and make it not safe to come down to the landing-place. It would be bad."

"Ahoy – oy – oy!" rang out in a clear, manly voice, and the sound of oars was followed by a boat gliding into sight.

CHAPTER V

THE DOCTOR'S POST-MORTEM

"Morning, Mr. Cameron," cried Harry heartily, as the boat, propelled by its fore-and-aft rowers, glided up to the landing-stage, Sree handing the crocodile-catching rope to one of the men to make the boat fast, while the occupant of the seat beneath the central awning leapt out.

He was a good-looking, lightly bronzed, red-haired man of about thirty, tall, and active apparently as a boy, and as he strode over the yielding bamboo flooring, making it creak, he shook hands warmly.

"How are you, my lads? – Ah, Sree!" and the hunter salaamed.

"I'm jolly, Mr. Cameron. Phra's bad. Put out your tongue, old chap."

Phra's reply was a punch in the chest.

"Looks terribly bad," said the new arrival, who knew his friends.

"Here, what does all this shooting mean? I came on to see."

"Awful great croc," cried Harry.

"Shooting at it?"

"Yes, and the big slugs rattled off it like hail on a lot of dry thatch."

"Then you did not kill it?"

"Kill it – no. Only wish we had. Mr. Cameron, it was a monster."

"So I suppose. Nine feet long, eh?"

"Nine feet long!" said Harry contemptuously; "why, it was over twenty."

"You young romancer!" cried the new-comer. "How long was it, Prince?"

"I've only seen its head," said Phra. "It was big enough for it to be thirty feet."

"Then I beg your pardon humbly, Hal."

This was accompanied by a hearty clap on the shoulder.

"Oh, I don't mind," said the lad merrily. "Only if you won't believe me, Mr. Cameron, I won't believe you."

"I never tell travellers' tales, Hal."

"No, but you tell me sometimes that your nasty mixtures will do me good, and that's precious hard to believe."

The young doctor laughed.

"You ought to have killed the croc, though," he said.

"Sahib! Sahib, look!" cried Sree, as a shout arose from Mr. Cameron's boatmen.

All turned sharply to where the men were pointing, to see, floating on its back and with its toad-like under part drying in the hot sunshine, the body of a huge crocodile.

"That's ours," cried Harry.

"Or a dead one from somewhere up the river," said the doctor. "But we'll soon prove it with our noses."

"Hooray! no need," cried Harry; "that's him;" for all at once the great reptile undulated in the water, struggled, splashed, and turned over, swam round, and went up the river again, passing out of sight.

"Well, you are pretty sportsmen! Why didn't you shoot?"

"I never thought of the gun," said Phra.

"Here, take us in your boat, and let's follow him, Mr. Cameron."

There was another shout before the doctor could answer, for the men could see that the reptile's strength was exhausted, it being once more upon its back, floating down the stream.

"We'll shoot this time," said Phra.

"There is no need, master," said Sree. "I think it is dead now."

"I came to have a chat with your father," said the doctor; "but I must make acquaintance with our friend yonder. Look here, Sree, take the boat and the rope and tow the brute ashore. Take care that it is dead first. Don't run any risks."

"No, Sahib," said the man, drawing his keen knife from his waist and trying its edge and point.

"Ah, I need not try to teach you, Sree."

"Here's father," cried Harry, as Mr. Kenyon came out of the open window of the bungalow and walked down to where they stood.

"Ah, Cameron, how are you? Glad to see you, man. How is the wife?"

"Complaining about the heat. But look yonder."

He pointed at the floating reptile, and the merchant uttered an exclamation of wonder.

"So that explains the firing, boys. It is a monster. What a good riddance! What are you going to do, Sree?"

"Put a rope round his neck and bring him ashore, Sahib."

"Yes, we ought to take some measurements. But be careful, or it will capsize you; I don't think it's dead."

"It will be soon, Sahib," said the man meaningly.

"Yes, but those creatures have such strength in their tails. Where is your spear, man?"

"In my boat, Sahib, far away."

"Here, Harry, run to the hall and take down one of those Malay spears."

Harry ran, and after a moment's hesitation the young prince followed him, walking in a slow, dignified way. But long contact and education with an English boy had left its traces, and before he had gone many yards the observances of his father's jungle palace were forgotten, and he dashed off as hard as he could go, leaping in at the doorway and nearly overturning his companion.

"Here, mind where you're coming to," cried Harry.

"Bring two spears," cried Phra excitedly.

"Well, I am bringing two, aren't I? Thought you'd like to have a go, too."

Phra's arm went over his friend's shoulder in an instant.

"That's what I do like in you," he cried. "You always want to share everything with me."

"You're just as stupid," said Harry drily. "Here, catch hold. Which will you have? Make haste. Come along."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Phra.

"Better choose," said Harry, holding out the long, keen heads. "This one's as sharp as that one, and that one's got as good a point as this. Which is it to be?"

"I don't quite understand," said Phra, gazing in Harry's laughing eyes. "Yes, I do. Either of them will do. How fond you are of trying to puzzle one!"

"Make haste, boys," cried Mr. Kenyon.

Dignity before the common people was once more forgotten, prince and English boy racing down to the landing-stage with the light spears over their shoulders.

"Hullo!" said Harry's father. "I did not mean you to go."

"Oh, we must go, father," cried the lad.

"Well, be careful, Sree. Mind that the boat is kept a little way back."

"Yes, Sahib; I will take care."

"You might have asked me if I'd like to come in my own boat," said the doctor, smiling.

"Oh, Dr. Cameron," said Phra with an apologetic look, "pray go;" and he offered him the spear he held.

"No, no, my dear lad," said the doctor; "I was only joking. It is your task."

"But come too," cried Harry.

"There will be plenty in the boat without me. Off with you."

Harry looked unwilling to stir, but the doctor seized him by the shoulders and hurried him along, and the next minute they were being paddled towards the floating reptile, the men managing so that the boys could have a thrust in turn, the Prince as they passed along one side, Harry on their return on the other.

But the thrusts did not follow one another quickly, for the deep plunging in of the spear by Phra seemed to act like a reviver, although it was delivered about where the lad believed the heart to be.

In an instant the great reptile had flung itself over and began lashing the water with its tail.

"Take care!" shouted Mr. Kenyon from the landing-stage. But the warning was needless, for a sharp stroke from the oars sent the boat well out of reach, the rowers changing their positions and sending it backward in pursuit, as the crocodile began once more to swim up stream, at a pretty good rate at first, then slower and slower, leaving the water stained with its blood as it went on.

It managed to make its way, though, quite a hundred yards above the bungalow before its tail ceased its wavy, fish-like motion. Then there was a struggle and a little splashing, and once more it turned over upon its back.

