

“LEANING FORWARD, WITH ONE HAND I GRABBED HIS SOLITARY HORN.”

(SEE PAGE 222.)

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"My dear friend," he gushed, "I've got him! How can I ever thank you? A tiger has fallen to my gun at last—a real tiger, a beauty!"

Triumph, gratitude, and delight shone from his every feature. He would not give me time to congratulate him in the glad haste of his exuberant joy.

"You must come and lunch with me," he continued, "so that I may have leisure to thank you properly. Your cards did everything; there was no difficulty whatever. It was so good of you! How did you ever think of it? I went over by the first train, just as you

suggested, and the moment I showed them your cards and told them my business they sold me a superb tiger. They were so kind. It was like buying a mutton-chop. Then they lent me a rifle and showed me how to shoot the animal by planting a bullet behind his left ear. It was really too kind of them! I can't help saying it again. I killed it utterly, all by myself, though the gun did kick a lot. When I told the manager, he said he would have kicked too! Funny fellow! But he tells me that it is not often that they get a man who walks over and buys his tiger without any haggling, pays his

cash down on the nail, and shoots it, and all before breakfast. Of course, I shall have the skin and claws mounted and sent home to me."

"You shot the beggar in his cage?" I inquired, mechanically.

"Rather!" chuckled the law-maker. "You didn't think I was going to drag the chap out and shoot him on the roof like a little dicky-bird, did you?"

I did not, and I said so; and then I congratulated the Senator.



"I KILLED IT, ALL BY MYSELF."

III.—A RIDE ON A RHINO.

BY W. W. FEGEN, OF THE "SIAM OBSERVER," BANGKOK.

It was decidedly a warm evening. At noon the thermometer on the club veranda had shown 116deg. Fahr.; now, at 5.30 p.m., it was just under the hundred mark, and the more you looked at the thermometer the hotter it seemed to get. So four or five of us, our day's toil over, sprawled on our backs in long cane chairs and smoked and casually sipped at the "long drinks" which stood in glasses set in the sockets in the chair-arms. There was not a

breath of wind, and the only sounds to be heard were the click of billiard-balls in the building itself, the faint buzz of the mosquitoes beginning to bestir themselves for their night's work, and the distant noises from the Malay kampong (village) some half a mile or so up the river, which flowed—an oily-looking, sluggish stream—just in front of our club. It was too hot to read, even if it had not been for the fact that our last mail had been received

three weeks ago; it was too hot to talk; and the only one who seemed to have any energy left was young Hunter, "the Griffin," only a few months out from home, and therefore with some of his vitality still left within him. And he it was who played billiards—with himself. As there was not a white woman within hundreds of miles our appearance for the most part was—well, let us call it *dégagé*. Those who dwelt in the little bungalows near the club were suitably garbed in naught save pyjamas and slippers.

Presently there was a bit of a stir outside as a boat landed another of our little coterie, in the person of the doctor. *His* advent was welcome because he went everywhere, saw everything, and could tell you whether Jones, who was playing bridge with you last night, was dead or down with fever. So he had hardly entered when somebody said:—

"Anything doing, doc? You're later than usual to-night?"

Dr. Briggs, late Assistant-Surgeon R.N., and now Medical Adviser to His Highness the Sultan of Tringano*, in whose country we dwelt, seized upon an unoccupied chair before he replied. "I say, you fellows," he demanded, "have any of you seen a stranger—a queer-looking, wizened little chap, sunburnt to a sort of saddle-colour? All in khaki rags, too. Has a lot of *barang* (luggage), and was up at the kampong inquiring where he could put up for the night. Speaks Malay—*pukkha* Malay—like a book, my boatmen say. If I'd seen him I should have told him to keep clear of the kampong on account of the smallpox."

Just then, before any of us could speak, Hunter, who for some minutes had been endeavouring unsuccessfully to deter a train of ants from mounting the club steps, ejaculated:—

"Great snakes! What's this—the Missing Link or the Mahdi?"

