In the Valley of the Tělom

By Sir Hugh Clifford

Very far away, in the remote interior of Pahang, there is a river called the Tělom— an angry little stream, which fights and tears its way through the vast primeval forest, biting savagely at its banks, wrestling petulantly with the rocks and boulders that obstruct its path, squabbling fiercely over long, sloping beds of shingle, and shaking a glistening mane of broken water, as it rushes downward in its fury. Sometimes, during the prevalence of the northeast monsoon, when the rain has fallen heavily in the mountains, the Tělom will rise fourteen or fifteen feet in a couple of hours; and then, for a space, its waters change their temper from wild, impetuous rage to a sullen wrath which is even more formidable and dangerous. But it is when the river is shrunken by drought that it is most of all to be feared; for at such times sharp and jagged rocks, over which, at ordinary seasons, a bamboo raft is able to glide in safety, prick upward from the bed of the stream to within an inch or two of the surface, and rip up everything that chances to come in contact with them as cleanly as though it were cut with a razor. At the foot of the largest rapid in the Tělom one of these boulders forms, in dry weather, a very efficient trap for the unwary. The channel narrows somewhat at this point, and is confined between high walls of rock, water -worn to a glassy smoothness, and the raging torrent pouring down the fall is obstructed by the jagged blocks of granite, with which the river-bed is studded. One of these leans slightly upstream, for the friction of ages has fashioned a deep cavity at the point where the full force of the river strikes it; and when the waters are low, it is impossible for a raft to avoid this obstacle.

The rafts, which are the only craft in use upon the upper reaches of Malayan rivers, are formed of about eighteen bamboos lashed side by side, and held in horizontal position by stout wooden stays, bound firmly above and across them by lacings of rattan. They are usually some twenty feet in length, the bow consisting of the larger ends of the bamboos, trimmed so as to present an even front to the stream, and the sterns of the tapering extremities cut short a couple of feet or so from their tips. Bamboos of rather larger size than the others are selected to form the two sides of the raft, and in the centre a low platform, some four feet square, is raised above the general level, and floored with split and flattened bamboos for the accommodation of a passenger or baggage. Each bamboo, of course, consists of a series of more or less watertight compartments—quite watertight at the outset, very imperfectly so later on, when the rafts have been subjected to the rough usage to which a journey down a rock- and rapid-beset river exposes them; but even at their worst they possess great flotage, though their very lightness causes them to wallow knee-deep as they whirl headlong down a fall at a pace that is exhilarating, with the angry waters roaring around and over them. The more shrunken the stream, the more desperate the pace at which a bamboo raft spins down the rapids, for the height of the fall suffers no change, while in the dry season the volume of water is insufficient to break the drop and soften the descent.

Thus it befalls that, when the river is low, a raft sent charging down this big rapid of the Tělom, between the sheer walls of granite, comes to eternal grief when it strikes the leaning rock which obstructs the channel near its foot. A sound like a scream— the

agonized pain cry of the bamboos—is heard above the tumult of the waters as the raft strikes the boulder; another second, and the bow is fast wedged beneath the projecting ledge of rock; again the bamboos give a despairing shriek, and the tail of the raft rises swiftly to a perpendicular position. For a moment it waggles irresolutely, and then, like the sail of a windmill, it whirls round in the air, the bow held firmly in position by the rock, serving as its axle, and smites the waters beyond with a resounding flap. Every one of the bamboos is smashed in an instant into starting, shrieking slivers, which have edges that can cut as sharply as the keenest knife. If there be men on board, they are cast high into the air, are broken pitilessly upon the rocks, are wounded horribly by the matchwood that was once their raft, or are to be seen battling desperately with that raging torrent. If, however, he can reach the water without sustaining serious hurt, a stout swimmer has a good chance of life, for a strong current sets off, as well as toward, every midstream boulder, and, if use be made of this, a man may win in safety to the calmer waters down below the rapid.