"Your turn now," cried Phra excitedly. "I must have missed its heart.

You stab it there this time."

"Want the doctor here to tell me where it is," said Harry, as he stood up with his spear poised ready to strike when within reach.

"Thrust just between its front paws, Sahib," said Sree from where he squatted just behind the front rower.

"I will if I can; if I can't, how can I?" hummed Harry.

"Now," whispered Sree.

"Yes, yes, now," cried Phra excitedly.

"There you are, then," muttered the lad, and he delivered a thrust right in the spot pointed out, snatching back the weapon just in time, for the wound seemed to madden the reptile, which turned over and began to struggle with astonishing vigour; but only to roll over again and swim round the boat in that position, giving Phra the opportunity of delivering a deadly thrust, which was followed by another by Harry.

"That has done it," said the latter, for there was no response to these save a slight quivering of the tail, and now Sree rose from where he had crouched.

"Dead now, Sahibs," he said; "he will fight no more."

The two lads worked their spears about in the water a few times to cleanse them, and then sat down under the thatched awning, panting and hot with exertion, while they watched the action of the hunter. Sree, aided by the boatmen, who held the crocodile within reach, leaned over the side and slipped a running noose over the monster's head right up to the neck, drew it tight, and then let the rope run through his hands as the two Siamese rowers made their oars bend in sending the light sampan along, for the huge bulk was heavy. But the stream was with them, and a few minutes after, in obedience to the doctor's instructions, the crocodile was drawn up close to the muddy bank, some fifty yards below the merchant's garden.

Here another rope was fetched out and made fast round one of the hind legs, both ropes being held by Sree's men, while their leader remained in the boat, the boys having sprung ashore.

And now measurements were taken, the monster proving to be just twenty-one feet in length, and of enormous bulk.

"I was not far wrong, Doctor Cameron," said Harry.

"No, my boy; you were not, indeed."

"Are you going to let it float down the river now?" asked Phra.

"Not yet," said the doctor; "but perhaps you two had better go now, for I am about to superintend rather a nasty examination in the cause of science."

"I know," said Harry to his companion; "he is going to see what the thing lives on. Shall we go?"

"No," said Phra gravely; "I want to learn all that I can, and the doctor is so clever, he seems to know everything."

"I heard what you said, Prince," said the doctor, smiling; "but I don't; I wish I did. Now, Sree, you know how to go to work; let's get it over; the water will wash everything away."

The hunter, who had worked with Doctor Cameron in many an expedition, and understood what was required, bent over the side of the boat, made one long opening, and then plunging his knife in again, made another, and with the flowing water for help, in a short time laid bare the various objects which formed the loathsome reptile's food.

First and foremost there was, to the doctor's astonishment, the snake, and as soon as this had been sent floating down the stream there were fish, seven of goodly size, beside some that were quite small. Then the boys were puzzled, but the cleansing water soon showed that what followed next were a couple of water-fowl, nearly as big as geese.

"That's all, is it?" said the doctor.

"No, Sahib, there is something else – something hard," said the hunter, and he searched about, gathering something in his hand, rinsed it to and fro a few times, and carefully threw four objects ashore.

Harry shuddered and felt a horrible, sickening sensation for a few moments, but it was swept away directly after by the feeling of rage which made the blood run hot to his temples.

"I've been thinking what brutes we were, killing things as we have been this morning; but oh, the beast! I should like to kill hundreds."

"Ugh!" ejaculated Phra, as he stamped his foot, and then through his compressed teeth: "The wretches! the monsters! how I hate them!"

He said no more, but stood with his companion listening as the doctor rested on one knee and turned over the objects on the grass.

"Yes, strung on wire; that is why they have not separated. Gilt bronze, and very pretty too. Each one is chased; the leg and arm bangles are bronze too, and quite plain. You may as well put them in your museum, Kenyon, with a label containing their sad little history – Worn by some pretty little Siamese girl dragged under when bathing."

"Yes, Sahib doctor," said Sree respectfully; "they wear bangles like that three days' journey up the river."

"Horrible!" ejaculated Harry, bending over the relics.

"Horrible indeed, my boy," said his father. Then laying his hand upon Phra's shoulder, "Thank you both, my lads, for ridding the river of a vile old murderer."

"Thank old Sree, too, father," said Harry eagerly, "for he did more than either of us."

"I'm going to thank Sree," said the merchant. "There, let the monster float down to the sea. Don't go away yet; Doctor Cameron and I want to talk to you."

"Yes, and Harry and I want to go up the river to the wild jungle," said Phra eagerly. "We have not had a hunt for a week."

"Come along, then," said Mr. Kenyon, laying his hand on the Prince's shoulder. "We'll talk it over, and perhaps we can join forces. What's that, Sree?"

"The crocodiles from below are coming up, Sahib; they have smelt the blood."

"Yes, look at that," said the doctor, as there was a wallow and a splash not ten yards from the monster's head.

"Take care!" said Mr. Kenyon excitedly. "Don't try to untie those ropes, Sree, or you may have your hand seized; cut them, and let the reptile go."

Sree obeyed, dividing the strong cords with a couple of cuts. Then taking an oar from one of the boatmen he forced the boat along past the crocodile, giving the latter a thrust, when the current bore it outward, and directly after another of its tribe, of about half the size, raised its head out of the water, and drew itself partly on the bulky body, which rolled over toward it, and then sank back out of sight.

But it was not gone, and the agitation of the surface about the floating body showed that others were there, tearing at it as it floated away.

"I should hardly have thought that we had so many of these brutes about here," said the doctor.

"They come and go, Sahib; and they hide so. There are plenty more, and that dead one will never reach the sea."

"It's a warning to you two boys never to attempt to bathe off here," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Bathe, father!" cried Harry, glancing down at the bronze rings and the necklace lying in the grass; "I feel as if I shall never like to bathe again;" and Phra curled up his lip, as he once more ejaculated: —

"Ugh!"

CHAPTER VI

MAKING PLANS

It was pleasantly dusk and shady in Mr. Kenyon's museum, where the party had gathered, glad enough to get away from the glare of the sun after the exertions of the morning. For Siam is a country beautiful enough, but one where the sun has a bad habit of making it pretty often somewhere near ninety-nine in the shade. The natives revel in this, and grow strong and well, though it has a tendency to make even them a quiet, deliberate, and indolent people. What wonder, then, that an Englishman should feel indisposed to work?

All the same, there was not much idleness in the Kenyons' bungalow, for the merchant was an indefatigable business man, who had built up a fine business, at the same time finding time for gratifying his intense love for natural history, in which he had an energetic companion in the young doctor, who had been encouraged to settle at Dahcok by one of the kings. As for Harry, his restless nature made him set the hottest weather at defiance unless he was checked, for, to use his own words, "I'm not going to let Phra beat me out of doors, even if he was born in the country."

