ADVENTURES

AMONG

THE DYAKS OF BORNEO.

SAKARRAN GIRL IN GALA COSTUME.

BY

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CHAPTER I.


ON the first of February, 1863, my brother and myself commenced our voyage to Sarawak. At that date we quitted England, and in the beginning of April we embarked from Suez for the far East.

Surely no one can wish to hear anything of our journey by the Overland Route. The good ship in which we took our passage contained the usual assortment of Anglo-Indian characters. We found therein the old gentleman high up in the Civil Service, who guarded his pretty daughter like an Argus, making up in ferocity for his very ordinary vision; the nervous lady, suffering from cockroaches in the imagination; the amiable general, and his aid-de-camp haughtily affable; a crowd of ensigns escaped from dépôt; Manchester clerks going out...
to China; such were our fellow-passengers. If ever an age existed in which balls, and newspapers, and serious flirtation enlivened the tedium of the Indian voyage, that happy time has passed. Eating, drinking, smoking, and mild gambling are the sole amusements at present to be anticipated, and these pastimes are not so novel as to deserve description.

After a month's voyage, broken only by the delay of twenty-four hours at Pointe de Galle, where we purchased rubies and sapphires of coloured glass, and mistook the ipecacuanha bushes in the Cinnamon Gardens for groves of precious spices, we arrived in Singapore. An accident which had lately happened to Rajah Brooke's mail steamer, the Rainbow detained us here for nearly two months. Decidedly Singapore is the least sociable colony of England. No public amusement whatever exists there, and the English inhabitants rarely meet except in their warehouses or on horseback. Each family gives one dinner party in six months and a ball once a year; the military band plays three times a week upon the Esplanade; races occur once in the twelve months. The environs of the town are dangerously infested with tigers, and a mountain five miles distant is alive with them. Under these circumstances the community is naturally addicted to gin and grumbling, but nevertheless a traveller is sure to be hospitably received among them.

Assisted by kind friends, we entertained ourselves in the "City of the Tiger" as well as was humanly
possible until the *Rainbow* came out of dock and was ready for her return voyage. This pretty little steamer, which gained so much glory by carrying the Bishop of Labuan and his "Terry" in the action with the Illanun pirates in May, 1862, is about 100 tons in burden, and carries two twelve-pound guns. She is at present the only steamer bearing Rajah Brooke's flag, but a companion vessel is building in Singapore, and will shortly be launched. Besides the *Rainbow*, the Sarawak Government possesses two small gunboats, the *Venus* and the *Jolly Bachelor*, of which I shall have much to say hereafter. These are employed in protecting the coast, and in carrying despatches to the out-stations, while the *Rainbow* plies continually between Singapore and Kuching, bearing mails, passengers, and merchandise.

As soon as the repairs were completed we embarked, and on the third morning after leaving Singapore, Borneo was sighted. Although this island cannot boast the delicate beauty which her innumerable palm groves give to the coast of Ceylon, yet our first view of it was very striking. A chain of lofty mountains far inland hung like blue clouds along the horizon; as we approached the shore, a broad sandy beach was discerned dividing the blue waves from the dark forest; and along the coast were scattered vast masses of rock still encircled by the fleecy mists of dawn. These lofty islets were mostly uninhabited, but the rich
vegetation of the Tropics had clothed them from base to summit with a mass of soft foliage, and no spot in the world could present a picture more sunny and brilliant than one of these green hills surrounded by its circle of white surf.

Our course was steered towards a high wooded peak called Santubong, under which lies the mouth of the river Sarawak. The little Malay village nestling among rocks and palm-groves under the mountain was once a famous rendezvous of piratical squadrons, Ilfanuns, Sulus, and Seribas, but the bravest of them dare not now approach within a hundred miles of the spot. After passing this village we steamed up the river between banks rich in the luxuriant beauty of tropical vegetation. A hundred yards on either side extended a thick belt of mangrove, tenanted in that early morning time by many a rustling school of monkeys; beyond this the jungle rose like a wall, and stretched, unbroken except by river or ravine, as far as the unknown mountains which loomed on the horizon.

The chief town of Sarawak is called by the natives "Kuching," which signifies "the cat;" why they should give it this name I know not; by Europeans it is frequently called Sarawak, but as the country and the river have also that name, I will use the native appellation. The town lies about eighteen miles from the sea by the Santubong route, and twenty-five by the other channel of Maritabas. As far as Tanah Putih, where the Borneo Company