

FOLLIES OF THE PASSING SHOW—By Hanlon

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The Terrible Orang-Outang of Borneo at Bay

By CHARLES MAYER.

It seemed to me, as I waited in Mahomed Munshee's village, that it might be a good plan to establish a reputation among the natives as a worker of wonders. Fame as a magician is easily acquired among these people and is an inestimable value in handling them. For the task that lay before us, I needed all their courage and confidence, and I had a feeling that they were accepting me with some doubt. That would never do, for unless I had them under perfect control when the hunt reached its most exciting point, all our efforts might be wasted. They showed proper awe of the express rifle that Ali exhibited so proudly, and they took fitting note of my stores, but still they regarded me simply as a white man who might, or might not, be able to do the things he said he was going to do. They were respectful and hospitable, but the more I saw of them, the more I realized the importance of doing some spectacular thing that would distinguish me in their minds and send tales of my magic traveling through the wilderness of jungle. It is astounding, by the way, how rapidly news travels in the jungle. Many times, in breaking through virgin country, I have found that the news of my coming had preceded me, and that the natives knew all about me and were waiting for me. The only explanation I could ever get was simply, "Tuan, we heard."

A good opportunity to impress the natives presented itself one day when I was preparing to take a plunge in the river. Munshee stopped me, saying: "Take care, sir. There are crocodiles in the river." He told me that many natives had lost their lives recently and that men had had their arms snapped off while they were paddling boats.

I took his advice and went to the house where my supplies were stored. Presently I returned with a stick of dynamite and a fuse. Gathering the natives around me, I explained to them that they were to line the banks of the river and prepare to come out in their boats when I gave the signal. They were entirely mystified, for they had never heard of dynamite.

Going up-stream, I prepared the charge and then drifted down, dropping it over. Wide-eyed and puzzled, they watched the smoke fuse disappear into the water. Then came a muffled explosion, which made them jump; the water trembled, shaking the boats and frightening them; fish came to the surface, signaled and the scramble to gather the fish began.

Ali was standing near me, ready to put the rifle into my hands, and I strained my eyes, looking for crocodiles. Suddenly a woman screamed to the opposite bank and screamed, "Basa (crocodile)!"

I yelled to Munshee to take his men down-stream and keep them quiet and on the alert; then I directed my boat above the spot where

the woman had pointed. I dropped another stick of dynamite overhead. A few seconds later, the belly of a crocodile appeared on the surface; its feet and tail moved feebly. It was stunned by the explosion—mabok (drunk), as the natives say. I took my gun and put two bullets into its belly. Before it could sink, Ali grabbed its tail; then we gathered about, wildly excited, and Mahomed Munshee was the proudest man in the village. He had vouched for my abilities and I had proved my possession of the powers that he claimed for me. I was hobat-an (magic).

The crocodile measured fifteen feet, four inches and was 25 years old. The natives could tell its age by counting the pebbles in its pouch. I decided to stop at Munshee's for a few days longer, to have the men gather rattan to make the nets, and also to talk with the natives about orang-outangs and plan all the details of the capture. Omar, the other headman, went on up to his village, taking with him as much of our stores of provisions as he could carry. I was willing enough to have him spread the crocodile story among the natives and I knew that the tale would not suffer in the telling.

Omar was to determine, if possible, the exact location of the orang-outangs and to make arrangements, such as engaging recruits for the hunt, in advance of my arrival.

It took us four days to gather as much rattan as we could carry in our boats; then, with 30 men, we started up the river. I found at each village that Omar had done more than justice to the crocodile story and that he had taken with him a select crew of men. As in Trengganu, the natives felt that this was to be the great sporting event of the year, and they were anxious to take part. Their keen interest in the adventure made it possible for us to choose the strongest and best of them, together with a few older men, who knew the jungle.

Our boatmen swung on their paddles steadily, pushing the boats against the current. Solid banks of foliage lined the sides of the stream, and, in places, the branches touched overhead, making a thick canopy that shaded us. In the sun, the heat was blistering.

When we arrived at Omar's kampong, the entire population was on the banks to welcome us. Omar came forward and announced that he had recruited 70 men—Malays and Dyaks—for the hunt and that he would vouch for all of them. That made a crew of 100, counting the 30 who came with me, and we examined one another curiously. I was the first white man that most of them had seen.

