STUDIES
IN
BROWN HUMANITY
BEING
SCRAWLS AND SMUDGES IN SEPIA
WHITE, AND YELLOW
BY
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'IN COURT AND KAMPONG'

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For always roaming with a hungry heart  
Much have I seen and known.  
Ulysses.

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IN THE VALLEY OF THE TÉLOM

Where the forest yields to the open space,
   And the trees stand back to see
The waters that babble and glisten and race
   Thro' woodlands trackless and free;
Where the soil is ploughed by a thousand feet,
   And the salt lies sweet below,
Here nightly the beasts of the jungle meet
   To wallow, and bellow, and blow.

The Salt-Lick.

Very far away, in the remote interior of Pahang, there is a river called the Télom—an angry little stream, which fights and tears its way through the vast primæval forest, biting savagely at its banks, wrestling impatiently with the rocks and boulders that obstruct its path, rippling fiercely over long beds of water-worn shingle, and shaking a glistening mane of splashing, troubled water, as it rushes downwards in its fury. Sometimes, during the winter months, when the rain has fallen heavily in the mountains, the Télom will rise fourteen or fifteen feet in a couple of hours, and then, for a space, its waters change their temper from wild, excited wrath, to a sullen anger, which it is by no means pleasant to encounter. But
it is when the stream is shrunken by drought that it is really most dangerous; for, at such times, sharp and ragged rocks, over which a raft is usually able to pass in safety, rise up, from the river-bed, to within an inch or two of the surface, and rip all things cast against them with keen firm cuts, that need no further hacking to complete their work of dismemberment. At the very foot of the largest rapid in the river, one of these boulders forms, in dry weather, a very efficient trap for the unwary. The channel of the stream, at this point, narrows somewhat, and is confined between high walls of rock, and the boiling waters of the fall are further troubled by the jagged blocks of granite, with which the river-bed is studded. One of these leans slightly up stream, for the friction of ages has worn away a cavity where the force of the current strikes most fiercely; and, when the waters are low, it is impossible for a raft to avoid this obstacle.

The rafts, which are used upon the upper reaches of the Malayan rivers, are formed of about eighteen bamboos, lashed side by side, and firmly kept in place by stout wooden stays above and across. They are usually some twenty feet in length, and, though they have great flotage, their very lightness causes them to wallow knee-deep when the furious waters of a rapid roar over them and about them, while they whirl down stream at a headlong, desperate pace. The more shrunken the stream, the greater the speed at which a raft spins down a fall, for the rapid itself is unchanging, while, at such times, the volume of water is insufficient to break the drop, and soften the descent.

Thus it is that, at the rapid in the Têlom, of
IN THE VALLEY OF THE TELOM

which I speak, a raft charges down the channel between the high walls of granite, and comes to eternal grief upon the leaning rock, which obstructs the passage, waiting so calmly and so patiently for its prey.

A harsh, sharp crack—the agonised pain-cry of the bamboos—sounds above the roar of the waters, as the raft strikes the boulder fairly and squarely. Another second, and the bow is fast wedged beneath the projecting ledge of the slanting rock. The bamboos give another despairing shriek; and the tail of the raft rises swiftly to a perpendicular position, waggling irresolutely, while the bow is buried more deeply beneath the boulder, which grips it fast. Then, like the sail of a windmill, the raft whirls round in the air, the fixed bow serving as its axis, and, with a flap, it smites the racing waters beyond the obstructing rock. Every one of the bamboos is smashed in an instant into starting, shrieking slivers, which have power to cut more sharply than the keenest knife. The men, who lately manned the raft, are cast high into the air. Then they are broken pitilessly upon the rocks, are cut and wounded cruelly by the matchwood that was once their raft, or are to be seen struggling powerlessly in an angry torrent.

Jeram Musoh Karam—the Rapid of the Drowned Enemy—the place is named in the vernacular, and native tradition tells of an invading expedition utterly destroyed in this terrible rock-bound death-trap. But men who know the records of the river are aware that the Telom spares friend no more than it once spared foe; and the tale of its kills waxes longer and longer as the years slip away.
None the less, it is during the driest season, when the stream, shrunken to the lowest limits, is most angry and vicious, that the valley of the Telom fills with life. It is then that the black tin ore, found in the sands and shingles of the river-bed, is most accessible, and the Malays come hither, in little family parties, to wash for it. Men, women, and little children stand in the shallows, deftly shaking their great flat wooden trays, with a circular motion, and storing small pinches of tin in the hollows of bamboos. At night-time, they camp in rude shelters on the banks of the stream, roast such fish as they have caught in the cleft of split sticks, and discuss the results of the day's toil. The amount of their earnings is very small, but Malays are capable of a great deal of patient labour when it chances to take a form that, for the moment, they happen to find congenial.

