

North of
SINGAPORE

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Illustrated



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to the men wearing shorts, he remarked, "They don't go into the jungle any more, Wells, as you used to. In fact they won't. We have the devil of a job to get young men even to live on a rubber estate unless they can get into town for lunch!"

I heard the same story from Singapore to Penang. The days of pioneering were over and, at present, I suppose pioneering is unnecessary. However, they were by no means over for the Japanese. Later I ran across several young men in the jungle who were in charge of iron mines. They were prospecting for more iron and were dressed just as I used to, in long khaki trousers with wrap-around puttees and tunics with high collars. The leeches of Malaya had not changed their habits, and the more one's body is protected from their onslaughts the better.

Gradually, as luncheon time approached, the lounge filled up with men in many different kinds of uniforms; it was interesting to note that naval officers, artillery men and aviators were in the majority. At night when the tables were cleared away for dancing, the scene was indeed thrilling. In Singapore before the war, there had been about eleven men to every woman. But with the influx of soldiers and sailors, the proportion of men was even higher; every woman who could walk without the aid of crutches was in great demand. Dozens of male wallflowers stood around the dance floor, patiently waiting for a chance to cut in. With few exceptions, the men were in uniform and, as many of them were veterans of the first World War, their breasts glittered with medals.

Conspicuous among the brilliant company were the officers of the Royal Engineers whose short mess jackets exposed their tight-fitting trousers with a broad red stripe running down the sides. Tall handsome men of the Royal Australian Air



This Malay barking deer knows the photographer is there, but doesn't quite know what to do about it.

Courtesy of Theodore Hubbard



This rhino is headed for his favorite salt lick.

Courtesy of Theodore Hubbard

CHAPTER 9

THEODORE HUBBACK, THE JUNGLEMANN.

TUNJAPAT KELANTAN IS ONLY TWENTY-NINE MILES BY RAIL FROM the Siamese border town of Sungai Golok. We had been warned to stay away from Siam, but I could not resist the temptation to take a ride over the line which I had surveyed. I can vividly remember meeting the Siamese engineers on the banks of the little River Golok. While they were on elephants traveling in great style, I was on foot, accompanied by twelve Malays. All of us were wet through and covered with mud, having several times been forced to swim across the flooded rice field. I suppose it had been done before, but I, personally, had never surveyed a railroad from a boat, or been forced to swim (when the use of a boat was not practicable) while taking cross-sections.

As we traveled swiftly by train across the expanse of rice fields that stretch from Kelantan northwards to Siam, it was hard to believe that on certain occasions the whole district becomes a lake with the water ten feet deep in many places.

It was September 22nd, and, although the skies were still covered with heavy grey clouds, the rain had not come to flood the fields. As far as the eye could see, the countryside looked like an immense checkerboard, divided into squares by earth ridges which the Malay calls "*batas*." These ridges play an

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important part in the cultivation of rice. They prevent the rain from draining away and force the water to fill up the fields like huge tanks. Although to outward appearance the great plain is level, actually there is a general slope which would cause the rainwater to drain completely away, were it not prevented by these ridges. Somewhere in every ridge there is a small opening which can be closed at will by the owner of the field. By means of these openings, the water can be made to flow gradually from one field into another until it drains either into a river or into the sea.

For the first few miles, the ricefields were hard, dry and apparently barren. But if one wanted to go to the trouble, he could take a spade and fish there on dry land; about two feet beneath the surface there is still a certain amount of damp mud in which innumerable fish hibernate. For months these fish remain dormant until the rains come and flood the fields. They then emerge and provide an important part of the Malay's food supply. If you ask an old Malay whence they come, he will speak of the snipe that migrate across the Peninsula but do not nest there. "No one has ever found the eggs of a snipe, *Tuan*. They don't lay eggs, they turn into fish."

As the train approached the Siamese border, many of the fields had already been flooded and ploughed up into thick mud. We could see the Malays standing in the water, many of them dressed in bright-colored clothing, transplanting the riceplants which had been raised in nurseries. The reflections of their clothing in the still water was a lovely sight, with the jungle-covered mountains in the background.