Leaving instructions that a council was to be called for the next morning, I went to the house that Omar had prepared for me. Ali and the Chinese boy accompanied me with my personal equipment, and

I sat talking with Omar while I waited for my bed to be prepared, so that I could get my afternoon nap.

Ali, who had become a good shot, showed the villagers my express rifle and demonstrated what an explosive bullet could do to the trunks of trees. The men were fascinated by that power of destruction, and they passed their fingers reverently over the barrel and listened to Ali's stories while he cleaned it. All had traveled all over the far east with me and he gave marvelous interpretations of what he had seen. He could hold an audience of natives spellbound for hours and, incidentally, he was an excellent publicity man for me. In his whole-hearted, childish, Malay fashion, he accepted me as the greatest man in the world and he was never contented unless others did so, too.

I wanted the council to be a formal affair, and so I had Omar sound the call by striking on a hollow log. The older men took their places first, squatting in a semi-circle; then the younger men squatted behind them. The women and children loitered on the outskirts at a respectful distance. All of them were chewing betel-nut. From the house, I watched the council assemble, but I did not go out until Omar came for me. Then, with Omar and Munshee walking beside me, I left the house, dressed in native costume—Chinese trousers, sarong and jacket. The chattering ceased as I approached, and all eyes were centered on me. Every one was visibly impressed by the fact that I was wearing the clothes of a native, and that they were of the finest quality, and entitled me to much consideration.

The importance of staging such an expedition—all the "magic," the talk, the council and the costume—was not to be underrated.

I squatted before the council and talked long and earnestly about the work that lay before us.

Then I called upon the men who had been sent out to locate the orang-outangs. They had found them about two hours' distance from the village; they described the location and told how it could be reached. A general discussion followed. I gave each man a chance to express his ideas. They all wanted to talk—preferably all at the same time—and the council dragged on for hours. With the assistance of Omar, I kept the debate orderly, and we listened to all sorts of opinions.

For the most part, they felt that it would be necessary to kill the animals. That, of course, was the last thing in the world that I wanted. It would mean that the expedition was wasted effort; there are few live orang-outangs in zoological gardens, but many stuffed ones in museums. I did not agree with the idea that we should have to kill the animals, but I did not entirely disagree. We compromised by reaching the decision that, if they must be killed, I should do the work and no man should try

to kill them without my consent. The natives had seen what one bullet from my rifle would do to a tree, and they were convinced that an orang-outang would stand a poor chance.

The council broke up and work began. I had Omar set some of his men to making strong nets of twisted rattan. He drew plans for the two cages and had other men gather the limbs of trees for them. The cages were just large enough to hold the animals and small enough to keep them from getting any leverage on the bars. After the skeletons of the cages were built, they were bound tightly with rattan ropes so that, even if the bars were broken, the orang-outangs would be in a network.

The strength of a full grown orang-outang is enormous. I have seen one bend a one-inch steel bar as though it were made of rubber. If he can brace himself properly, with plenty of room to exert his entire strength, he can bend almost anything; but between bending a bar and breaking a rope by pulling, there is a great deal of difference. A rattan rope will hold him, though a simple manergerie cage may not give him any more trouble than a paper hoop.

The strength of the orang-outang, or "wild man," as the name means in Malay, is largely in his arms. The arms of a mias—the breed that we were after—measure 10 feet or more from tip to tip. The mias type, which is next in size to the gorilla, is somewhat larger than the ordinary breed. It is distinguished by a darker color and by folds of skin at each side of the face. Its body, from shoulders to hips, is about the size of a man's. It has short, undeveloped legs, long fingers and thumbs that are mere stubs.

An orang-outang never travels on the ground when he can swing from tree to tree, and, since there are very few open spaces in the jungle, he seldom reaches the ground except when he goes down to get something he can swing incredible distances, hurtling through the air and catching branches with perfect accuracy.

Orang-outangs usually live in colonies numbering from 40 to 60, and the largest and most powerful is the chief. They make their homes on platforms in the branches of trees and they build the platforms by breaking off limbs and putting them crosswise. In mating season the male and female live together, but the couples separate after the young are born. The mother takes care of them and the father goes off about his business.