There had been a few words in connection with his restlessness when the lads bore in the guns and spears, all of which were handed over to Mike to be cleaned and carefully oiled.

"You lads had better sit down now and have a good rest in here; it's cool and shady. Your face is scarlet, Hal. Make Phra stay and have a bit of dinner with us."

"I should like to," said the young Prince eagerly.

"Of course he will, father; but you and Doctor Cameron want to talk."

"About what will interest you as well, I dare say. What were you going to do?"

For Harry had made a sign to Phra, and was sidling towards the door.

"Oh, I don't know, father; look about and do something along with Phra."

"Do you hear him, Doctor? Did you ever see such a restless fellow?

He's spoiling the Prince too."

"Oh no," said Phra; "I'm just as bad as he is, sir."

"I begin to think you are," cried Mr. Kenyon. "Look here, Cameron; they've had a fight with the boa whose skin I showed you, and another with that crocodile. That ought to satisfy any two boys who love adventure for quite a month."

"Well, it is a pretty good morning's work," said the doctor, laughing. "Take my advice, lads, and have a rest till dinner-time, and another afterwards. As it happens, Kenyon, I told the wife I shouldn't be back to dinner."

"You wouldn't have gone back if you had not," said Mr. Kenyon laughing. "Oh, by the way, have you completed your collection of fireflies?"

"No; there is one which gives out quite a fiery light, very different from the greeny gold of the others. I've seen it three times, but it always soars away over the river or up amongst the lofty trees."

"I know that one," said Phra eagerly.

"I've seen it once," said Harry. "Old Sree would get you one."

"I've asked him, but he has not succeeded yet," said the doctor.

"We'll try, then," said Phra, springing up, an action followed by Harry.

"But the fireflies are best caught by night," said Mr. Kenyon drily.

"Of course," cried Phra, reddening through his yellowish bronze skin, and he dropped back in his chair, with Harry following suit.

But in spite of the heat, the boys could not sit still, and began fidgeting about, while Mr. Kenyon and his friend chatted about the state of the colony.

For want of something else more in accordance with their desires at the moment, the two boys began to go over the various objects in the large, high-ceiled room, which were the result of ten years' collecting. There were bird-skins by the hundred – pheasants with the wondrously-shaped eyes upon tail and wing, which had won for them the name argus; others eye-bearing like the peacock, but on a smaller scale; and then the great peacock itself – the Javanese kind – gorgeous in golden green where the Indian kinds were of peacock blue.

Every here and there hung snake-skins, trophies of the jungle, while upon the floor were no less than six magnificent tiger-pelts, each of which had its history, and a black one too, of murder committed upon the body of some defenceless native.

Leopard-skins, too, were well represented. Elephants' tusks of the whitest ivory; and one strange-looking object stood on the floor, resembling a badly rounded tub about twenty inches in diameter, and formed out of the foot of some huge elephant.

Skulls with horns were there, and skulls without; cases and drawers of birds' eggs, and lovely butterflies and moths, with brilliant, metallic-looking beetles; and the boys smiled at one another as they paused before first one thing and then another in whose capture they had played a part.

Here, too, was another stand of weapons that would be suitable for the attack upon some tyrant of the jungle, or for defence against any enemy who might rise against the peace of those dwelling at the bungalow.

The boys were interested enough in the contents of the museum they had helped to form; but at last the weariness growing upon them became unbearable, and they moved towards the door, expecting to hear some remark made by either Mr. Kenyon or the doctor; but these gentlemen were too intent upon the subject they had in hand, and about which they were talking in a low voice.

"They didn't hear us come out, Phra," said Harry. "Here let's run and see whether old Sree has gone yet. I hope Mike Dunning has given them all plenty to eat."

"He was told to," said Phra quietly.

"Yes, he was told to," said Harry; "but that does not mean that he always does as he's told."

"One of our servants dare not forget to do what he was ordered," said

Phra, frowning.

"No; but our laws don't allow masters to cut off people's heads for forgetting things."

By this time they had passed round the house, to find right at the back Sree and his two men busy at work cleaning and polishing the guns and spears that had been used that morning, while Mike, whose task it was by rights, lounged about giving orders and looking on.

"Have you given those men their dinner, Mike?" asked Harry.

"Oh yes, sir, such a dinner as they don't get every day," replied the man.

"That's more than you know, Mike," said Harry. "Hunters know how to live well out in the jungle; don't they, Sree?"

"We always manage to get enough, Master Harry," said the man, smiling; "for there is plenty for those who know how to find it in the jungle, out on the river's edge, or in the water."

"And you know how to look for provisions if any man does. But here, you, Mike, they've no business cleaning these things. You finish them; I want to talk to Sree."

Mike took the gun Sree was polishing without a word, and went on with the task, while the hunter rose respectfully and stood waiting to hear what the boys had to say.

"We want to have a day in the jungle," said Harry. "What is there to shoot?"

"A deer, Sahib."

"No," said Phra, frowning; "they are so hard to get near. They go off at the slightest noise."

"The young Sahibs might wait and watch by a water-hole," said the hunter. "It is easier to catch the deer when they come to drink."

"But that means staying out in the jungle all night."

"Yes, Sahib, it is the best way."

"No," said Phra.

"What else, Sree?" asked Harry.

"The Sahib said he would like two more coo-ahs; would the Sahibs like to lie in wait for them? I could make them come near enough by calling as they do —*Coo – ah! coo – ah!*"

The man put his hands before his mouth and softly imitated the harsh cry of the great argus pheasant so accurately that Phra nodded his head and smiled.

"Yes, that's like it," cried Harry. "*Coo – ah! coo – ah!*"

"And that isn't a bit like it," said Phra laughingly. "You would not have many come to a cry like that; would he, Sree?"

"No, my Prince," replied the man, shaking his head; "the great birds would not come for that."

"Very rude of them," cried Harry merrily; "for it's the best I can do."

Well, shall we try for the *coo – ahs*?"

"What else do you know of, Sree?" asked Phra.

"There was a leopard in the woods across the river yesterday, my Prince; but they are strange beasts, and he may be far away to-day."

"Oh yes, I don't think that's any good," said Harry. "I should like to try for an elephant."

"There are very few near, just now, Sahib," replied the man. "It is only a month since there was the great drive into the kraal, and those that were let go are wild and have gone far away."

"Oh, I say, Phra, and we call this a wild country! Why, we shall have to go beetle-catching or hunting frogs."

Sree smiled, and Harry saw it.

"Well, propose something better," he cried.

"The men were at work in the new sugar plantation," said the man quietly.

"Well, we don't want to go hunting men," cried Harry impatiently.