Jĕram Mûsoh Kâram—the Rapid of the Drowned Enemy—this place is named in the vernacular; and native tradition tells of an invading expedition utterly destroyed in this terrible, rock-bound deathtrap. But men who know the records of the river tell you that it spares friend no more than it once spared foe; and since Malays are ever wont to take their chance of danger rather than submit to the abandonment of a raft, and to the labour which constructing another in its place entails, the number of its kills waxes larger and larger as the years slip away.

The probability that its supply of victims will be fairly constant is strengthened by the fact that it is precisely at the season when the river is at its lowest that the valley of the Tĕlom fills with life. The black tin ore, found in the sands and shingles which form the bed of the stream, is only accessible during a drought, and the Malays come hither in little family parties to wash for it. All day long, men, women, and small children stand in the shallows, deftly manipulating their big flat wooden trays, sluicing the lighter sands over the edges, picking out and throwing away the pebbles, and storing the little pinches of almost pure tin, which in the end remain, in the hollows of bamboos, which they carry slung from their waists. At night-time they camp in rude palm-leaf shelters, built on the banks of the stream; roast in the cleft of a split stick such fish as they have caught; boil their ration of rice; and when full-fed, discuss the results of the day's toil, ere they lie down to sleep, lulled by the night songs of the forest around them. The quantity of tin won by them is not large; but Malays are capable of a great deal of patient labour if it chances to take a form that they happen, for the moment, to find congenial, and these tin-washing expeditions serve to break the monotony of their days.

During the dry season, moreover, the jungles are one degree less damp and sodden than at other times, and the searchers for *gĕtah* rattan, and other jungle produce, seize the opportunity to penetrate into the gloomy depths of the forest where these things are to be found. Nothing is more dreary than a sojourn in such places when the rains come in with the northeast monsoon, for then the sun is unable to force a ray through the sodden canopy of leaves and branches overhead to dry what the down-pours have soaked, the drip from above never ceases, even when for a little the rain abates, and the leeches go upon the warpath in their millions during all the hours of daylight. By a merciful disposition of Providence, these rapacious and insidious blood suckers go to bed at dusk

like humans. Were it otherwise, a night passed among them in a Malayan forest would mean certain death.

Meanwhile, the magnificent *dûri-an* groves, which grow on the banks of the upper reaches of the Tĕlom, are rich with a profusion of fruit, and the semi-wild tribes of *Sdkai* come from far and near to camp beneath the shade of the giant trees, and to gorge rapturously. They erect small shacks just beyond the range of the falling fruit, for a blow from a *dûri-an,* which is about the size of a Rugby football, and covered all over with stout, pyramidal thorns, is a by no means infrequent cause of death in the Malay Peninsula. By day and night they maintain their watch, and when, during the hours of darkness, the dulled thud of the fruit falling into the underwood is heard, a wild stampede ensues from the shelters of the jungle dwellers, in order that it may be immediately secured. This is necessary, for every denizen of the forest, including the big carnivora, delight in the *dûri-an,* and are attracted to it by its strange and wonderful smell; and a man must be quick in the gathering if he would avoid a fight for possession with some of the most formidable of his natural enemies.

But it is not only by human beings that the valley of the Tĕlom is overrun during the dry season of the year; for it is then that the great salt lick of Mîsong is crowded with game. The Mîsong is a small stream that falls into the Tĕlom on its left bank, some miles above the rapids. About a couple of thousand yards up the Mîsong, from its point of junction with the Tĕlom, there is a spot where its right bank, though covered with virgin forest, is much trodden by the passage of game. The underwood, usually as dense as a thick-set hedge, is here so worn down that it is thin and sparse. The trees are smooth in places, and the lower branches have been trimmed evenly, just as those of the chestnuts in Bushy Park are trimmed by the fallow-deer; and here and there the trunks are marked by great belts of mud, eight feet from the ground, showing where wild elephants have stood, rocking to and fro, gently rubbing their backs against the rough bark. Great clefts are worn in the river bank on both sides of the stream, such as the kline make near Malayan villages at the points where they are accustomed daily to go down to water; but on the Misong these have been trodden down by the passage of wild animals.