For, coming along the path from the direction of the Malay village, was a little, wizened man clad in a distinctly disreputable suit of khaki. He was evidently old, yet he walked with the springy, wiry gait of a youngster. Clean-shaven, and with a clear grey eye, his many-lined face had been tanned to what the doctor's boatmen had called it—"saddle-colour." Stepping briskly up, he addressed us collectively:—

"Good evening, gentlemen. This is, I presume, the club? I hope you will pardon me, but could any of you tell me where I can camp for the night? I had intended staying at the village, but they've got smallpox there. Not that I mind that myself, but my boatmen would be sure to get it; they always take everything

that's going. I wouldn't trouble you, but it's going to rain—rain heavily, too—and I haven't had time to get my tents unpacked."

A babel of cries answered him. "Come in, sir; come in. Here, boy, a stengah and cigars! I can give you a bed, sir. I've got a long chair and a mosquito net. I've got a whole spare bungalow with nothing in it but a *hantu* (ghost)." For strangers were rare in those parts, and there was something about the old man which awakened our curiosity.

The stranger bowed courteously all round and then said something to a Malay lad who had been following him. The boy departed, whereupon our visitor took one of the many chairs which had been offered him, his "stengah," and a cigar. There was silence for a few minutes; then our guest said:—

"I didn't expect this, gentlemen. The last time I was here, about fifteen years ago it must be, there wasn't a white man in the country." Seeing that we were all interested, he continued: "Ah, yes. It's changed a lot; but there's room for it—room for it. Not half a mile from here my three companions were cut up with creeses. I just managed to bury them before I, too, was found. Luckily, I managed to escape. They were scientific explorers. I am but an orchid-gatherer and occasional hunter, a native of Jersey, but afflicted with *Wanderjahr*, and I have been on the road for nearly forty years. I have only come down from the interior in order to take my collection of plants and skins to the coast for shipment home to Europe."

He told us, further, that his name was Mimardière, and that he had worked for Cross, of Liverpool, Hagenbeck, and other big wild animal dealers. Then the dinner-gong sounded (we had a capital Chinese *chef* at the club) and our visitor was, of course, made to sit down, despite his protests that he had already dined. The meal passed off as usual, and after it we all sat on the veranda and had our cigars and coffee and exchanged those yarns which never seem to flow so well at other times. Our guest was not very talkative, but what he had to say was eminently to the point. He told us of some adventures among the Sakais and other wild tribes of the jungle-clad mountains, and volunteered to show us some interesting trophies next morning. But when someone said that a rhinoceros had been seen that day a few miles down the river, he livened up.

"Ah!" he remarked, "so you have the *raat*, as our Siamese friends call him, down here? One of the most terrible experiences of my life was incurred in a chase after one. It is not to everyone that it is given to be able to say that he has ridden a mile on the back of a wild rhino!"

* At that time a Siamese Protected State, but recently taken over by the British Government.

We were interested, of course, and plied him for the details, and he then told us the following story:—