So far no one has been able to persuade the Malays to plant their rice in any way but by this laborious method of thrusting the plants into the mud, one at a time. When harvest time

comes, instead of cutting down the rice with a sickle or a mechanical harvester, they cut each stalk separately with a knife so tiny that it cannot be seen unless they stop working and open their hands. Just imagine cutting wheat here in America, one piece at a time, and you will have some idea of how Malays harvest rice. The reason is that they wish to avoid giving offence to the Rice Spirit, who might object to having his rice roughly cut down by a large ugly knife. But, knowing that the Spirit does not object to birds helping themselves, the Malays deceive the Spirit by using a very small knife which is made to resemble a bird.

It took our train nearly two hours to cover the twenty-nine miles from Tumpat to Siam. But the slowness was due to the long waits at the stations. Hundreds of Malays crowded on to the trains, dressed in their gayest sarongs. Others walked along the platform selling fruit, flowers, and roasted fish to the passengers, who reached out of the windows for their purchases.

When the train arrived in Siam, I looked in vain for the elephants which had been there to greet me the last time I was in Golok. In their place were the most modern means of transportation in the Far East—bicycle taxis. I had never seen them before, but they are a great improvement on the ricksha. In some taxis the passenger rides in front of the driver in a comfortable basket chair; in others, which have an ordinary side-car of the kind known in Sweden as a "wife-killer," he rides beside the driver.

Zetta, Ali and I, each hired a taxi and dashed about the village to the astonishment of the local people. Before the authorities had time to realize the presence in their midst of

a couple of Americans, we were back across the border and safely seated in the train on the Kelantan side.

Our destination was Kota Bharu, the capital of Kelantan, a typical Malay town and the residence of the Sultan of Kelantan. In order to reach Kota Bharu, it is necessary to cross the Kelantan River in one of the comfortable motor boats of the Federated Malay States Railway. When the motor boat itself is filled with first class passengers, it tows a barge full of third class passengers behind it.

Kota Bharu (The New Fort) seemed quite unchanged since I was there as a young engineer. Floating in the river but moored by a long piece of Malacca cane, were the same old Malay "Chic Sales" or bathrooms, for they served both purposes. Crowds of Malay women and children were washing themselves and then their clothes in the muddy water. Before climbing the river bank, they dipped up a jar of water and carried it home with them. Somehow the average up-country Malay has no conception of the transmission of disease through germs and microbes. It is true that outbreaks of cholera and typhoid fever sometimes occur, but most of the time the people seem immune to the ill effects of drinking water that is obviously filthy.

It was evident, from the excitement our arrival caused, that visitors to Kota Bharu had lately been few and far between. The war had upset business and the ricksha boys fought for our patronage like hungry vultures.

"Pergi Resthouse" (Go to the Resthouse), I ordered.

I led the way, followed by Zetta and then by Ali, who was having the time of his life. Our baggage followed in seven other rickshas. On arrival at the resthouse which apparently had not changed, we registered our names and proceeded to

the police station to report our presence as aliens. Then we took rickshas to the Kelantan Club, but since it was the middle of the day, the club was deserted, except for the servants and the Chinese bar-tender. I had been a member of the club in 1915, but I knew the custom in Malaya—once a member, always a member. I had never had an opportunity to test this delightful tradition, but when I looked at the list of members I was thrilled to find my name still there. I didn't want a drink but, to show I had a right to one, I said, "*Bagi satu tonic.*" (Give me a tonic).

"Tuan is a member of the club?" enquired the Chinese doubtfully.

I showed him my name in the members' book. I got my drink.

It was with considerable excitement that I telephoned my old friend Captain Anderson. He answered the telephone himself and invited us to have dinner with him that night. Anderson is an Australian, a typical sahib and a pillar of the British Empire. Very tall, handsome, well built and straight as a poker, he is the kind of man whose appearance commands respect. His greatest grief was that on account of his age he had been unable to obtain a commission in the army. He was itching to get at the Nazis but the government had decided that his presence in Kelantan, even in retirement, was of such value that he had better stay where he was, in the fine house presented to him by the Sultan. Every night Anderson dresses for dinner. His Malay servants wear the colors of his father's racing stables. Strict formality is his invariable rule in the presence of natives; yet no man is more beloved by the Malays.