A bold sweep of the stream forms at this point a rounded headland, flat and level, and covering, it may be, some two- acres of ground. Here and there patches of short, closely cropped grass colour the ground a brilliant green, but, for the most part, the earth underfoot has the appearance of a deeply ploughed field. This is the salt lick of Mîsong.

The soil is here impregnated with saline deposits, and the beasts of the forest come hither in their multitudes to lick the salt, which to them—as to the aboriginal tribes of the Peninsula also—ms ‘‘sweeter’’ than anything in the world. Sâkai or Semang will squat around a wild-banana leaf, on to which a bag of rock salt has been emptied, and devour it gluttonously, sucking their fingers, like a pack of greedy children round a box of sugar plums. it is Nature in them howling for the corrective which alone can keep scurvy at arm’s length from the perpetual vegetarian; and the beasts of the forest, driven by a similar craving, risk all dangers to obey alike command. When the waters of the Mîsong are swollen with rain, the salt cannot be got at, and the lick is deserted, but in dry weather all the surrounding jungle is alive with game, and at nighttime it is transformed into a sort of Noah’s Ark. In the soft and yielding earth may be seen the slot of deer of a dozen varieties; the hoofprints of the wild buffalo, the strongest of all the beasts; the long sharp scratches made by the toes of the rhinoceros; the pitted trail and the deep rootings of the

wild swine; the pad track of the tiger; the tiny footprints of the *kanchil,* the perfectly formed little antelope, which is not quite as heavy as a rabbit; and the great round sockets punched in the clay by the ponderous feet of elephants. Here come, too, the black panther and the tapir, the packs of wild dogs, which always hunt in company, and the jungle cats of all kinds, from the brute which resembles a tiger in all save its bulk, to the slender spotted creature, built as lightly 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 within a few yards of you, and if you have the patience to keep your rifle quiet, you may see a thousand wonderful things on a clear moonlit night.

It was to the salt lick of Mîsong that my friend Pandak Aris 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 thereabout, wizened and dry, with deep furrows of wrinkle on face and body. His left arm was shrivelled and powerless, and he bore many ugly scars besides. His closely cropped hair was white as hoarfrost, and from his chin there depended a long goat's beard of the same hue, which waggled to and fro with the motion of his lips. Two solitary yellow fangs were set in his gums, and his mouth was a cavern stained to a dark red colour with betel-nut juice. His words came indistinctly through his quid and the wad of coarse tobacco which he held wedged between his upper lip and his toothless gums; but he had many things to tell concerning the jungles in which he had lived so long, and of the Sâkai folk with whom he had associated, and, whenever I chanced to tie up my boat for the night at his bathing-raft, we were wont to sit talking till the dawn was reddening in the east, for age had made of him a very bad sleeper.

In his youth he had come across the Peninsula from Rembau, near its western seaboard, to the interior of Pahang, on the other side of the main range of mountains, which run from north to south. He had had no special object in his journey, but had drifted aimlessly, as young men will, to the fate that awaited him, he knew not where. She proved to be a Jelai girl whose people 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 Tĕlom River, where they might be completely alone, for no other Malays lived permanently in this valley. She had borne him three sons and two daughters, and he had planted cocoanuts and fruit trees, which now cast a grateful shade about his dwelling, and cultivated a patch of rice annually in a new clearing on the side of one of the neighbouring hills. Thus he had lived, quite contentedly, without once leaving the valley, for nearly fifty years before I first met him. He had remained, during all that long, long time, wrapped in a seclusion and in an untroubled peace and quiet almost unimaginable to a modern European; rarely seeing a strange face from year's end to year's end, concerned only with the microscopic incidents in which he was himself concerned, and entirely undisturbed by the hum and throb of the great world without. Think of it, ye white men! He had only one life on earth, and this is how he spent it—like the frog beneath the half cocoanut shell, as the Malay proverb has it, which dreams not that there are other worlds than his. Wars had raged within sixty miles of his home, but his peace had not been broken; immense changes had been wrought in political, social, and economic conditions from one end of the Peninsula to the other, but they had affected. him not at all. The eternal forest, in which and by which he lived, had remained immutable; and the one great event of his life, which had scored its mark deeply upon both his mind and his

body, was that which had befallen him at the salt lick of Mîsong, a score of years and more before I chanced upon him.