As they do in the case of most dangerous animals, the native collectors hunt orang-outangs by killing the mother and taking the young. The weapon they most often use, except when they have guns, is the blow pipe, which, in the hands of an expert, is not to be despised. It is a long, slender tube, measuring from

six to eight feet, made from a single joint of rare bamboo. The tube is allowed to dry and harden and is wrapped tightly with rattan. The darts, which are about the size of a steel knitting needle, are made from the midribs of palm leaves, and at one end there is a small conical butt, which fits tightly into the bore of the pipe. A small rick is made in the shaft of the dart just below the point, and the end is coated with a deadly poison made from the sap of the upas-tree and another species of the genus Ipo. When the dart strikes, the end breaks off and remains in the wound; the poison acts rapidly, first paralyzing, then killing the victim. In warfare, also, the natives poison kris and spear, and the wound is invariably fatal.

Fighting a full-grown orang-outang with weapons so primitive is extremely hazardous work, and the natives avoid it except when a beast becomes a menace to the village. An orang-outang in battle is ferocious. If it is tired and afraid to come down, it goes into a paroxysm of fury. It will bite its arms, tearing the flesh away and inflicting frightful wounds. If there are two of the animals, they bite and hug each other. An orang-outang that has been struck by an arrow can follow the natives in the trees or on the ground while the poison is taking effect. The only refuge from the frenzied creature is the smoke of a fire, and, when it is sufficiently enraged, even that will not stop it. The best chance lies in keeping it at bay, but that it does not know whom to attack; once it decides on a particular native, the native is as good as dead. When the poison begins to work, after an animal has been wounded, the natives end the fight with knives. The possibility of an orang-outang attack is a danger that all the men must be prepared to face, and the duty of engaging in an orang-outang hunt is no less important than that of making war. It was but normal, therefore, that, as soon as I had convinced the villagers of my trustworthiness, I should have their hearty support.

After putting the men to work on the nets and cages, I selected a crew of 25 to accompany me while I went out to get the lay of the land. I warned the men against doing anything that might frighten the animals unnecessarily and explained that we should do no hunting for smaller game until we had attended to the two big orang-outangs.

With the guides leading, we started into the dense jungle, and, after several hours of slow, tortuous traveling, we came to the tree where the animals lived. I could see, far up, the platform they had built.

Fortunately, the orang-outangs were not there, and we were able to inspect the location at our leisure. I stationed the men at one side, telling them to wait for us, and then Omar and Munshee and I circled the tree. The surrounding jungle was as thick as any I have ever seen;

the trees were so close that their branches mingled and they were woven together with creepers, vines and rattan. It was not possible to go forward a step without cutting the way. The tree in which the orang-outangs lived was the largest in the vicinity. Nearly an hour passed before I decided upon the course we would pursue. Squatting with Omar and Munshee, I explained how we would cut away the trees, so as to leave in isolation the one in which the animals had their platform; then, how we would cut that tree and tumble them into the net.

We went back to the place where the men were waiting, and I put them to work at cutting the mass of creepers that bound the trees together. The jungle was so dense that it would have been impossible to fell the trees without first cutting the network woven between them; for it would have held the trees upright even though they were cut at the base. Without tearing the creepers to the ground, we cut each stick at 60 feet on all sides. I estimated that the trees beyond would be well out of swinging distance for the orangs. At the point where I planned to have the big tree drop I had an additional 30 feet cut. Then, when the creepers were all singly hanging, we began work on the trees.

First-rate native jungle men use their parangs with astounding rapidity and accuracy. I doubt if there are any finer woodsmen in the world. Their greatest fault is that they like to stop working in order to talk. Omar, Munshee and I, knowing this weakness for conversation, circled through the jungle constantly, urging our men on. Partly as a result of this watchfulness, perhaps, I have never seen natives do a piece of work more rapidly and rapidly. It was vitally important, of course, that we finish before the big fellows came swinging back home.

The trees were cut so that they remained standing. We were trying to achieve something like a dominoes, which one push will send toppling. At a signal every tree in the circle I had mapped out was to fall, those at the center first and the others in order, until the one in which the orang-outangs had their platform was isolated. It was a delicate problem in junglcraft to cut the trees so that they would bear the weight of animals swinging in the branches, and yet be so weak that they would all fall—and in the proper directions—when we started them by pulling on the ropes. I allowed myself to be guided entirely by the judgment of the natives; they appreciated my confidence and took care to see that the work was done accurately.

