

FOLLIES OF THE PASSING SHOW—By Hanlon

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SOME CANDIDATES FOR DISARMAMENT

The Sea Tragedy of the Wild Orang-Outangs

By CHARLES MAYER.

Illustration by Will Crawford.

The orang-outangs, high up in the tree, were huddled together, swaying back and forth. Omar came with the message that the space was cleared for the tree to fall; I ordered the net carried to position and sent the two headmen to place the natives at their posts.

Dense clouds of smoke rolled up from the smudges, enveloping the tree completely and hiding the orang-outangs, who perched aloft, screaming and coughing. I could get occasional glimpses of them, as they sat there, hugging each other.

The big rattan nets were in place, with the men holding them ready to cast when the tree came down. Other men, armed with sharp-pointed poles, stood behind, to pin the beasts down if the nets did not fall in the proper position. They were so excited that I spent several minutes in casually walking about, talking with them and calming them. All frugged a few feet behind me, carrying my express rifle.

We cleared away the litter of tree trunks and creepers from the spot where the big tree was to fall, so that there might be nothing underfoot to interfere with rapid work; then I gave the signal for the tom-toms. The racket began again and the crew of men detailed to cutting the tree ran through the smoke barrier, waving their banners and shouting. I stood outside, near the net, watching the orangs and keeping the men at their stations. Omar was with me, and Munshee was with the men who were doing the cutting. We could hear the big knives hacking into the tree.

A messenger from Munshee came with the word that the tree was ready to drop. I gave a hasty glance around me, told the men to be on the alert and sent him back with instructions to let the tree fall. Once again through the din of tom-toms and shouts we could hear chopping; the tree swayed for a moment, the orang-outangs screamed with terror and the men with the nets crouched, ready to spring. Slowly the tree toppled and came down, gathering speed as it fell, exactly in the spot we had marked. When it struck, the entire jungle seemed to be in upheaval.

The orang-outangs abruptly stopped their outcry. As they hit the ground, they were paralyzed with fright. A net went sailing over them. In an instant they came to their senses and began fighting. With long, black, powerful arms they lashed at the rattan; they leaped and struggled, biting the ropes and tearing great gashes in their bodies. They screamed and chattered furiously. One of them reached out and grabbed a native by the throat, whipping him through the air and breaking his neck. The native struck the ground several yards away, blood pouring from his nose and mouth.

I yelled to the men to cast the second net and secure it to the trees. The orangs kept up a constant bawling, lashing and heaving under the ropes that pressed them to the ground. Their arms and legs became entangled in the meshes of the nets, and they wasted their strength in wrenching and squirming. While we fastened them down, the natives, crazy with excitement, pressed in, tumbling over one another.

Our material had been put to the greatest test and would hold the animals, I knew, for they could not again equal the struggle of the first few minutes. So, because I wanted them to have room to become thoroughly tangled in the nets, I ordered the ropes slackened a trifle.

Just then, while I was standing near the nets, superintending the work of making them fast, a huge paw shot out and grabbed my ankle. I was jerked off the ground and, as I fell, my hands caught the limb of a tree. I clung to it with all my strength, feeling my fingers weaken and slip while the brute pulled. The joints at my hip and knee pained me for an instant; then my leg became numb. The men stood terrified and I could not yell at them; I felt myself growing dizzy and I simply wondered why some one did not do something. Then Omar grabbed a club and pounded the orang's arm; the pulling stopped, and I realized that I was being dragged away from the nets. For several minutes I was too groggy to know what was happening, but the idea that the natives might kill the orang-outangs while I was disabled made me sit up. They were standing there, looking first at me and then at the animals, wondering what to do. I told them I was all right and I began feeling my leg. It was not broken, but it had been so badly wrenched that I could not stand on it.