The day before we left Kota Bharu, I received a registered letter from the local branch of the Mercantile Bank of India,

dated Sept. 23, 1939. The letter was to inform me that on July 28th, 1916, I had left with the bank a sealed envelope with instructions that it was to be delivered to the British Adviser in case of certain eventualities. These eventualities not having arisen, the bank was anxious to know what my wishes were regarding the disposition of the sealed envelope. As it had been kept in a safe by the bank for twenty-four years, I considered that their enclosed bill for two dollars and fifty cents was very reasonable. I sent the money and received a government envelope, yellow with age and carefully sealed. It was addressed to The British Adviser, Kota Bharu, Kelantan. For the life of me, I could not remember what was in it.

On opening it, I found that it contained a full confession of a man who had taken part in the Kelantan Rebellion. As it implicated other people, I had decided not to hand it over to the government unless the rebellion grew to more serious proportions. More interesting than the contents of the letter, was the efficiency of my bank. It was certainly a tribute to the British banking system; for the bank had changed its personnel many times in twenty-four years.

We left Kota Bharu early on a Sunday morning, crossing the Kelantan River by boat, then catching an express train for Pahang. As the boat neared the shore at Palekbang, where we were to take our train, I noticed a sight which had escaped me when I had crossed the river to Kota Bharu. Moored alongside the river bank were a dozen or more great steel barges with Japanese names. For several hundred feet along the shore, a long mechanical loading battery had been constructed, and only a short time was required to load the barges. They were towed down the Kelantan River to the sea, and their contents transferred to Japanese freighters,

bound for Japan. Several freight trains were shunting to and from the loaders; and the whole scene was unnatural for Malaya, because of the intense activity of the workmen. There was no lying down on this job. Japanese overseers saw to it that the laborers worked like bees to transfer their burdens from freight train to loader.

"What is it they are loading?" I enquired.

"Iron," was the answer.

I presume that governments like our own and the British have their reasons for supplying the munitions of war to a potential enemy, but I must admit that I cannot understand them. In 1937, the figures for which are the latest I could obtain, Japanese mines in Johore, Trengganu and Kelantan exported to Japan 2,438,059 tons of iron ore. These figures must have increased enormously by 1940, to judge from the annual increase in the production of manganese, another munition of vital importance. In 1936, two Japanese mines in Kelantan and Trengganu exported to Japan 36,776 tons. One year later the export of manganese from the same two mines was 185,537 tons, just five times as much. What it is by now we can only guess, but the extraordinary thing is that this export of essential war materials was going on daily in October, 1939, and is probably still going on.

I was not surprised to find several Japanese on the train. They were dressed as I used to dress when I was about to set off into the jungle on a journey of exploration. They were talking to one another in Japanese. I do not pretend to speak Japanese, but I do know a few useful words. As I walked past them to my seat in the dining car, I casually said, "*Ohyo gozaimasu!*" (Good morning.) The effect was electric. They jumped as if they had been stuck with a pin. Then they

smiled and bowed and drew in their breath with an audible hiss as they returned the salutation in Japanese. What they had been talking about I have no idea, but they did not continue the conversation.

On the chance that Hubback might be at home, I sent him a message to say that I would be at Bukit Betong station at six o'clock that evening and would watch out for his coolies, in case he could arrange to transport us up the River Jelai to his house. Shortly before six, a terrific downpour of rain commenced and when the train pulled in at Bukit Betong station I had given up hope of anyone's venturing out in such weather, but I saw a Malay running up and down the platform, peering into the carriages. He was drenched to the skin.

"Are you one of Tuan Hubback's men?" I enquired.

"Yes, Sir," was the reply. "The boat is waiting for you."

I had said nothing about having Zeta with me, or my Malay boy, or my fifteen pieces of baggage, and when I saw the small dug-out which a Malay was baling out, my heart sank. I knew perfectly well what extraordinary loads those Malay boats can carry in an emergency, but this boat was designed for three people. With Hubback's men, there were six of us, besides our baggage. However, I did not raise the question, nor did the Malays. All they wanted was to get home out of the rain. It was already nearly dark.

When I saw that the boat was fitted with an outboard motor I felt quite relieved. To shelter Zeta and me from the down-pour, the Malays had rigged up a small roof which they call a "*keiang*." Under this flimsy shelter, Zeta and I huddled while the heavens poured sheets of cold rain upon us. The river was swollen and discolored by mining silt. Great pieces

were the principal trophies; and they indicated to anyone who knew the jungle the patience and persistent tracking of a great hunter.