He told me the tale brokenly, as a child might do, as he and I sat talking in the dim light of the *dâmar* torch, guttering on its clumsy wooden stand, set in the centre of the mat-strewn floor; and ever and anon he pointed to his stiff left arm, and to certain ugly scars upon his body, calling upon them to bear witness that he did not lie.

It was in the afternoon that Pandak Aris and his two Sâkai followers reached the salt lick of Mîsong. They had been roaming through the forest all day long, blazing *getah* trees, for it was Pandak Aris's intention to prepare a large consignment of the precious gum, so that it might be in readiness when the washers for tin came up into the valley during the next dry season. The Malay and his Sakai all knew the salt lick well, and as it was an open space near running water, and they were hungry after their tramp, they decided to halt here and cook rice. They built a fire near the base of a giant tree, which grew a hundred yards or so inland from the left bank of the stream, at a point where the furrowed earth of the lick begins to give place to heavy jungle. The dry sticks blazed up bravely, the flame showing pale and almost invisible in the strong sunlight of the afternoon, while thin vapours danced frenziedly above it. The small black metal rice pot was propped upon three stones in the centre of the crackling fuel, and while one of the Sâkai sat stirring the rice, with a spoon improvised from a piece of wood, and the other plucked leeches from his bleeding legs, and cut them thoughtfully into pieces with his *pârang,* Pandak Aris began to prepare a quid of betel nut from the ingredients, which he carried in a set of little brass boxes, wrapped in a cotton handkerchief. The gentle murmur of bird and insect, which precedes the wild clamour of the sunset hour, was beginning to purr through the forest, and the Mtsong sang drowsily as it pattered over its pebbles. Pandak Aris's eyes began to blink sleepily, and the Sâkai who had dismembered his last leech, stretched himself in ungainly wise, and then, rolling over on his face, was asleep before his nose touched the grass. This is the manner of the Sâkai, and of some of the other lower animals.

Suddenly a wild tumult of noise shattered the stillness. The Sâkai, who was minding the rice, screamed a shrill cry of warning to his companions, but it was drowned by the sound of a ferocious trumpeting, not unlike the sound of a steam siren, the explosive crashing of boughs and branches, the rending of underwood, and a heavy, rapid tramping that seemed to shake the ground. The cooking Sâkai had swung himself into a tree, and was now swarming up it, like a monkey, never pausing to look below until the topmost fork was reached. His sleeping fellow had awakened, at the first alarm, with a leap that carried him some yards from the spot where he had been lying—for the Sâkai, who can fall asleep like an animal, can wake into complete alertness as abruptly as any other forest creature. A second later, he, too, was sitting in the highest fork of a friendly tree; and from their perches both he and his companion were scolding and chattering like a couple of terrified apes. And all this had happened before Pandak Aris, who had only been dozing, had fully realized that danger was at band. Then he also bounded to his feet, and as he did so, two long white tusks, and a massive trunk held menacingly aloft, two fierce little red eyes, and an enormous bulk of dingy crinkled hide came into view within a yard of him.

Pandak Aris dodged behind the trunk of the big tree with amazing rapidity, thus saving himself from the onslaught of the squealing elephant, and a moment later he, too, had swung himself into safety among the branches overhead; for a jungle-bred Malay is quick

enough on occasion, though he cannot rival the extraordinary activity of the Sâkai, which is that of a startled stag.