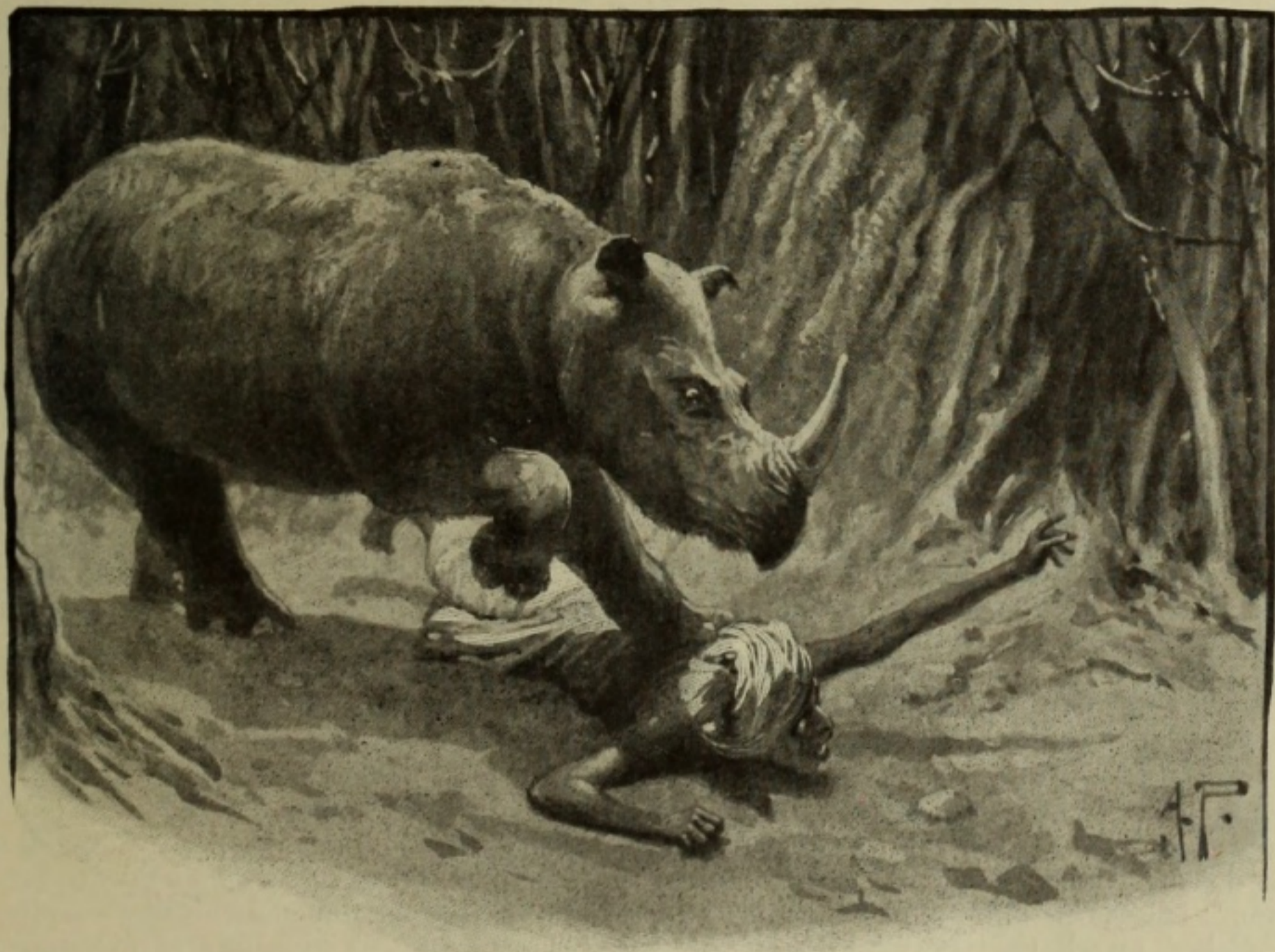
It is about ten years ago now that I was pottering about in that little congeries of Siamese protected States which lie between the northern boundary of the Federated Malay States and Siam proper. My real reason for being there was that I had heard that a certain variety of deer, the *Cervus schomburgki*, was to be found there. I did not find them, and I have never found them yet, but while I was there word was brought in that a big one-horned rhinoceros had been seen at a place about a couple of miles off, and that there were also tiger and black panther there; so I shifted camp to a place about two hundred yards from a regular trail which Mr. Rhino had made down to a river, and spent a couple of days looking for him without success, though I did succeed in potting a good-sized tiger and two panthers. I also saw some Imperial pigeons, and another bird which I had never seen before, so I exchanged my rifle for a shot-gun and cartridges and sallied off down the rhino's track to look for them, being accompanied by one of my Malay boys.

We had got into a kind of a lane with impenetrable mangrove jungle on either side, the

native boy some thirty yards in the rear, when I heard him shout. Turning abruptly, I was just in time to see him as he was knocked down and trampled upon again and again by the biggest rhinoceros I have ever seen in my life. As most of you know, a rhinoceros always sticks to its old paths, and there was I right in that of this one, shut in with impenetrable thorn and mangrove on either side! I had nothing but my fowling-piece and small shot cartridges, together with this knife here, and I thought my time had come.

I bolted down the jungle lane for a few yards at my best speed, when safety appeared in the shape of a huge mango tree, with a big, bare branch stretching almost horizontally across the track at about ten feet from the ground. Quick as thought I scrambled up the trunk and, seating myself on the branch, looked around, but a slight curve in the track hid the rhinoceros from my view. For the moment, therefore, I could see nothing of him, but from the noises I heard I judged he was still spending his fury on the body of my unfortunate follower.

In my scramble for safety I had dropped my gun. It lay just underneath where I sat, but I dared not descend for it. It would have been quite useless to me if I had, for I had nothing about me but cartridges charged with the



"HE WAS KNOCKED DOWN AND TRAMPLED UPON."

smallest of shot, so as not to injure the skins of the birds I was seeking.