While I sat on the ground directing the work the men gathered the outside meshes of the nets and ran a rope through them. Then, as the other ropes were loosened, they pulled the noose close, and the two brutes were in a sack. For the first time I had an opportunity to examine our catch. They were the two biggest orang-outangs ever captured in Borneo.

Gradually they exhausted themselves and gave up the struggle. They peered out through the meshes, snarling at the men who came near them and sometimes shooting out a long arm with the fingers opening and closing. The natives squatted about in a circle, watching the animals' and laughing.

When the men had rested I had them build two litters of boughs—one for the dead man and the other for me. Then we strung the net on three long poles, to be carried by 12 men, and started back to the village. Messengers went on ahead to tell the people of the kampong of our success. I headed the procession;

then came the orang-outangs with natives dancing around them and beating tom-toms; then the dead man. It was necessary to stop often to change crews that were carrying the litters and the animals—they weighed over 500 pounds—and the entire population of Omar's kampong came out to meet us in the jungle before we had covered half the distance. My coolie boy, who had remained at the village, was ahead of them all. He was one of the fastest rickshaw men I have ever seen, and his old training came in handy that day. He wanted to carry me in his arms back to the village, but I told him to run back and put some water on to boil for me.

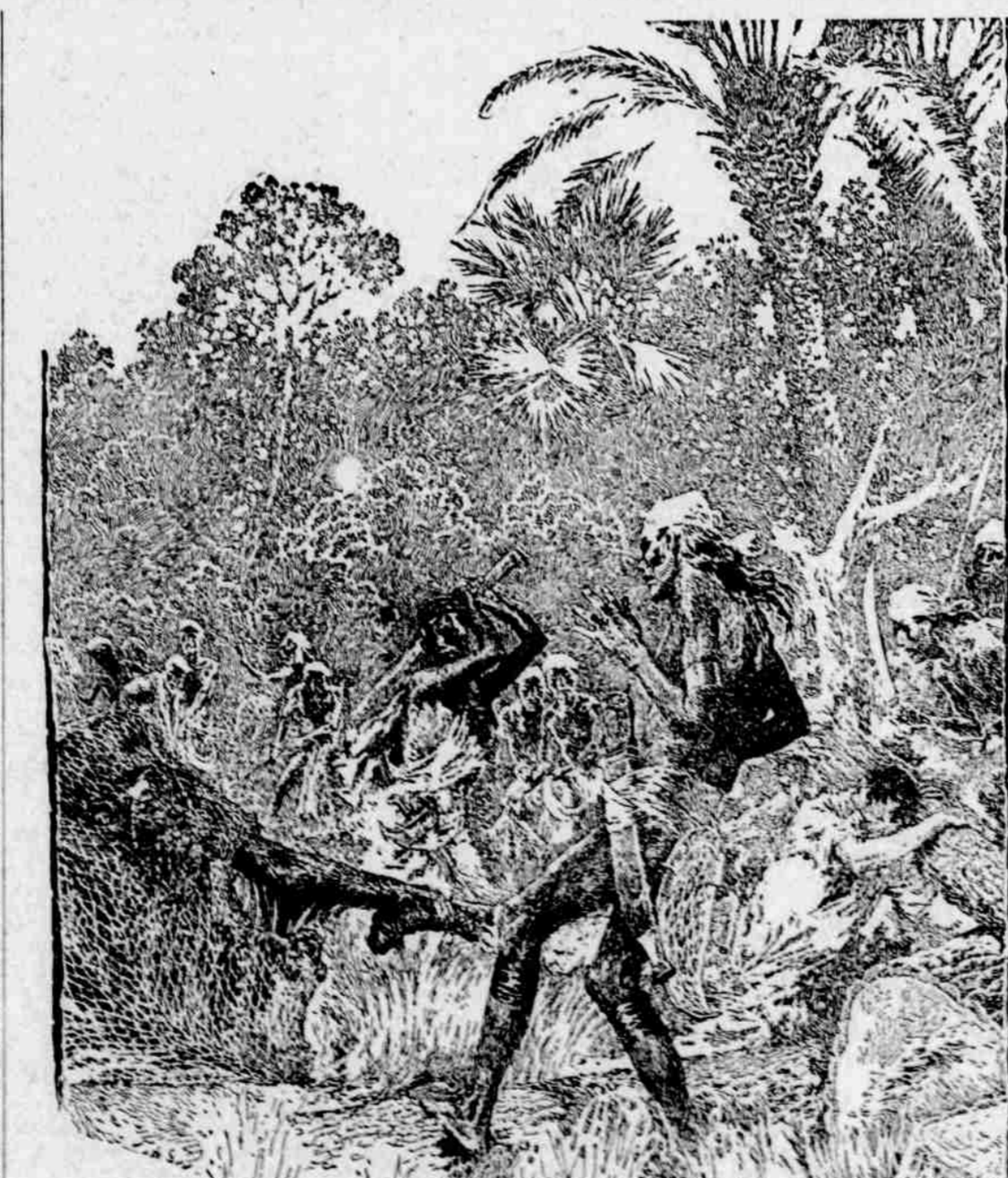
I left Omar and Munshee in charge of the orangs, and had my men hurry ahead with me, for my leg was paining me intensely and I could feel the fever coming on. I had many things to do before I could afford to be sick, and I did not want to lose any time. For one thing, I realized that it would be impossible to get the animals into separate cages and that it would be necessary to build a larger cage before we could take them from the nets. It would be too dangerous to leave them in the nets overnight, for they might chew their way out.