The elephant charged the fire savagely, scattering the burning brands far and wide, trampling upon the rice pot, till it was flattened to the likeness of a piece of tin, kneading the brass betel boxes deep into the earth, keeping up all the while a torrent of ferocious squealings. The whole scene only lasted a moment or two, and then the brute whirled clumsily about, and still trumpeting its war-cry, disappeared into the forest as suddenly as it had emerged from Pandak Aris and the two Sakai sat in the trees, and listened to the crashing of the elephant through the underwood growing fainter and fainter in the distance, until at last it died away.

"How can one name such ferocity as this?" murmured Pandak Anis, with the aggrieved, half wondering patience of the Oriental, in whose long-enduring soul calamity never awakens more than a certain mild disgust. He looked down very sadly upon the flattened metal which had once been his rice pot, and upon the shapeless lumps of brass deeply embedded in the soil, which had so lately contained the ingredients for his quids.

The two Sâkai, gibbering in the upper branches, shook the boughs on which they were seated, with the agony of the terror which still held them.

"The Old Father was filled with wrath," whispered the elder of the two. He was anxious to speak of the brute that had assailed them with the greatest respect, and above all things to avoid proper names. Both he and his fellow were convinced that the rogue was an incarnation of their former friend and tribesman Pa' Pâtin—the Spike Fish—who had come by his death on the salt lick two years earlier; but they were much too prudent to express this opinion openly, or at such a time. In life, Pa' Pâtin had been a mild enough individual, but he seemed to have developed a temper during his sojourn in the land of shades, and the two Sâkai were not going to outrage his feelings by making any direct allusion to him.

Presently, Pandak Aris climbed down from his tree, and began somewhat ruefully to gather together his damaged property. He cried to the two Sâkai to come down and aid him, but they sat shuddering in their lofty perches and declined to move. Pandak Aris quickly lost his temper.

"Come down!" he yelled at them. "Descend out of the branches, ye children of sin! May you die violent deaths! Come down! Are your ears deaf that you obey me not?"

But the terrified Sâkai would not budge, and maintained an obstinate silence.

Pandak Aris, capering in his impotent rage, miscalled them with all that amplitude of vocabulary which, upon occasion, the Malays know how to use. He threatened them with all manner of grievous punishments; he tried to bribe the trembling wretches 'with promises of food and tobacco; he flung stones and sticks at them, which they evaded without the least difficulty; at last he even condescended to entreat them to come down. But all was in vain. The Sâkai are still, to some extent, arboureal in their habits, and when once fear has driven them to seek safety in the trees, some time must elapse before sufficient confidence is restored to them to embolden them again to face the dangers of life upon the ground. Pandak Anis would willingly have wrung their necks, could he but have got within reach of them; but he knew the hopelessness of attempting to chase these creatures through the branches, for Sâkai can move among the treetops with the instinctive dexterity of monkeys. At length, therefore, very much out of temper, he abandoned the idea of persuading his companions to rejoin him that night.

Meanwhile, much time had been wasted, and already the waters of the Mîsong were running red beneath the ruddy glow overhead that marked the setting of the sun. The tocsin of the insect world was ringing through the forest, and the birds' chorus was slowly dying into silence. High above the topmost branches of the trees, the moon, not yet at the full, was showing pale and faint, though each moment the power of its gentle light was gaining strength. Pandak Aris glanced at these things, and drew from them a number of conclusions. It was too late for him to push on to the mouth of the Mîsong, near which his camp had been pitched that morning; for no Malay willingly threads the jungle unaccompanied, and least of all after darkness has fallen. It was too late, also, to erect a camp on the salt lick, for after the shock which his nerves had sustained from the attack of the rogue elephant, he had no fancy for penetrating into the forest to cut the materials for a hut, unless at least one of the Sâkai would go with him. Therefore, he decided to camp on the bare earth at the foot of the monster tree near which he stood. It would be fairly light, he told himself, until some three hours before the dawn, and though his rice pot had been smashed, and he would have to go supperless to bed, he would light a big fire and sleep beside its protecting blaze. But here an unexpected difficulty presented itself.

