

IN
COURT & KAMPONG

BEING
TALES & SKETCHES OF NATIVE LIFE
IN THE MALAY PENINSULA

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I cried aloud three times, "I am Si-Hamid, the Tiger unbound!"—for by that name did men then call me—"Get ye to your dwellings speedily, and leave your money where it is, or I will slay you!"

'Many were affrighted, some laughed, some hesitated, but none did as I bade them. "Dogs and pigs!" I cried, "Are your ears deaf that ye obey me not, or are ye sated with life, and desire that your shrouds should be prepared? Obey me, or I will slay ye all, as a kite swoops upon little chickens! What is your power, and what are your stratagems, and how can ye prevail against me? I who am invulnerable, I whom even the fire burns but cannot devour!"

'With that I thrust my right hand into the flame of a gaming lamp, and it, being saturated with the white man's perfume, blazed up bravely even to my elbow, doing me no hurt, as I waved my arm above my head. Verily, the white men are very clever, who so cunningly devise the medicine of these perfumes.

'Now, when all the people in the gambling house saw that my arm and hand burned with fire, but were not consumed, a great fear fell upon them, and they fled shrieking, and no man stayed to gather up his silver. This I presently put into sacks, and my men removed it to my house, and my fame waxed very great in Klang. Men said that henceforth Si-Hamid should be named the Fiery Rhinoceros,¹ and not the Unbound Tiger, as they had hitherto called me. It was long ere the trick became known, and even then no man, among those who were within the

¹ Fiery Rhinoceros = *Bidadak api*, a fabulous monster of Malay tradition.

gaming house that night, dared ask me for the money which I had borrowed from him and his fellows. Ya Allah, T'uan, but those days were exceeding good days! I cannot think upon them, for it makes me sad. It is true what is said in the *pantun* of the men of Kēdah :

* Pūlau Pīnang has a new town,
And Captain Light is its King ;
Do not recall the days that are gone,
Or you will bow down your head,
And the tears will gush forth !

‘Ya Allah! Ya Tūhan-ku! Verily, I cannot think upon it!’

He tossed about uneasily on his mat for some time, and I let him be, for the memory of the old, free days to a Malay *rāja*, whose claws have been cut by the Europeans, is like new wine when it comes back suddenly upon him, and it is best, I think, to let a man fight out such troubles alone and in silence. ‘Can words make foul things fair?’—and, however much I might sympathise with my friend, there was no blinking the fact, that he and I were then engaged in trying to do for another set of Malay *rājas*, all that Raja Haji Hamid so bitterly regretted that the white men had done for him, and for Sēlāngor.

After a space he became calmer, for though the thought of his troubles is often present to the mind of a Malay *rāja*, the paroxysms, which the memory occasions, are not usually of long duration. Presently he began chuckling to himself, and then spoke again :

at the approach of strangers, a water-buffalo does not inspire them with as much terror as a tiger, and they do not hesitate to make, comparatively speaking, long journeys from their homes if occasion requires. In all this they differ widely from the semi-wild Sākai of the centre of the Peninsula. These men trade with the Malays, it is true, but the trade has to be carried on by visitors who penetrate into the Sākai country for the purpose. Most of them have learned to speak Malay, though many know only their own primitive language, and when their three numerals, *na-nu*, *nar*, and *ní*—one, two, and three—have been used, fall back for further expression of arithmetical ideas on the word *Kérpn*, which means ‘many.’ For clothes they wear the narrow loin cloth, fashioned from the bark of certain trees, which only partially covers their nakedness; they are as shy as the beasts of the forest, and never willingly do they quit that portion of the country which is still exclusively inhabited by the aboriginal tribes. It was to semi-wild Sākai such as these that Chép and her people belonged.

There are tribes of other and more savage jungledwellers living in the forests of the broad Sākai country, men who fly to the jungles even when approached by the tamer tribesmen. Their camps may be seen, on a clear day, far up the hillsides on the jungle-covered uplands of the remote interior; their tracks are occasionally to be met with mixed with those of the bison and the rhinoceros, the deer and the wild swine, but the people themselves are but rarely encountered. The tamer Sākai trade with them, depositing the articles of barter at certain spots in the forest, whence