

MALAYAN SYMPHONY

*Being the impressions gathered during a
six months' journey through the Straits
Settlements, Federated Malay States,
Siam, Sumatra, Java and Bali*

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*Illustrated with Photographs
by the Author and others*

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PREFACE

IT has been a pleasant task to recall the joyous journeys outlined in the following pages. For six months, while engaged upon a special journalistic mission, I travelled by car and railway through the major portion of Malaysia—British Malaya, Siam, Sumatra, Java and the Island of Bali. Having been given a free hand as to choice of routes, I went just where the fancy dictated. It was a grand experience, but devoid of thrilling adventures.

I am fully aware that this record, compiled from my diary and very full notes made on the spot, does not take the reader off the beaten track. Anyone who is blessed with sufficient means and the time to indulge a taste for seeing other lands or strange peoples, can travel over exactly the same roads. Yet I managed to visit places and see curious ceremonies which are not included in the average traveller's itinerary. My own delightful experiences may prove helpful to others who are keen to follow the same route. Indeed, I hope they will. I feel confident none would find this part of the world less fascinating.

Let me add that I have not been guilty of any "traveller's tales": not even strained the truth, striven after effects or sensationalism. I have written solely of those things seen with my own eyes, or else learned from men of wide experience and living in these countries. Indeed, I went to considerable trouble to insure accuracy in all things relating to the laws and strange customs or rituals of the various native races with whom I came in contact. I am greatly indebted to many people—too many for mention here—for invaluable help and information regarding these and other matters.

The opinions expressed are my own, based on first impressions only. I have tried earnestly to be both honest and fair-minded; but it is quite possible that a deeper understanding might cause me to reconsider some of the views formed in my travels.

If the following account of my journeys through Malaysia tells you something new and interesting, inspires you to go and see these countries for yourself, and possibly entertains you even for a fleeting moment—then, indeed, I am well repaid. Personally, I know of few more charming and picturesque lands.

W. ROBERT FORAN

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protest. Like most things Chinese, the productions staged are much as they were played hundreds of years ago. As a race, the Chinese have not much liking for changes in their age-old arts. They are strictly conservative in their outlook, which tends to provide a rare degree of charm to their theatrical performances. Their theatre will always repay a visit.

The Malayan opera, or *Wayang Malayu*, represents a most important part in the life of the people of the Peninsula. I can honestly commend the efforts of the local producers, for the *Wayang Malayu* is anything but a dull entertainment. The range of their repertoire is wide, but largely consists of the European pantomime type; but William Shakespeare, and their own plays based on ancient Malayan mythology, are constant favourites.

Singapore, as a city, has enough life and colour to satisfy even the most exacting. It also has heat, dust and many strangely pungent odours

The Singapore River challenges attention and positively declines to be dismissed summarily from notice. The river, as such, would be insignificant were it not for the hundreds of craft packed so tightly on its surface that there is scarcely any fairway left. The picturesque Chinese cargo-barges, sampans, and Malay *prahus* cluster as thick as ants upon a honey-pot; but there is no sweetness in that river! It insists on making its presence known through the agency of an original and abominable stench at low tide; and at high tide, though somewhat less offensive and overpowering, is yet not all violets.

The nauseating odours which arise from its muddy depths make you feel positively sick. There can be no equal to them anywhere else, unless it be in the native section of the town of Srinagar in Kashmir. I was assured that European residents in Singapore grow accustomed to this infliction in course of time. They need to do so, since they have to cross over it by the Cavenagh Bridge when going to and from their daily labours. If they can harden themselves to the persistence of that overpowering stench, they are indeed fortunate: more so than I was. The crossing of that bridge always filled me with acute repugnance, and was made possible only by vigorous smoking of pipe or cigarette.

Beach Road, a purely Chinese and Malay quarter of the city, is interesting if only for its rabbit-warren of hovels, Chinese artisans' shops and factories, movable open-air restaurants, licensed opium-shops, pawnbrokers, second-hand clothes and junk dealers, and the hordes of strange people who throng this evil-smelling artery of Singapore, both by day and night. Here are to be found some of the best examples of local brasswork.

In Rochore Road, which is one of the many streets connecting Beach and North Bridge roads, are located most of the bird and

animal shops. Rochore Road is famous throughout the East for its animal dealers, and the Mecca for all collectors of wild birds, reptiles and other creatures for zoological gardens in the West. In that thoroughfare you can buy almost anything from a Java sparrow to a full-grown Malayan tiger. Almost every shop displays many cages of doves, whose value is estimated according to the volume of their cooing notes and the number of rings on their legs. Others have cages filled with a variety of wild beasts for sale; and in one shop I saw a baby Sumatran rhinoceros. Birds, snakes and pythons, monkeys, and all kinds of jungle beasts are brought to Rochore Road for sale to the collectors from Europe. Rare birds and animals vie with monstrosities for pride of place.

If you are blessed with a nose impervious to horrible smells, then a walk up Rochore Road is vastly interesting.

One of the amenities of Singapore is the popular seaside resort at Sea View, where there is excellent sea-bathing and a comfortable hotel. Its local name is Tanjong Katong, but all Europeans know it as Sea View. Near this resort are the European and Chinese Swimming Clubs, where exceptional good bathing is obtainable. Not so long ago, however, you bathed at risk of life and limb from a vagrant shark. Such fatalities were not common, but did occasionally happen.

Only a few years ago, a party of four men and a girl were bathing in the European Swimming Club's pool, and swam out to the diving-platform off-shore. It was agreed that they should race back to the beach, the girl being given a hundred yards' start. She dived in and started to swim strongly. Just as the men were about to follow, they suddenly heard a shriek and saw the girl throw up her hands. Their horror-stricken eyes caught the flash of a shark's body in the water as it attacked the swimmer. All four dived in and raced as fast as possible to her aid; but, before they could reach her side, the shark had bitten off a leg just above the knee and disappeared from sight. With great difficulty, they managed to get the gravely-injured girl ashore. She was unconscious on being carried up the beach, where a doctor was waiting to attend to the terrible injury. Though everything possible was done to save her life, the shock and loss of blood were so great that she died a few minutes after rescue from the water.

After this tragedy, the Club fenced in the bathing area with a stout *pagar* for the protection of its members against such brutal intruders.

While I was in Singapore, a Dutch girl had a most amazing adventure, and escaped death only by a miracle. She was a passenger on a Dutch liner to Batavia, which left Singapore about ten o'clock at night. The girl went down to her cabin soon after the steamer left the docks, intending to go to bed at once. She had the cabin to herself. When almost undressed, the beauty of the lights of Singapore attracted her interest and she leaned out of the square port-hole to view them better. At that moment the ship suddenly changed