The flint and steel, with which the fire was to be kindled, was nowhere to be found. With the rest of Pandak Aris's gear, it had been tossed into the undergrowth by the rogue elephant, and the fading light refused to reveal where it had fallen. Pandak Aris searched with increasing anxiety and a feverish diligence for half an hour, but without result, and at the end of that time the darkness forced him to abandon all hope of finding it. If he could have lighted upon a seasoned piece of rattan, a really dry log, and a tough stick, he could have ignited a fire by friction; but rattan grows green in the jungle, and no suitable log or piece of stick were at the moment available.

Pandak Aris lay down upon the warm earth between the buttress roots of the big tree, and swore softly, but with fluency, under his breath. He cursed the Sâkai, the mothers that bore them, and all their male and female relatives to the fifth and sixth generation, and said many biting things of fate and destiny. Then he rolled over on his side, and fell asleep. The roots of the tree, between which he lay, had their junction with the trunk at a height of some two or three feet above the surface of the ground. Thence they sloped downward, at a sharp angle, and meandered away through the grass and the underwood, in all manner of knotty curves and undulations. Pandak Aris, occupying the space between two of these roots, was protected by a low wall of very tough wood on either side of him, extending from his head to his hips, just beyond the reach of his fingertips as he lay, but gradually dwindling away to nothing.

The placid light of the moon flooded the jangle with its soft radiance, lending a ghostly and mysterious air to this little clearing in the forest, and peopling it with fantastic shadows. It shone upon the face of the sleeping Malay, and upon the two Sâkai hunched up, with their heads between their knees, snoring uneasily in the treetops. The ants ran hither and thither over Pandak Aris's body, and the jungle hummed with the myriad night noises of nocturnal birds and insects, but the rhythm of this gentle murmur did not disturb the sleepers.

Suddenly the two Sâkai awoke with a start. They said never a word, but they listened intently. Very far away, across the Mîsong, a dry branch had snapped, with a faint but crisp sound. The ear of an European would hardly have detected the noise, even if its

owner had been listening for it, but it had sufficed to arouse the sleeping Sâkai into an alert wakefulness. It was repeated again amid again. Now several twigs and branches seemed to snap simultaneously; now there came a swishing sound, as of green leaves ripped from their boughs by a giant's hand; and then for a space silence would ensue. These sounds grew gradually louder and more distinct, and for nearly an hour the Sâkai sat listening to them while Pandak Aris still slept. At the end of that time a soft squelching noise was suddenly heard, followed presently by a *pop,* like the drawing of a big cork; and this was repeated many times, and was succeeded by the splashing of water sluiced over hot, rough hides. Even a white man would at once have interpreted the meaning of this; but again the Sâkai would have outdistanced him, for their ears had told them, not only that a herd of elephants, which had been browsing through the forest, had come down to water in the Mîsong, but also the number of the beasts, and that one of them was a calf of tender age.

The wind was blowing from the jungle across the river to the trees where the men were camped, so the elephants took their bath with much leisure, undisturbed by their proximity, splashing and wallowing mightily in the shallows and in such pools as they could find. Then they floundered singly ashore, and later began working slowly round, under cover of the jungle, so as to get below the wind before venturing out upon the open space of the salt lick. The Sâkai, high up in the trees, could watch the surging of the underwood, as the great beasts rolled through it, but the footfall of the elephants made no noise, and except when one or another of the animals cracked a bough or stripped it of its leaves, the progress of the herd was wonderfully unmarked by sound. The wind of the Sâkai passed over their heads, though from time to time they held their moistened trunk tips aloft, searching the air with them, but they presently scented Pandak Aris. Instantly a perfect tumult of trumpetings and squealings broke the stillness of the night, and was followed by a wild stampede. Pandak Aris, awake at last, listened to the crashing and tearing noise caused by the herd flinging itself through the underwood, and fancied that they were charging down upon him full tilt. It is often well-nigh impossible in the jungle to tell the direction in which big game are moving when they are on the run, but this time the elephants had been seized with panic and were in desperate flight.