While waiting thus I became aware of two distinctly unpleasant facts. One was that the limb on which I sat was swarming with myriads of red ants—the “soldier ants,” whose bite is like the pricking of a red-hot needle—and that these were gradually swarming over me. My second discovery was that the branch was utterly rotten. Still, it had borne my weight so far, and I trusted that it would continue so to do until my enemy had gone on to the river. And then the ants began to bite. I brushed them off as well as I could, and while I was doing this I heard the rhinoceros coming slowly down the trail. Upon arriving at my gun and just underneath me the unwieldy brute paused and started sniffing, or, rather, snorting at it. Then, as if intentionally, he deliberately put one of his fore feet on the grip of the stock, which snapped through like a rotten carrot.

“Confound you!” I cried, angrily; and as the brute raised his head, feeling quite safe and very annoyed, I tried to kick him on the horn.

Idiot that I was! There was a sudden crack, the branch gave way, and down I went, landing astride right on the brute’s back, and with the dead limb across his quarters just behind me! The bulky brute was probably more astonished than I was myself at this sudden onslaught from aloft, for he broke at once into a lumbering run. It was a curious position for a man to be in, but I didn’t stop to think much about it. I wanted to settle matters before some branch swept me from my perch or my queer steed started to wallow in the river, as, once I was off his back, he might finish me as he had done poor Yusoof. So, leaning forward, with one hand I grabbed his solitary horn, and with the other I sought this knife. (It was a strong, dagger-like affair, with a blade some six inches long and an edge like a razor.) Clinging as tightly as possible to the brute’s withers with my thighs, I got the point of the knife level with his left eye and then, with all the strength I was master of, thrust it in up to the hilt.

The animal gave one unearthly bellow, and then left the beaten trail, ploughing and stumbling heavily through the mangroves and attaps. My shirt was being ripped to shreds and my skin badly lacerated, but I resolved to have a try for the other eye also, and had just withdrawn the knife and was trying to get it into my right hand without letting go of the horn, when we plunged together through some tall grass, down several yards of bank, and into the stream. The shock flung me off, and before I had picked myself up the rhino was in deep water, swimming round in circles in a dazed sort

of way. As I scrambled ashore, to my delight I saw two of my own men, whom I had that morning armed with Martini rifles and told to watch the embouchure of the animal’s trail to the river, standing close to me.

“Truly, O Tuan, thou art a great man and the favoured of Allah,” they said. “Who ever heard of the like?”

But my half-blinded foe was now nearing the bank, and, hastily seizing one of the rifles, I took aim and fired. I struck him in the right eye and, after some floundering in shallow water, he gave up the ghost. We managed to get the carcass alongside the bank and made it fast with rattans and creepers; but that night there was a heavy thunderstorm and the river rose, so that the next morning the remains of my strange steed had disappeared. It may sound a trifle queer, gentlemen, but the whole of it is gospel truth, I assure you.

We said, mendacious ourselves, that we didn’t doubt its truth in the least, but of a verity I thought that Mr. Mimardière, with a trifle of practice, could give Baron Munchausen points and a beating. And I never saw him again.

Several years had passed away and I found myself in the jungles of the little Siamese suzerain State of Perlis, talking to a *penghulu*, or district headman. We talked shooting—everyone does in those parts. “Ah, Tuan,” said the old man, “it is a pity that the great hunter is dead.”

“What great hunter do you mean?” I queried.

“He, the great hunter who rode on the demon rhinoceros in Setul and slew him with a knife. He who feared neither the *hantu* (ghosts) by night nor the tiger by day or night. Come, Tuan, I will show you his grave.”

Wondering, I went with him to a mound at the foot of a huge dammar tree. It had been neatly bordered all round with slabs of stone. On our way back I asked the headman if he knew his name.

“No, Tuan, I know it not. But the Rajah sent his things to Bangkok at the time of the sending of the annual tribute, and it may be that those there will know. But there were some things forgotten, and I have kept them to send when one goes that way.”

So saying, he went to a shelf and returned with a biscuit tin, from which he produced a battered silver watch, with a leather guard. On the face of the watch was the maker’s name, “Pelletier, St. Heliers.” There were one or two other trifles, and among these a curious carved pipe which I at once recognised as the property of our visitor at the club on that evening years before. And so the story of his strange ride on a rhino may have been true after all.