At the village I found that my boy had laid out my medicine kit. I soaked my leg in hot water and massaged it; then we painted it with iodine and bandaged it tightly. By the time the procession arrived I was ready to give Omar and Munshee orders about the new cage.

While the women prepared the feast of chicken, rice and sugar-cakes, the men went into the jungle again and cut logs eight feet long and from six to eight inches in diameter. These they drove two feet into the ground, placing them not more than three inches apart, so as to form a cage eight feet long and three feet wide. Then they bound them together tightly with rattan ropes and made an lashed-down strong roof of logs. One end of the cage was left open for the animals to enter.

Propped up on my litter, I directed the work; then I was carried while I made a careful inspection of it. When the cage was ready, the orang-outangs were brought up to the open end, the poles were drawn out and the slip-knot of the outer net was loosened. By using poles and working at a respectful distance, the men forced into the cage the single net containing the animals; then they drove the end-bars into the ground and lashed them. Finally, by working between the bars, they loosened the slip-knot of the net and left the orang-outangs free to untangle themselves.

By the time the job was finished, I was exhausted by the fever, and my leg was paining me unbearably.



A huge paw shot out and grabbed my ankle. I was jerked off the ground, and, as I fell, my hands caught the limb of a tree. . . . The brute pulled. I felt myself growing dizzy. . . . Then Omar grabbed a club and pounded the orang's arm.

I thanked the men for their good work and was carried back to Omar's house.

In the morning I sent for Munshee and told him that it would be necessary for me to go down the river to Sintang, where Dr. Van Erman lived. He selected four of his fastest boatmen and sent them off to the doctor with the message I was coming. Their orders were that they might stop at Naoah-Pinoh to eat, but that they were not to rest until the message was delivered. Just as soon as they were out of the way, Munshee turned to preparing a boat for me; an awning made of palm leaves was put over the center and a bed arranged.

I left Omar in charge of the orang-outangs, with Ali to assist him. Ali objected to being left behind, but I explained to him that he could be of greatest service to me by staying. He was to see that the orang-outangs were fed and watered and to have the natives trap other animals for me. I instructed Omar to build a shed over the cage and to place a fence around it, so that

conscious when we reached Sintang. Two days later I awoke in Dr. Van Erman's house and was unable for some time to realize where I was and why I was there. The doctor came in and talked with me for a few minutes. He said that I would be well in two weeks and that my leg was not badly damaged. Then I drifted off to sleep again.