"And the tiger leaped out of the edge of the jungle, caught the man by the shoulder, and carried him away."

"Ah!" cried Phra excitedly; "why didn't you tell us that at first?"

"Because he kept it back for the last," said Harry. "That's just his way."

"Would the Sahib and my Prince like to try and shoot the tiger?" asked Sree.

"Would we? Why, of course we would," cried Harry excitedly. "What shall we do? Have a place made in a tree?"

"No, Sahib," replied the man, shaking his head. "If it were a cow or one of the oxen, I would make a place in a tree near the spot where he had dragged the beast, for he would come back to feed upon it as soon as it grew dark; but it was not an ox nor a cow. The poor man has been taken away to the wat, and his wife and friends have paid all they could for him to be burned."

"What shall we do, then?"

"It is of no use to go without a couple of elephants and beaters to drive the tiger out."

Harry looked round at Phra, who nodded his head quietly.

"Very well," he said; "we'll have the elephants out, and men to beat."

When shall we go? To-morrow?"

"Yes, my Prince; to-morrow when the tiger will be lying asleep."

"I'll go and speak to my father," said Phra. "He will not care to come himself, but your father and Doctor Cameron will be sure to say that they will come."

"Yes, of course," said Harry. "But I say, only to think of old Sree here knowing of this tiger, and not saying a word!"

"I was going to tell you, Sahib, before I went away."

"But why didn't you tell us before?"

"Because I did not know, Sahib, till a little while ago, when he came to find me and bring me the news."

He pointed as he spoke to an ordinary-looking peasant who was squatted a little way off beneath the trees, chewing his betel.

The lads had not noticed the man before, as he had shrunk away more into the shade on seeing them come out.

"He brought you the bad news?" said Phra.

"Yes, my Prince. He went to find me yonder after coming across from his village, and no one could tell him where I had gone, till at last he saw the Sahib doctor's boatmen, and they told him that I was here."

"Then I will go and tell my father we want the elephant," said Phra.

"You go and speak to them indoors, for we must kill that wretch."

"If we can," said Harry, smiling; "but Mr. Stripes is sometimes rather hard to find."

Phra nodded, and went across the garden on his way to the palace, while Harry went back into the house, Mike waiting till his young master's back was turned and then handing the gun he was finishing to the old hunter.

"You may as well do this, Sree," he said; "you clean guns so much better than I can."

The old hunter smiled, as he waited to examine the points of the spears his men had been polishing, and then good-humouredly took the gun to finish after his own fashion, for there was a good deal of truth in what Mike Dunning had said.

CHAPTER VII

THE BRINK OF A VOLCANO

The boys were quite wrong in imagining that their act of escaping from the museum had passed unnoticed, for as soon as they had passed out of hearing the doctor nodded his head and threw himself back in his cane chair.

"Now we are alone," he said to Mr. Kenyon, "I may as well tell you what I have heard."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"No – yes. It may be either," replied the doctor. "I would not say anything before the boys, for it might make Phra uneasy."

"And Harry?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"No, I think not. I don't believe he would give the matter a second thought."

"You are hard upon the boy," said Mr. Kenyon, rather sternly.

"Not in the least," said the doctor, smiling. "It is his nature. I don't think the matter is really of any consequence, but it would have upset Phra, who is as sensitive as a girl; and he would be worrying himself, and thinking about it for weeks, beside exaggerating the matter on his father's account."

"What is it, then – some trouble with our friend the other king?"

"Friend, eh? I believe that if he could have his own way every European would be driven out of the country – or into the river," he added to himself – "before we were twenty-four hours older."

"What is the fresh trouble, now?"

"Nothing fresh about it, Kenyon. It is the stale old matter. Here we have two parties in the country."

"Yes, and worse still, two kings," interposed Mr. Kenyon.

"Exactly, each having his own party. The one wants to see the country progress and become prosperous and enlightened; the other for it to keep just as it was five hundred years ago; and the worst of it is nearly all the people are on the stand-still side."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon. "The old traditions and superstitions suit the indolent nature of the people."

"And the progress the King is making offends their prejudices."

"You mean the prejudices of the bonzes," said Mr. Kenyon sadly.

"Exactly; that is what I do mean, and they are getting so thick with the second king, that I sometimes begin to be afraid that we shall have trouble."

"You have had that idea for a long time now, but the reigning King holds so strong a position that his kinsman dare not rise against him. He is as gentle and amiable a man as could exist, but there is the old Eastern potentate in him still, and our friend number two knows perfectly well that if he attempted to rise he would be pretty well sure to fail, and then his head would fall as surely as if our old Harry the Eighth were on the throne."

"But would he fail? All the bonzes are on his side."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon, laughing; "and they'd tell him to go on and prosper, but they would not fight."

"No, they would not fight," said the doctor musingly.

"Do you think there is a regular conspiracy?"

"I really do sometimes, and it makes me uneasy."

"That is because you are a young married man, and fidget about your wife."

"Well, and quite naturally."

"Yes, quite naturally, of course; but when you have been here as long as I have, you will not be so nervous."

"I don't think I am nervous, Kenyon; but it would be very horrible if there should be a rising amongst the people."

"Horrible, but not likely, my dear sir."

"But if there were? I suppose I am right in looking upon ourselves as being favourites."

"Certainly."

"Well, then, should we not be among the first whom the people would attack?"

"That is quite possible, but I suppose we should defend ourselves, and be defended as well by the people who remained staunch."

"I have thought of all that, but if trouble did come it would be sudden and unexpected, and we should be taken by surprise."

"We might be, or we might have ample warning. I think the latter, for these people are very open and wanting in cunning."

"But don't you think we – or say you – having so much influence with the King, would do wisely if you warned him – told him of our suspicions?"

"No, I think not," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Why?"

"Because, quiet and studious as the King is, he happens to be very acute and observant. I feel certain that nothing goes on in the city without his being fully aware of it; and though he seems to take very little notice, I am pretty sure that nothing important takes place except under his eye, or which is not faithfully reported to him by one or other of his councillors."

"Perhaps you are right," said the doctor, "and I have been unnecessarily nervous."

"I feel sure that you have been. I would speak to him, but he might look upon it as an impertinent interference on my part in connection with private family matters. Take my advice, and let it rest. We should have ample warning and ample protection, I feel sure. But I am glad you spoke out, all the same. But bah! nonsense! You would not be hurt – you, the doctor who has done so much good among the poor people. Why, doctor, they look upon you as something more than man: they idolize you."

"For the few simple cures I have effected."

"Few? Hundreds."

"Well, hundreds, then. But what has it done?"

"Made you friends with every one in the city."

