

FROM GOLDEN GATE TO GOLDEN SUN

*A RECORD OF TRAVEL, SPORT AND
OBSERVATION IN SIAM AND MALAYA*

BY

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CHAPTER VIII

BIG GAME IN THE WILHELMINA MOUNTAINS

IN the hope of finding a straying elephant herd, John and I set out from Medan, headed for the foothills of the Wilhelmina Mountains. I had come on him at the Witte Societat—the white club to be found wherever the Dutch are, even at home in the Hague—found him planning a hunt, and straightway accepted his invitation to join.

“For even if you don’t get an elephant,” he said, “you will see a part of the country and have experiences you might otherwise miss.”

By far the greater part of Sumatra is still in a primitive state, tempting to the adventurous. One does not travel far without seeing monkeys, deer, wild boar, huge bats, flying dogs, and many varieties of snakes and birds. But the larger and more ferocious animals are less frequently met, and nowadays one may spend months on the island without seeing an elephant, a tiger or a tapir. But occasionally a tiger, too old to catch boar, becomes a man hunter, and ventures close to the settlements. Occasionally, too, a herd of elephants strays down from the mountains, and raises havoc on plantations by uprooting trees, or tearing up pipe lines in the oil districts. Hunting for pleasure is too vigorous a sport for the

chemistry. Both admit the practice, and both believe that it works. But while the women believe that it holds the love of the man, the Europeans declare that its power lies in enervation, in the utter wreckage of the man through loss of will and power to escape.

And all this, as John would have pointed out, was strange knowledge to pick up on an elephant hunt.

When, after days, John came, he was cadaverous of face, and so weak we had to lift him out of the trap. He ate ravenously before we could get a word out of him. But, like every other hunter, he gave his story in detail when he started on it.

He had abandoned the elephants' trail for other game, when he discovered rhinoceros tracks beside a body of water. The coolies fixed a seat for him in a tree. There from a look-out fifteen feet above the ground, he sat and waited, his gun ready. By bright moonlight he saw the rhino, a huge fellow, weighing, John estimated, fifteen hundred pounds. It had taken three bullets to kill him. The coolies had worked a day pulling him out of the swamp, and another half day in pulling off the hide and salting it.

John might be half-starved, but he was triumphant. It had been a record-breaking hunt. The rhino's hide was the most valuable trophy he could have brought from the bosch.