The next day I felt stronger, and the doctor repeated some of the tales the natives were telling about the capture of the orang-outangs and the death of the crocodile. The stories had improved with age, and so I told him what had actually happened.

Mahomed Munshee has been waiting here for you to get well," said the doctor. "I think he'd like to see you—if you don't mind."

Munshee came in, beaming with delight. Taking my hand and pressing it to his forehead, he told me that only one chosen by "God and the Prophet" could recover from the fever and the sickness caused by the paw of an orang-outang. All of the villagers, he said, had been making offerings to the different deities for my recovery, and the people would be happy to hear that Tian was well again. I told him that I would return with him to Omar's kampong within two weeks, and he left, promising to come for me.

By the time Mahomed Munshee came for me I was quite ready to go up the river. I had seen enough of the country to know that the jungles were full of animals, and I wanted to capture as many as possible before starting back for Singapore. Munshee said that the orang-outangs were in good health and that Omar's men, working with Ali, had made many captures. Dr. Van Erman cashed a draft for me, so that I should have silver money to distribute to the natives who had helped me, and I started up the river, promising to stop on my way down so that the doctor could see the animals.

At Munshee's request, I stopped over night in his village. The people gave me a royal welcome and we had a fine celebration. The news of my coming went ahead of us, and Omar and Ali came down the river, meeting us two hours' distance below the kampong. They gave me an enthusiastic reception and I was touched by their affection. We rowed on up the river and, when we reached Omar's village I found that the people had been busy for days, preparing the festivities in honor of my return.

After greeting the people, I went directly to the cage of the orang-outangs. They showed little fight, and I was encouraged to find that they were not too despondent. I did not want to risk transporting them until they had become thoroughly accustomed to captivity—or at least as much accustomed to it as is possible for orang-outangs. For some

sickness grips them just as it grips human beings, and they become pitiable objects. If they refuse to eat, it is scarcely worth while to spend time and money in transporting them, for scissiveness and the excitement of traveling will kill them. I had been lucky enough to find my captives eating quietly and taking life calmly.

Before beginning the work of capturing other animals, I turned my attention to preparing the transportation cages. These were three feet wide, three feet high and five and a half feet long—just large enough to hold the orangs, without giving them any chance to wrench at the bars. They sat clutching each other while we placed the transportation cages at each end of the big cage. Occasionally they snarled at us and reached out between the bars. Natives armed with sharpened poles held them back. Then, by poking and prodding, we separated them and ran bars through the center of the big cage. These operations excited the beasts so greatly that they left off work for the day. The next morning we went to the cage again and out away the end bars so that the animals could enter their transportation cages. These gave them more room, and I stationed an extra guard over them with instructions to call me immediately if they began to tear at the bars. Ali spent practically all of his time there, talking to them and feeding them. Gradually they became accustomed to him, and, although they were far from accepting him as a friend, they did know him and realize that he was not there to hurt or annoy them. All others, except the headmen and myself, were kept away from the cages.

Food was always placed in the transportation cages, and, since the animals were deprived of each other's company, they became accustomed to spending their time in them. That, of course, was exactly what I wanted, and the prospects looked more encouraging each day.

We spent the next two weeks in trapping and snaring, and I kept the men of the kampong busy all the time, either at collecting the animals or at building cages for them. I was fortunate enough to get one proboscis-monkey. It is a rare, long-nosed species, difficult to capture. My standing orders from zoological gardens all over the world were included one of these creatures, but this was the only one I ever caught. We found him hopelessly tangled in a net we had put up near a watering place. He was a fine specimen, two feet high, with long arms, legs and tail, and a nose that measured two inches.

Among the animals we captured while working from Omar's kampong were three gibbons, or wah-wahs. These are also known as flying gibbons, because they make such long leaps from tree to tree. The

(Continued on Page Five)