"Made me a number of bitter enemies, sir. Why, the native doctors absolutely hate me. My word! I should not like to be taken ill and become helpless. They'd never let me get well again if they had the doctoring."

"Don't be too hard on them," said Mr. Kenyon.

"Not I, my dear sir. I only speak as I think. So you would not take a step in our defence?"

"Not until we were certain that it was necessary; then as many as you like. Steps? I'd make them good long strides. But say no more: the boys are coming back, and we don't want to set them thinking about such things."

In effect, steps were heard in the verandah, and a few minutes later

Harry hurried into the museum again.

"Well, boy!" cried the doctor. "What is it? you look hot."

"Tiger," said Harry eagerly.

"Where?" cried Mr. Kenyon and his visitor in a breath.

"Over yonder, by the new sugar plantation," cried Harry. "Jumped on a man and killed him. Sree has just heard the news. He told me and Phra."

"How horrible!" said Mr. Kenyon.

"Yes, and the village people sent a messenger to Sree. They want the brute killed, and we're going to have an expedition and destroy the wretch."

"Indeed?" said Mr. Kenyon drily.

"You and Mr. Cameron will come with us, of course, father?" said Harry, who was too much excited to notice the glances exchanged between the merchant and his visitor; "but I should like to have first shot, and kill the beast."

"No doubt," said the doctor drily; "but I suppose you would not wish us to give up our chances if the tiger came out our way?"

"Oh no, of course not," said Harry. Then turning to Mr. Kenyon, "You will try the new rifles the King sent to you, will you not, father?"

"When I go tiger-hunting," said Mr. Kenyon drily.

Harry felt damped by his father's manner.

"But you will go now, father?"

"What, and walk the tiger up like one would a partridge?" said Mr. Kenyon. "Certainly not, and you are not old and experienced enough yet to go tiger-shooting. It requires a great deal of nerve."

"Oh, but I don't think I should feel frightened, father."

"Perhaps not; but you would be too much excited, and might shoot the doctor. We could not spare him, Hal."

"I shouldn't, father. You taught me how to handle a gun, and if I can do that I ought to be able to handle a rifle."

"Possibly; but, as Mr. Cameron will tell you, we could not risk going on foot."

"We're not going on foot, father," cried Harry excitedly. "We're going to have two elephants, and you and doctor could go on one, and Phra and I on the other."

"Oh, that alters the case," said Mr. Cameron eagerly.

"Has the King offered to lend us elephants?" said Mr. Kenyon.

"No, father, but he will," said Harry. "Phra has gone to tell him, and he is sure to say we may have them."

"Indeed? I doubt it."

"He always lets Phra and me have anything we ask for."

"Yes, he is very indulgent to you both, my boy – too much so sometimes; but I notice that there is a certain amount of wisdom in what he does. What about the rifles?"

"Well, he gave us the rifles, father."

"With certain restrictions, Hal. They were to be placed in my charge, and I was to decide when it would be right for you to use them."

"Oh yes, father, he did say that."

"Yes, and I think it was not until you and Phra had been waiting nearly two years that they were sent."

"It was a long time, certainly," agreed Harry.

"The King is a wise man in his way, and I feel pretty sure that he will refuse to lend the elephants. What do you say, Cameron?"

"I agree with you."

"What, and let the tiger lurk about that great plantation and keep on killing the poor fellows who are hoeing?" cried Harry indignantly. "I'm sure he wouldn't; he's too particular about protecting people."

"He will most likely get up a big hunt to destroy the tiger," said the doctor; "but I don't believe he will let you two boys go."

"Oh!" cried Harry, who seemed as if he could hardly contain himself in his keen disappointment; "any one would think it was wicked and contemptible to be a boy. One mustn't do this and one mustn't do that, because one is a boy. One mustn't do anything because one is a boy. It's always, 'You are too young' for what one wants to do. Oh," he cried passionately, "who'd be a boy?"

"I would, for one," said the doctor, laughing.

"I don't believe it, doctor," cried Harry. "You wouldn't like to be always kept down."

"Perhaps not; boys never do. They're too stupid."

"What!" cried Harry.

"Too stupid," said the doctor again, while Mr. Kenyon lay back in his creaking cane chair with his eyes half closed, listening, with an amused expression of countenance. "Why, I was as stupid as you are, Hal, at your age."

"But you did not think so," retorted Hal.

"Of course I did not. I did not know any better. I could not see that by being a thorough boy for so many years, and being boyish and thinking as a boy should think, I should naturally grow into a thorough manly man."

"I don't quite understand you, sir," said Harry rather distantly.

"But I'm speaking plainly enough, Hal. Come, confess, my lad; you want to be a man, and to be treated as if you were one?"

Harry hesitated.

"Speak out frankly, sir," said Mr. Kenyon sternly.

"Well, of course I do," said the lad.

"And you can't see that if we treated you as you wish to be treated," said the doctor earnestly, "that we should be weak, foolish, and indulgent, for we should be doing you harm?"

"Oh, Mr. Cameron, what nonsense!"

"Think of this some day in the future, Hal, my lad," said the doctor warmly, "and you will find then that it is not nonsense. Look here, my lad, a boy of seventeen, however advanced and able he may be in some things, is only a boy."

"Only a boy!" said Harry bitterly.

"Yes, only a boy; a young, green sapling who must pass through years before he can grow naturally into a strong, muscular man. Some boys fret over this and the restraints they undergo, because of their youth, and want to be men at once – want to throw away four or five of the golden years of their existence, and all through ignorance, because they are too blind to see how beautiful they are."

"You told me all that once before, Mr. Cameron."

"Very likely, Hal, for I am rather disposed to moralize sometimes. But it's quite true, my lad."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon, "it's true enough, Hal, for boys are wonderfully boyish. Naturally, too, my lad," he added, with a laugh. "But there, don't build any hopes upon this expedition, for I should certainly shrink from letting you go."

"Oh, father, I would be so careful, and I'll believe all Doctor Cameron said and won't want to be a man till I am quite grown up. I'll be as boyish as I can be."

"I think I'd shrink from any promises of that kind, Hal," said the doctor, smiling. "Don't tie yourself down to rules of your own invention. Look here, aim at being natural, at hitting the happy medium."

"I suppose that's the unhappy medium for the boy, isn't it?"

"Not at all, my lad; it's the way to be happy. Leave it to Nature; she will set that right. Don't be too boyish, and don't aim at being an imitation man – in other words a prig. Be natural."

"Yes," said Mr. Kenyon; "the doctor's right, Hal. Be natural, and you will not be far wrong there."

"I always am as natural as I can be," said Harry, throwing himself into action, and looking as gloomy and discontented as a boy could look; "but no one gets to be so disappointed and sat upon as I am."

Mr. Kenyon's brow clouded over, but he said nothing.