The hacking with the parangs and the conversation attracted hundreds of jungle animals, including many of the smaller orang-outangs. We did not molest them, and they grew

bolder, until we had a large, chattering, screaming audience watching us work.

Long before the two big brutes came back to their home, we were on our way to Omar's kampong, with the first stage of the work completed. The jungle as we left it did not appear greatly different from the way it looked when we arrived. I knew that the orang-outangs would realize that some one had been there, and yet I was fairly certain that the absence of human beings would reassure them. And, too, they would have several days to accustom themselves to whatever changes they noticed.

At the kampong, I called the men together again, this time for an informal council. I told them that I had considered carefully everything that had happened the day before, and that, after inspecting the location, I had come to the conclusion that we could easily capture the animals. It would be simply a matter of rapid work and of each man's thoroughly understanding his job. Drawing a circle on the ground and planting a stick in the middle, I explained what we were to do and how we were to do it. Then I told them how we had cut the creepers and prepared the trees.

During the next four days we avoided the location as much as possible. Crews of men, bearing bundles of dry grass and bushes, approached within 500 feet, dropped their bundles and returned to the village. The grass and bushes were to be used for the fire I planned to build at the base of the tree, once the orang-outangs were isolated there. We took care never to go near when the big fellows were at home, and the other jungle creatures grew less and less perturbed each time we appeared.

I remained at the kampong, supervising the making of the nets and cages. The entire population helped us, and I put some of the people to work at making smaller cages and rigging snares for other animals. Finally, when the nets and cages were ready and the material for the platform was isolated, I began drilling the men in their parts. Thirty men were detailed to the work of pulling down the trees in the circle; 10 men to clearing the space where the big tree was to fall, and 10 men to handling each side of the big net. It was upon the last-named crew that the success of the attack rested, for any mistake or delay in manipulating the net would mean that the animals would escape—even probably with disastrous results. Omar and Munshee helped me select the men from the number of those who had previously demonstrated their courage and resourcefulness in the face of danger. I had a long pole put up near the village, and we rehearsed the capture, innumerable times; the pole would fall, and the men would cast the net and secure it over the bunch of grass tied to the top to represent the orang-outangs. We repeated that

performance for several days, and I always stood by with my rifle in my hands as if I were ready to put an explosive bullet into the bundle of grass, if it tried to escape.

When they had played the part so many times that there seemed to be no chance of a blunder, we had a full rehearsal. As the pole fell, this time, the other men closed in, beating with the clubs, pounding tom-toms and yelling. I wanted them to make just as much noise as possible when the orangs came down; for noise paralyzes animals with fright and makes them easier to handle.

On the eighth night at Omar's village, I called all the men together and announced that we would start next morning before daybreak. Once again I made them promise that they would not kill the beasts without my permission, and I, in turn, promised them that I would shoot if there was the least danger. Long before daybreak the village was astir. All those who were to take no part in the hunt were ordered to stay behind, and they stood silently watching us while the men shouldered the nets and ropes and filed into the jungle blackness.

By the time it was light, each man was at his post, waiting for me to fire my pistol as a signal. We could see the two orang-outangs sleeping on their platform.

The men who were to give the trees the final cut and send them toppling over stole forward silently. Ali was beside me, carrying my rifle; Omar and Munshee were stationed near, one at each side.

Omar moved first; then Munshee. I gave a quick glance around and fired my pistol. Instantly the tumult started; the men yelled and beat upon tom-toms and trees. The orang-outangs leaped up bewildered and scrambled about their platform. Through the noise I could hear the men at work with their parangs; then came the crashing of trees. The jungle seemed to fold up, and the big tree stood alone. The orangs screamed and hugged each other. Men rushed forward with the bundles of dry grass and started the fire; others came with wet leaves to make a smudge. One of the orangs started, as if to come down, and I reached for my rifle; but when the smoke struck him, he went back to the platform, screaming and tearing the tree. Then, as the smoke became more dense, the two animals climbed higher and sat on the topmost limb, arms and legs wrapped around each other.

The natives danced and yelled. Through the clouds of smoke that drifted over us, I could see their black bodies flashing, arms waving, and lips, stained crimson with betel-nut, wide open. The din was terrific. For several minutes I just stood there, unable to move.

(Continued Next Sunday.)

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