

MALAY SKETCHES

FRANK ATHELSTONE SWETTENHAM

DIRECTOR D'ACROÛTIQUE.



LONDON JOHN LANE - THE BULLY HEAD -

NEW YORK MACMILLAN & CO. MDCCCXV -



BIBLIOTHEEK

DE

INDISCHE INSTELLING

TE DELFT.

VIII

THE STORY OF MAT ARIS

I create him as I would a worm,
With heart as spotted, with nerves as
thin;
He never wakes again.

WARRIOR

IT was in the year 1876 that a man named Mat Aris, of no occupation and less repute, persuaded one Sâhit to take his wife Salmah and start on a journey through the jungle to a distant country. The interest of Mat Aris in this couple was a desire to get rid of Sâhit and possess himself of the woman Salmah, for whom he had conceived an overmastering passion.

The travellers began their journey at a spot many miles up the Perak River; their road lay along a jungle track, and so sparsely inhabited was the country they were to pass through, that they could not even find a habitation in which to pass the night. They had to look forward to many days'

MALAY SKETCHES

journey through the primeval forest, the home of wild beasts and Sakai people, aboriginal tribes almost as shy and untamed as the elephant, the bison and the rhinoceros, with which they share the forests of the interior.

Sabit and his wife started on their journey in the company of two brothers of Mat Aria, but meeting him the brothers returned, Mat Aria undertaking the part of escort. In the afternoon of the first day's march a Sakai named Pah Patia met the three, and, being known to Mat Aria, that worthy ordered him to accompany them. Pah Patia did as he was told, and when evening came on, as there was no dwelling within miles, a shelter was built in the jungle wherein the night was to be passed.

It is as well to understand what a Malay jungle is like, for a good soil, well watered, in one of the hottest and dampest climates in the world, produces a forest that is not altogether the counterpart of all other forests.

The reading public, no doubt, believes that the jungle of Darkest Africa is a place of gloom, terror and difficulty without parallel. It may be so, but few of those who know it have visited Malaya, and one is apt to exaggerate one's own troubles. Whatever gruesome peculiarities there are about

THE KING'S WAY

We know what Heaven or Hell may
bring
But no man knoweth the mind of
the King

RUSSIAN PROVERB

HE was the Sultan of an important Malay State, but to those who knew him best he was, and will remain, "Craddock's King," principally because he always sent for Craddock whenever he wanted anything that he thought needed the assistance of a European officer, and, on the rare occasions when he travelled outside his own dominions, Craddock used to go with him as guide, interpreter, and shield.

The King was one with whom things had gone badly until the appearance of the white man in his country. His character had not endeared him to the people, who should have been his subjects, but were, almost without exception, his enemies; and the consequence was that when he ought to have

MALAY SKETCHES

The King, being informed, expressed his extreme unconcern, and said that, as it was the priest's business and his only, he could settle it. The priest raised the amount necessary to meet the bill, and the party returned to their own State with the musical-box and tricycle.

Then "a private *pique* arose" between King and Priest as to who should finally pay for these play-things. For the first time these firm friends appeared in opposition to each other, and both parties gave their respective versions of the transaction before a highly edified and delighted Council of Arbitration.

First the King: He knew nothing of any musical-box, did not like musical-boxes, had no ear for music, and did not understand the discordant noises made by these inventions of the white man. He had seen a thing of the kind in his house, had heard it, had even himself made it play its absurd tunes, did not enjoy it in the least, and had done it without thinking, but knew it would please the priest as he had bought the thing, and he supposed he would not have done so unless he wanted to have it played.

As for the tricycle, how in the name of misfortune could a tricycle concern him? The bare idea of a

THE KING'S WAY

man of his age and figure riding a tricycle was enough to make a dog bark (and here His Highness laughed consumedly at the spectacle he had conjured up). Had anyone ever seen him ride a tricycle? Where was he going to ride it? Was it on the sandy shore of the river where he lived? and if not there, then where? He understood that tricycles would neither go through the jungle nor across *pañ* fields, and, if he were to take "the creature" out shooting, he supposed it would not greatly help him to get a shot at a bison or a rhinoceros. Did anyone imagine he was going to carry letters? that he was going to join the Post Office? If the imputation were not so stupid he could almost be angry with the priest, a man whom he had heard over and over again say that the one thing he desired was a tricycle, something on which he could take exercise, and at the same time get about his district. He had even asked him, the King, to lend him money to buy the machine, but he had no money to lend and tried to dissuade the man because he thought that in his inexperience he might fall and hurt himself. Malays did not understand things that ran on three wheels without ever a horse or a bullock, or even a buffalo to pull them. He saw the tricycle lying under his house, and he