"So sure as I set my mind upon anything I'm sure to be balked."

"Poor fellow!" said the doctor gravely.

"Yes, Doctor, it's all very well for you to make fun of me. You can do just as you like."

"Of course," said the doctor gravely, "and I see that does make a difference. One sees things from such a different point of view."

"Yes, that you do," said Harry.

"Exactly," continued the doctor slowly, "and you see, as you say, I do exactly as I like, have everything I wish for, never suffer the slightest trouble, enjoy the most robust health, am as rich as a man need wish to be; in fact, I am the happiest man under the sun."

"Are you, Doctor?" said Harry. "I'm glad of it. I didn't know it was so good as that."

"And, of course, that is about how you'd like to be, eh, Hal?"

"Well," said the boy, hesitating, "something like that – I – er – I – I don't want to be greedy."

"Don't want to be greedy?" cried the doctor, changing his manner, as he sprang up and began to pace the museum. "Why, you miserable, discontented young cub! There is not one boy in a thousand leads such a life as you do: a good home, surrounded by friends, with plenty of time for study, and plenty of time for the necessary amusement. Yours, sir, is an ideal life; but it has spoilt you, and I'm afraid it is from having a too indulgent father."

"Oh, come, Cameron, I must speak in my own defence," said Mr. Kenyon.

"And you ought to speak in mine too, father," cried Harry indignantly, as he gazed at the doctor with blazing eyes and flaming cheeks.

"I can't, Hal," said his father, smiling; "there's so much truth in what he says, my boy, and your words were uncalled for – unjust."

"I beg your pardon, Kenyon," said the doctor; "I had no business to speak as I did. I had no right. But I'm such a hot-headed Scotsman, and Master Hal here put me out."

"There is no begging pardon needed," said Mr. Kenyon quietly.

"You see, I could not help comparing Hal's lot with mine – a poor, raw lad on the west coast who lived on potatoes and porridge, with a broiled herring or haddie once in a way for a treat. But there, once more, I had no right to interfere."

"I say, granted, and thanks."

"Then I shan't beg your pardon, Hal, boy," cried the doctor, "for I honestly believe what I say is the truth. Take it all as so many pills, and if you'll come along the river to my place to-morrow morning I'll give you a draught as well – to do you good, my dear boy – to do you good."

"I think I've had physic enough," said Harry sulkily.

"And you don't seem to like the taste, eh?" said the doctor, laughing. "Never mind; it will, as people say, do you good. You will be sure to have some bit of luck to take the taste out of your mouth – a bit of sugary pleasure, my lad. Aha! and here it comes in the shape of friend, Phra, the prince, who, king's son as he is, does not enjoy a single advantage more than you."

"Doctor!" cried Harry indignantly. "He has only to speak to have everything he wants. No one could be better off than he is. Look, he's in a hurry to tell us all about the expedition for to-morrow. Oh, it is so disappointing, for I wanted so badly to shoot a tiger. It set me longing when Phra and I looked at those skins to-day."

"Dear me! what a thirst for blood you are developing, Hal!" said the doctor, as Mr. Kenyon still sat back in his chair, looking pained, while his son carefully avoided gazing in his direction. "I should have thought you had killed enough for one day."

"Well, Phra?" cried Harry, as his companion came straight in.

"Well?" said the boy, with a mocking smile.

"What did your father say?"

Phra was silent for a few moments, and then he spoke quietly.

"That I was too much of a boy yet to think of going after tigers," said the lad slowly, and then he started and frowned. For the doctor had thrown himself back in one of the cane chairs, which gave vent to a peculiar squeaking noise, while its occupier rocked himself to and fro, literally roaring with laughter.

"I am very sorry if I have said some ridiculous thing, sir," said Phra gravely. "I speak English as well as I can."

"Ridiculous thing!" cried the doctor, springing up and seizing the young Siamese by the shoulders; "why, it was splendid. Look at him," he cried, half-choking with laughter, "look at Hal! Oh, dear me, how you have made my sides ache!"

"But I don't understand," said Phra.

"Then you soon shall," cried the doctor. "My lord there has been in a tantrum because – because – oh, dear me, I shall be able to speak directly."

Phra looked in a puzzled way from the laughing doctor to his friend, who sat frowning and biting his lips.

"Because," continued the doctor, "Mr. Kenyon here has told him that he should not like him to go to the tiger hunt."

"Mr. Kenyon told him so?" cried Phra quickly.

"Yes, because he is too young."

"Oh, I am so glad," cried Phra, showing his white teeth.

Harry started as if he had received a blow.

"What!" he cried fiercely.

"I say I am so glad, because that is just what my father said to me."

"And very wisely too, Phra, my boy," said Mr. Kenyon, rising. "You lads had better wait a bit longer before you indulge in a sport which is very risky even to one mounted upon an elephant, especially if the elephant is timid. I have known several bad accidents occur through the poor creature becoming unmanageable from a wounded beast's charge."

"It's disappointing, sir," said Phra; "but I suppose father's right."

"Of course he is, and I'm glad to see you take it so wisely."

The speaker laid his hand on the doctor's arm, and they went out into the verandah.

"Ah, Kenyon, you spoil that boy with indulgence."

"Think so?"

"Yes; I don't like to hear a lad like that speak as he did to you. It was that made me fire up. But there, I'm sorry if I've done wrong."

"You have not done wrong," said Mr. Kenyon, "and I am rather glad you spoke as you did. But you do not understand Hal so well as I do."

"Naturally I do not."

"He is a queer boy, with a good many things about him that I don't like; but he has some oddities that I do like. I dare say he will display one of them before you go."

"He will have to be quick about it, then," said the doctor, smiling, "for I have not much longer to stay."

"Plenty of time for him to show the stuff he is made of. I'm sorry to disappoint the boys, though."

"And ourselves too, for I should have liked the jaunt, and the more of those savage beasts we can destroy the better. What do you say to going over to the palace and asking the old gentleman to let us have the use of the elephants and beaters?"

"No," said Mr. Kenyon, "I could not do that under the circumstances."

It would be too hard upon the boys. Yes, Michael?"

"There is a man from – one of the gentlemen from the King to see you, sir," said the man.

"Indeed? I will come. Come too, Cameron; I daresay it will interest you."

The messenger had come to ask Mr. Kenyon if he would take charge of a little expedition to be made against a tiger that had been destroying life in the neighbourhood, and to say that as matters were so serious the King would be greatly obliged if he would go.

"I don't like to say No, and I don't want to say Yes," said Mr.

Kenyon.

"I do not see how you can refuse."

"Neither do I," said Mr. Kenyon thoughtfully, and he sent a note back, promising to undertake the task.

Hardly had the messenger departed before Harry came hurriedly into the room, but started on seeing the doctor there.