At this season, too, the jungles are one degree less damp and sodden than they are at other times, and the searchers for getah and rattans seize the opportunity, and betake themselves to the forests, for well they know how unpleasant life can be when the rain falls heavily, and what sun there is cannot force its way through the tangled canopy of leaves and creepers, to dry what the rain has soaked.

Meanwhile, the magnificent duri-an groves of the upper reaches of the Telom are rich in a profusion of splendid fruit, and the semi-wild tribes of Sakai¹ come from far and near to camp beneath the shade of the giant trees, and there to feast luxuriously. No man

¹ Aboriginal tribes of the Malay Peninsula, belonging to the Mon-Annam family.
knows who planted these gardens, for the Sākai asks no questions as long as food is plentiful, and the Malays are equally lacking in curiosity upon the subject. But the trees are very ancient, and the fruit has formed one of the main food-supplies of the Sākai since first they roamed through these forests.

So the wild tribes gather together in the groves, camping there for weeks at a time, and gorging rapturously. In the silent night-time, the dulled thud of the fruit, falling upon the rank grass, sounds in the ears of the watchers, and a wild stampede ensues from under the shelters of the forest-dwellers, in order that the fruit may be instantly secured. This is a somewhat necessary precaution, for tigers love the dāri-an, and a man must be quick in the gathering, if he would avoid a fight for possession with one of these monsters.

But it is not only by human beings that the valley of the Tēlom is overrun during the dry season of the year; for it is then that the great Salt-Lick of Mīsong is crowded by game. The Mīsong is a small stream, which falls into the Tēlom on its left bank, some miles above the rapids. About a couple of thousand yards up the Mīsong, from its point of junction with the Tēlom, there is a spot where the right bank, though covered with virgin forest, is much trodden by the passage of game. The underwood is worn down, and has become thin and sparse. The trees are smooth in places, and here and there are splashed by great belts of mud, eight feet from the ground, which mark the spots where wild elephants have stood rocking backwards and forwards, gently rubbing their backs against the rough bark. In many
places, the earth is trodden down to the water’s edge in great deep clefts, such as the kine make near Malay villages, at the points where, in the cool of the afternoon, they go to wallow in the shallows of the river.

A bold sweep of the Mísong, at this spot, forms of the left bank a rounded headland, flat and level, and covering some two acres of ground. In places, short, closely-cropped grass colours the soil a brilliant green, but, for the most part, this patch of open bears the appearance of a deeply-ploughed field. This is the Salt-Lick of Mísong.

The earth is here impregnated with saline deposits, and the beasts of the forest come hither in their hundreds to lick the salt, which, to them, and to the lowest of our human stock also, is ‘sweeter’ than anything in the world. When the waters of the Mísong are swollen, the salt cannot be got at, and the lick is deserted, but in the dry weather, the place is alive with game. Here may be seen the tracks of deer; the hoof-marks of the selâdang, the strongest of all the beasts; here is found the long, sharp scratch made by the toes of the rhinoceros; the pitted trail, and deep rootings left by the wild swine; the pad-track of the tiger; the tiny footprints of the kanchil, the perfectly formed deer which, in size, is no larger than a rabbit; and the great round sockets, punched by the ponderous feet of the elephants in the soft and yielding soil. Here come, too, the tapir, and the black panther, and packs of wild dogs, and the jungle cats of all kinds, from the brute which resembles the tiger in all but bulk, to the slender spotted animal, built as lightly and as neatly as a greyhound. Sitting in the fork of a tree, high
above the heads of the game, so that your wind cannot disturb them, you may watch all the animal life of the jungle come and go, and come again, within a few yards of you, and, if you have the patience to keep your rifle quiet, you may see a thousand wonderful things.

It was to the Salt-Lick of Mîsong that my friend, Pandak Âris, came, one day, with two Sâkai companions, from his house below the rapids. When I knew him, he was an old man of seventy or thereabouts, wizened and dry, with deep furrows of wrinkle on face and body. His left arm was stiff and powerless, and he bore many ugly scars besides. His closely cropped hair was white as hoar-frost, and, on his chin, grew a long goat's beard of the same hue, which waggled to and fro with the motion of his lips. Two yellow fangs were set in his gums, and his mouth was a cavern stained dark-red with betel-nut juice. His words came indistinctly through his quid, and from his toothless gums, but he had many things to tell concerning the jungles, in which he dwelt, and, when I camped near his house, we were wont to sit talking together far into the night.

In his youth, he had come to Pahang from Rembau, drifting aimlessly, as young men will, to the fate which awaited him, he knew not where. She—these fates are always feminine—proved to be a Jêlai girl, who lived near the limits of the Sâkai country, and, after he had married her, they took up their abode a couple of days' journey up the Telom river, where they might be completely alone; for no other Malays live permanently in this valley. Here, she had borne him