Over and over again, while the light of the moon still held, game of all kinds made its way to a point below the wind, whence to approach the salt lick, and each time the tainted wind told them that men were in possession. The savage blowing and snorting of the wild kine, the grunting protests of a herd of swine, the abrupt, startled bark of a stag, and many other jungle sounds all were heard in turn, and each was succeeded by the snapping of dry twigs or the crashing of rent underwood, which told of a hasty retreat.

At first Pandak Aris sought safety in the branches of the tree, but very soon the agony of discomfort caused by his uneasy seat and by the red ants which swarmed over him, biting like dogs, drove him once more to brave the perils of the earth.

At about 2:30 A. M. the moon sank to rest, and a black darkness, such as is only to be found at nighttime in a Malayan forest, shut down upon the land. Though Pandak Aris squatted or lay at the edge of the open, he could not distinguish the branches against the sky, nor see his own hand, when he waggled it before his eyes; and the impenetrable gloom that enveloped him wrought his already over-strained nerves to a pitch of agonized intensity.

And now a fresh horror was lent to his situation, for the larger game no longer troubled themselves to approach the salt lick from below the wind. From time to time Pandak Axis could hear some unknown beast floundering through the waters of the Mîsong, or treading softly upon the kneaded earth within a few feet of him. He was devoured by sand-flies, which he knew came to him from the beasts that now were crowding the salt lick, and they fastened on his bare skin, and nestled in his hair, driving him almost frantic by the fierce itching which they occasioned.

Now and again some brute would pass so near to him that Pandak Axis could hear the crisp sound of its grazing, the noise it made in licking the salt, or the rhythm of its heavy breath. Occasionally one or other of them would wind him, as the sudden striking of hoofs against the ground, or an angry snorting or blowing, would make plain. But all this time Pandak Axis could *see* nothing.

Many times he clambered into the tree, but his weary bones could find no rest there, and the ferocity of the red ants quickly drove him to earth again.

Shortly before the dawn Pandak *Axis* was startled out of an uneasy, fitful doze by the sound of some huge animal passing very close to him. He could hear the sound of its movements more distinctly than he had yet heard those of any of the other beasts which had peopled his waking nightmare; and as he still lay listening, there came suddenly a mighty blowing, then a ferocious snort, and some monster—he knew not what—charged him viciously.

Pandak Aris was lying flat upon the ground, with the sloping buttress roots of the tree on each side of him, and the beast passed over him, doing him no hurt, save that a portion of the fleshy part of his thigh was pinched by a hoof that cut cleanly, for Pandak Aris could feel the warm blood trickling down his leg. He was not conscious of any pain, however, and continued to lie flat upon the earth, too terrified to move, and almost choked by the wild leaping of his heart.

But his invisible assailant had not yet done with him. The reek of a hot, pungent breath upon his face, which well-nigh deprived him of his reason, told him that some animal was standing over him. Instinctively, he felt for his *pârang*—the long, keen-edged knife from which the jungle-bred Malay is never, for an instant, separated—drew it gently from its clumsy wooden scabbard at his girdle, and grasped the hilt firmly in his right hand.

Presently, to an accompaniment of much snorting and blowing, some hard object was insinuated beneath his body. Pandak Aris moved quickly, to avoid this new horror, and clung convulsively to the ground. Again and again, first on one side and then on the other, this hard, prodding substance sought to force itself below him. It bruised him terribly, driving the wind from his lungs, sending dull pangs through his whole body at each fresh prod, and leaving him faint and gasping. It seemed to him that it was pounding him into a jelly.

How long this ordeal lasted Pandak Aris never knew. For an eternity, it seemed to him, every energy of his mind and body was concentrated in the effort to prevent his enemy from securing a hold on him, and he was dimly aware that he was partially protected~ and that his assailant was greatly hampered by the buttress roots by which his body was flanked. It was a desperate struggle, and Pandak Aris felt as though it would never end, and the situation was unchanged when day began slowly to break.