"I thought you had gone, sir," he said. "I made sure I heard the door swing to."

"No, I have not gone, Hal," said the doctor, smiling good-humouredly; "but I'll soon be off, if you want to speak to your father alone."

"I did, sir; but it doesn't matter your being here."

"What is it, Hal?" said Mr. Kenyon gravely.

"Wanted to tell you I feel horribly ashamed of myself, father," said

Harry quickly.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, it seems so queer that such a chap as Phra should behave like a gentleman over a bit of disappointment, while I – I – well, I behaved like a disagreeable boy."

"But very naturally, Hal," said the doctor. "Better than acting like a make-believe man."

"Thank you, Hal," said Mr. Kenyon quietly, holding out his hand. "Has

Phra gone?"

"No, father."

"Tell him that his father has sent requesting me to take charge of an expedition against the tiger, and that I am sorry I cannot ask you two lads to go with me."

"All right, father; he won't mind. I don't now."

Harry nodded at the doctor, and went out of the room, while his father waited till his steps had ceased, and a door had swung to.

"Odd boy, isn't he, Cameron?" said Mr. Kenyon then.

"Very odd chap," replied the doctor. "But I like boys to be odd like that."

CHAPTER VIII

A PROWL BY WATER

It was disappointing and hard for two boys to bear, situated as they had been – singled out by the old hunter as the first receivers of the news; but they had determined to be heroic over it, and after a fashion they were.

"Don't let's seem to mind it the least bit in the world, Phra," Harry said.

"What shall we do? go up the river?"

"Go up the river? No. Let's see them start, and help them with their guns when they mount the elephants. They'll be watching to see how we look, and we're going to puzzle them."

"But will not that look queer?"

"I dunno," said Harry, "and I don't care; but that's what I've made up my mind to do. What do you mean to do?"

"The same as you do," said Phra firmly.

The result was that at the time appointed Harry walked up to the court by the palace main entrance, shouldering one of the rifles, and there his heart failed him for a moment or two, but he was himself again directly.

For the sight of the two huge elephants with their howdahs, and their mahouts with their legs hidden beneath the huge beasts' ears, each holding his anchus – the short, heavy, spear-like goad with hook which takes the place of whip, spur, and reins, in the driving of the huge beasts – was almost too much for him.

There was a party, too, of pretty well fifty spearmen to act as beaters, some of whom were furnished with small gongs. Altogether it formed a goodly show, and it sent the sting of disappointment pretty deeply into the boys' breasts, so that they had to bear up bravely to keep a good face on the matter.

The King was there to see the start made, after Mr. Kenyon, with Sree for his attendant, had mounted one of the elephants by means of a bamboo ladder, the doctor and a trusted old hunter in the King's service perching themselves upon the other.

Then the King wished them both good fortune, the word was given, and half the spearmen marched off in front; the elephants at a word from their mahouts shuffled after, side by side, and the remainder of the spearmen followed, passing out of the gateway.

The King said a few words to the boys, and then retired, leaving them alone in the yard with the armed men on guard.

"Shall we follow them part of the way?" said Phra then.

"No, that wouldn't do," replied Harry. "It was right to come and show that we weren't going to mind; but if we followed now, I know what my father would think."

"What?" said Phra abruptly.

"That we were following in the hope of being asked to get on the elephants. It would be too mean."

"Yes," said Phra, "of course. I did not think of that. Well, what shall we do?"

"I dunno. Lie down and go to sleep till they come back; that's the best way to forget it all."

"Bah! I'm not going to do that. I know: get over the river in a boat, and go and see the big Wat."

"What for? Who wants to see the old place again, with its bonzes, with their yellow robes and shaven heads?"

"We could go up the great tower again."

"Nice job to climb all the way up those steps in a hot time like this!

What's the good?"

Phra looked at him and smiled.

"You could take the telescope up, and see for miles."

"But I don't want to carry that lumpy thing up those hundreds of steps."

"I'd carry it."

"But I don't want you to carry it, and I don't want to see for miles. I can see quite as much as I want to-day without the telescope. I don't feel as if I want to see at all. It was quite right, I suppose, for us to be left at home, and proper for us to come and make a show of not minding; but now the excitement's all over, and they're gone, I feel just as if I could howl."

"What! cry?" said Phra wonderingly.

"No – ooo! Howl – shout with rage. I want to quarrel with some one and hit him."

"Well, quarrel with and hit me."

"Shan't. I should hurt you."

"Well, hurt away. I won't hit back."

"Then I shan't be such a coward. Here, I know: I'll go and take that chap's spear away, and break it."

He nodded his head towards one of the guards on duty close to the entrance of the palace.

"What for?"

"Because I'm in a rage," said Harry between his teeth. "Oh, I could do that, and then run at another and knock him down, and then yell and shout, and throw stones at those great vases, and break the china squares over the doorway. I feel just like those Malay fellows must when they get in one of their mad tempers and run *amok*."

"Why don't you, then?" said Phra mockingly.

"Because I can't," cried Harry bitterly.

"Can't? Why, it would be easy enough. You could go and break the spears of all the guards, and take their crises away. They wouldn't dare to hurt you, seeing what a favourite you are with my father."

"I know all that," said Harry, snapping his teeth together.

"Then why can't you do it?" said Phra mockingly. "Go on; run *amok*."

"Shan't – can't."

"Why can't you?"

"Because I'm English, and I've got to fight it all down, and I'm going to, savage as it makes me feel. Here, what shall we do?"

"Go right up to the highest window in the big tower of the Wat over yonder, and take the telescope up with us."

"I tell you I don't want to. There's nothing to see there that we haven't seen scores of times."

"Yes, there is."

"No, there isn't."

"Yes, there is, I tell you."

"Well, what is there?"

"We could watch and follow them with the glass nearly all the way to the new sugar plantation, and perhaps see the tiger hunt."

Harry started excitedly, and caught his friend by the arm.

"So we could," he said, with his face lighting up. "I needn't go back for our glass; you could get one from your father; he'd let you have that if he wouldn't let you have the elephants."

"Yes. Shall I fetch it?"

"No," cried Harry sharply; "I won't take any more notice of the hunting; we'll do something else."

"But you'd like to see it," said Phra.

"Of course I should, but I won't. There."

"But it's like – what do you call it when you're doing something to hurt yourself?"

"Hurting myself," said Harry bluntly.

"No, no, no. Ah, I've got it. Biting your own nose off in revenge of your face."

"All right, that's what I'm going to do – bite it off. I won't watch them going, and I won't take any more notice of the miserable, disappointing business."

"Oh, Hal, what a temper you're in!"

"I know that, but I'm fighting it all the time, and I mean to win."

"But you'll be obliged to be here when they come back."

