

OUR TROPICAL POSSESSIONS

18

MALAYAN INDIA:

BEING A DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT OF SINGAPORE, PENANG,  
PROVINCE WELLESLEY, AND MALACCA; THEIR  
PEOPLES, PRODUCTS, COMMERCE,  
AND GOVERNMENT.

BY

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certain seasons of the year, and is then thickly spread over on the Singapore side with stakes and nets. Early one morning a party of Malay fishermen, who had set their nets overnight, proceeded to examine what luck they had had, and were surprised to find secured in their meshes a large female tiger. The animal had in its struggles to get free thoroughly entangled itself, and was completely exhausted, and nearly drowned. There was still some life left, however, and the Malays thought it wiser to despatch it before bringing it to shore. From the part of the net in which the animal was entangled, it was clear that it had been approaching from the mainland; it could not have swam off from the Singapore shores, for several rows of nets lying further in were uninjured.

This circumstance first directed attention to the probability that it was from Johore that Singapore was supplied with tigers, and it is said that since then they have on several occasions been seen swimming across the channel. It is beyond doubt that, once established on the island, they have since increased and multiplied,\* but it is probable that considerable reinforcements are still from time to time received from the mainland.

What has induced these animals to leave the mainland of Johore, where the forests are undisturbed, for the limited jungles of Singapore, it is difficult to say, unless it be their horrible love for human blood. In Johore, game is plentiful; there are deer and wild hogs in much greater abundance than in Singapore,

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\* This is certain, as cubs only a few days old have frequently been caught.

and a host of other animals besides, that are unknown on the island, among which are the buffalo, rhinoceros, and elephant; indeed, as far as animal life is concerned, it is beyond all doubt that the mainland is richer in every species except man. On the island, however, they have now established themselves, nor does it seem at all probable that they will leave it as long as a strip of jungle remains.

The manner in which they execute their destruction upon man is simple and uniform. Though ferocious, they are cowardly to a degree, and while I have inquired into the circumstances attending every death by tigers for a number of years back, I have been unable to find one case where the victim was not come upon unawares, and from behind. The animal moves rapidly and noiselessly through the tangled brushwood of the jungle as near to its intended victim as possible, and there keeps watch, it may be for hours, for a fitting opportunity. This occurs when, if the poor fellow be a gambier planter, he is intent upon stripping some out-of-the-way branch of its leaves, and has his back turned to the direction of the tiger. The brute then steps forth slowly in a crouching attitude till within seven or eight yards, when it gives one fierce and well-directed bound forward, and down goes the man, dead, with the first stroke of the beast's muscular paw. In an instant the tiger seizes the body, generally by the neck, and tossing it across its back, bounds into the jungle, where it is safe.

It is at all events some comfort to reflect that however horrible the death may appear it is quickly

were constructed so that the planking of one side would open out or let down; these vessels were run some miles up the Prye river and moored in deep water close to the bank, the side was opened out and a broad planking sloped from the bank into the hold. The elephants were enticed on to this planking, the extremity of which reaching on board was then suddenly lowered a little and the animals slid down into the hold. It is many years since this export stopped, and the demand in Siam is so great as to absorb all that are now reclaimed from the forests.

The rhinoceros is still plentiful in the bordering forests, and they not unfrequently make incursions into the province itself. They are hunted by the Malays for the sake of their horns and hides. The wild ox or bison is also in great abundance; its flesh is sweet and wholesome, and the Malay hunters cure the meat and bring it into market to be sold to the Chinese junks and native prahus; these hides are also valuable, but the great object is to capture them alive and break them in to be beasts of burden. Wild hogs and deer abound; the former is a very powerful animal. A few months ago a planter in the province shot at one and slightly wounded it, on which the beast rushed upon him, knocked him down, and a deadly scuffle ensued, from which the planter very narrowly escaped with his life. Besides these that I have enumerated, there is an abundance of smaller animals, such as monkeys, squirrels, &c., also birds, alligators, and snakes; and any one really bent upon sport, with some good guns in his kit, and