Dawn comes rapidly in Malaya up to a certain point, though the sun takes time to arise from under its bedclothes of white mist. One moment all is dark as the bottomless pit;

another, and a new sense is given to the watcher—the sense of form. A minute or two more, and the ability to distinguish colour comes to one with a shock of surprise—a dim green manifests itself in the grass, the yellow of a pebble, the brown of a faded leaf, the grayness of a tree trunk, each is revealed as a new and unexpected quality in a familiar object. So it was with Pandak Axis. All in a moment he began to see; and what he saw did not help to reassure him. He looked up at a vast and overwhelming bulk standing over him— a thing of heavy, heaving shoulders and ferocious, lowered head, still seen only in outline-and knew his assailant for a *seladang,* the wild buffalo of eastern Asia, which is the largest of all the beasts, save only the elephant, and is reputed to outmatch even him in strength. Then, as the light increased, Pandak Aris could see the black hairy hide, the gray belly, the long fringe of shaggy hair at the monster's throat, the smoking nostrils, wide open and of a dim red, and the cruel little eyes glaring savagely at him.

Almost before he knew what he had done, Pandak Axis had grasped his *pârang* in both hands, and with the strength of desperation had drawn its long, keen edge across the brute's throat. A torrent of blood gushed into the man's face, blinding him, and the *seladang,* snorting loudly, stamped with its off forefoot. The heavy hoof alighted upon Pandak ArL's left arm, crushing it to a jelly, but the wounded limb telegraphed no signal of pain to the brain, which was working too absorbedly on its own account to be able to take heed of aught else.

Furious with pain and rage, the *seladang* tried again and again to gore the man with its horns, but the buttress roots baffled its efforts, and all the while the *pârang* worked by Pandak Axis's still uninjured hand sawed relentlessly at the brute's throat. Very soon the bull began to feel the deadly sickness which comes before death, and it fell heavily to its knees. It floundered to its feet again, bruising Pandak Aris once more as it did so. Then it reeled away, sinking to its knees again and again, while the blood pumped from the widening gap in its throat. Presently it sank to the ground, and after repeated attempts to rise, and tearing up the earth in its death-agony, it lay still forever.

"Yonder lies much meat," grunted one of the Sâkai to his fellow. That was their only comment upon the struggle, the end of which they had witnessed.

Now that danger was past and the daylight come again, they climbed down out of the treetops. They bent over the insensible body of Pandak Aris, and when they found that he was still alive, they bandaged his wounds, not unskilfully, with strips torn from his *sarong,* and stanched the bleeding with the pith which they ripped out of the heart of a *trap* tree. Then they built a makeshift raft, and placed the wounded man upon it, together with as much *seladang* beef as it would carry. Wading downstream, one at the bow and one at the stern of the raft, they reached the camp at the mouth of the Mîsong, which they had quitted the preceding morning, and there they lighted a fire and indulged in a surfeit of the good red meat.

Pandak Axis was as tough as are most jungle-bred Malays, and he was blessed with a mighty constitution; wherefore, when he regained consciousness, he also feasted upon the body of his enemy.

"I cut his throat, *Tûan,"* he said to me in after days. "I cut his throat, and I mind me that while doing so, I murmured the word *Bishmillah*—in the name of Allah. Therefore it was lawful for me to eat of the meat, for the beast had been slaughtered according to the rites of the Muhammadans."

For my part, I was less surprised at the ease with which he had salved his conscience than at his bility to touch meat at all in his then shattered condition. However, the Sâkai got him back to his house, rafting him carefully downstream, and Mînah, his wife, who was a knowledgeable soul, tended him devotedly, till nought save scars and a useless left arm remained to tell of his encounter with the *seladang*.

This was the one notable incident that had served to break the dead monotony of Pandak Aris's many days of life; but perhaps he was right in thinking that that single night on the salt lick of Mîsong had held enough excitement and adventure to last any reasonable man for a lifetime.