"No, I shan't; I won't hear them."

"You can't help it; they'll come marching back, banging the gongs and tomtomming and shouting, with the tiger slung on the back of one elephant, and the doctor and your father in the same howdah. Oh, you'll be obliged to come and meet them."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Harry, drawing a deep breath. "If I don't, they'll think me sulky."

"So you are," said Phra, laughing.

"I'm not; no, not a bit, only in a temper."

"I wish the cricket and football things had come."

"I don't believe they ever will come," said Harry. "See what time it is."

"They will come," said Phra gravely.

"How do you know?"

"Because my father said that we should have them. There, you're better now."

"No, I'm not; I'm ever so much worse," said Harry, through his set teeth.

"Well, let's go and kill something; you'll be better then."

"Don't believe I should," replied Harry. "What should we go and kill?"

"I don't know. Let's get the guns and make two of the men row us up the narrow stream, right up yonder through the jungle where the best birds are. Your father would like it if we got some good specimens ready for Sree to skin."

"Very well," said Harry resignedly; "I shan't mind so long as you don't want me to go up the big temple tower to watch them. I say, Phra, I'm beginning to feel a bit better now."

Phra laughed, and the two boys went into the palace, where the former gave an order to one of the servants about a boat, and then led the way to his own room, a charming little library with a couple of stands on one side bearing guns and weapons of various kinds, beside fishing-rods and a naturalist's collecting gear.

"Which gun will you have?" asked Phra.

"Either; I don't care," was the reply; and by the time they were prepared one of the attendants announced that the boat was ready.

They walked down to the great stone landing-place at the river, stepped into the boat, and seated themselves under the little open-sided roof, while their two rowers pushed off, and keeping close in shore, where the eddy was in their favour, sent the boat rapidly on through the muddy water.

For some distance the forest lay back away from the river, while the bank on their right was pretty well hidden by a continuous mass of house-boats, so close together as almost to touch; but at last these were left behind, and the trees on their left began to encroach upon the fields and fruit gardens, where melons, pines and bananas grew in wonderful profusion, and the air was full of life such as would have delighted an entomologist.

By degrees cultivation ceased and the wild jungle came close down to the stream, and in places even overhung and dipped the tips of branches in the water. Now and then, a small crocodile scuffled off the muddy bank and plunged into the river. Fish began to be more plentiful, little shoals showing on the surface, and in two or three places a heavy fellow springing out in pursuit of its prey and falling back with a splash.

Birds, too, began to be seen: tiny parrots whistled and chattered in the trees; a big hawk hovered overhead; and several times over great long-legged waders were disturbed.

But no attempt at firing was made, the two lads sitting quiet and thoughtful beneath their sheltering roof, musing over the expedition, and wondering whether it was being successful.

In imagination Harry seemed to see it all: the men spread out to beat some fairly open space and drive the tiger towards where the two elephants would be stationed some fifty yards apart, with their occupants, rifle in hand, watching for the slightest movement in a clump of bushes or tuft of reeds.

"Oh, what would I not give to be there!" said Harry to himself at last. "I wish I were not such a boy!"

The colour came a little, though, into his cheeks – or it might have been caused by the heat of the sun, at any rate it was there – as he thought of what the doctor had said, and of his own words to his father.

And as these thoughts came, he felt something like shame at his feeling of dissatisfaction with what he had, and his striving after that which he had not.

"I won't be such a dissatisfied donkey," he muttered, and his face looked brighter as he turned sharply to speak to Phra.

His change affected his companion, who brightened up too.

"We're getting close to the mouth of the little river," he said.

"I'm glad of it," said Harry cheerfully. "I say, they have been quick; it's hot work for them."

"Yes," said Phra, "but they'll have a good rest soon while we're going slowly, and there will be nothing to do but steer, going back."

"I say, suppose they get back first with the tiger."

"I hope they will not," cried Phra; "but it isn't likely. They've a long way to go, and the beating will take a long time. We shall be back first. Ugh, you brute!" he whispered, reaching for his gun, cocking both barrels softly, and taking aim at a large crocodile.

Snip! snap! and then a splash, as the reptile disappeared.

"I don't think you have killed it," said Harry seriously, but with his eyes dancing with mischief.

"Ah, you're better," cried Phra pettishly. "You don't want to run *amok* now. How could I be so stupid! I never thought about not being loaded."

"Better think about it now," said Harry, beginning the operation in the tedious, old-fashioned way that ruled so long before the cartridge was invented for a sportsman's use. "But we were only to shoot birds, I thought."

"Yes, birds, and only beautiful specimens," replied Phra. "I couldn't help being tempted to fire at the brute, though. I shall always be shooting at them now."

"Here we are," said Harry, and at a word from Phra the light sampan was guided into a sluggish side stream only some twenty yards or so wide, while on either side the trees rose like a wall of verdure, the water lapping the leaves, which dipped and played up and down with the motion of the stream.

"You take that side and I'll take this," said Phra; and then giving the order to the rower in front, the man ceased paddling and made his way right astern, to squat down on the little platform beside his fellow, who cleverly propelled and steered the light craft with his one oar, leaving the look-out forward free for the gunners.

"Hullo! How are you, old gentleman?" cried Harry suddenly, as a grey-bearded, venerable-looking little face was suddenly thrust out through the leaves, so that its owner could look down at the strange visitors to his wild home.

There was a sharp chattering, the head of the monkey was drawn back, and then a rustling and waving of the boughs on the left began, going on a little in front.

"There's a whole troop of them travelling along," said Harry.

"Yes, and they'll scare all the birds," cried Phra. "Look, they've startled those lovely parroquets. What's to be done?"

"They'll soon go," replied Harry. "Row away."

The man astern thrust the boat along with his easy, Venice-like manipulation of the oar, and the light boat glided on right in the centre of the beautiful green lane with its watery floor; but the wave as it seemed to be likewise glided along, with a peculiar rustle in the foliage some twenty yards in front.

There was not a sound beside, save when, further ahead, some parroquet darted out with a shriek to cross to the other side of the stream, or a sharp flapping of wings told that it was a dove darting frantically through the twigs to escape from enemies with a great love for eggs, and no objection to savoury, plump morsels in the shape of half-fledged young, by way of change from a fruit diet.

"Let's stop," said Phra, on seeing that the undulation in the green wall on their left kept on at about the same rate.

"Stop, and let them go on?" said Harry. "Very well."

At a word the man ceased paddling, the boat glided on from the impetus already given, but less and less fast, till completely overcome by the stream it was meeting, it gradually came to a standstill, and was on the point of giving way and being borne back, when Harry burst into a hearty laugh, which had the result of making the grey, inquiring face of the monkey that had just peered out, pop back again.

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