Hubback told me that some years ago he had given up hunting and his particular hobby was the photographing of animals. He is also intensely interested in wild life conservation and believes that hunters make the best conservationists because they know, from practical experience and contact with the animals, their habits and peculiarities. He told me that after seven years of trying, he had just succeeded in securing some motion pictures of a tiger.

"Would I be correct in saying that these are the first such pictures ever taken in the Malay jungle?" I enquired.

"Absolutely," he answered. "Mind you," he added, "I fully appreciate that some magnificent flashlight stiffs of tigers have been made. But these are motion pictures taken in the daytime."

I had in mind the thrilling motion pictures I had seen on Broadway, of Malay tigers performing amazing feats such as fighting furiously with enormous snakes, springing up the trunks of trees at the intrepid photographer and struggling with domesticated water buffaloes. Such pictures provide an excellent show, but, unfortunately, whether they want to be or not, audiences are educated, or should I say mis-educated, by such films. The average theatregoer is accustomed to see his explorer-hero depicted with a heavy revolver strapped to his belt. He is convinced that the jungle is swarming with dangerous wild animals.

I lived for six years in the Malay jungle, but I never owned a rifle. As a greenhorn I did take an old-fashioned revolver into camp, but I was soon too ashamed to carry it. Theodore

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Hubback has lived in the Malay jungle for over forty years and here is what he has to say: "I often hear persons who should know better upholding the practice of carrying firearms in the jungle as a defense against unprovoked attacks by wild animals. As a cold fact, unprovoked attack by unwounded wild animals in the jungle is a myth, and it is quite unnecessary to make any provision for carrying firearms unless one is hunting." In other words, as Carl Akley used to say, "No animals are wild unless you make them wild. The easiest way to make a lion wild is to shoot at it."

The reason that ordinary theatrical motion pictures cannot be taken in the jungle is the poor light. It is hard enough to take an ordinary snapshot in the gloom of a tropical forest and, even if the animals would come out and perform for the benefit of the movie director, the result would be much too tame for the spilt movie fan. Consequently, Hollywood is compelled to catch the animals and then make them do their stuff in a specially prepared studio, made to resemble a real jungle. Such jungle studios are cheaply built in Malaya. In between acts, the animals rest while the heroic explorer goes back to his hotel for lunch. As for sound effects, not even the genuine sounds of the jungle can approach the noises made by the professional animal imitator. That Hubback is able to succeed where Hollywood fails, is due, in the first place, to his intimate knowledge of the habits of animals and, secondly, to the fact that he is permitted to go to places which are forbidden to theatrical producers or hunters.

During his years of hunting, he had discovered certain natural salt-licks, which, for centuries, have been used by animals when they feel in need of a dose of salts. These might be called animals' corner drug stores. In such places, the ground

is impregnated with natural salts and nothing will grow. Consequently, a natural clearing is formed in the midst of dense jungle.

In order to secure photographs of animals, it is first necessary to construct a "blind," or "hide," with small openings through which the camera may be aimed. Weeks must be allowed to elapse between the construction of such a blind and an attempt to use it, because the scent of man takes a long time to disappear and the animals must be given plenty of time to become accustomed to the presence of the blind.

For several hours, far into the night, Hubbard and I watched the screen, just as if it had been the actual salt lick in the jungle. In the background was the darkness of the jungle, but in the foreground was an open space about the size of a tennis court, in the middle of which was a pool of muddy water.

"Sec," said Hubbard. "That's the drug store. Watch."

The head and shoulders of a splendid sambar deer emerged from the edge of the jungle. For a moment the deer sniffed the air, then walked boldly towards the salt lick. First it took a long drink, then it took a mouthful of earth, which it proceeded to chew. A moment later another deer entered the open space. This one was more nervous than the first. It could hear the noise of the camera but could not detect the scent of man. Several times the deer deliberately stamped its foot as it looked straight into the camera.

"He's trying to frighten us away," whispered Hubbard.

Finally, having failed to stop the strange noise, the deer turned its white tail towards the camera and slowly stalked off into the darkness of the jungle.

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The next visitor was a huge seladang, or wild bull. It must have weighed at least a ton.

"He's not afraid of anything," said Hubbard as the animal gave one look around and then walked straight into the salt lick and filled its mouth with mud. "See how his ribs are sticking out." Hubbard explained that this animal was probably very old and badly in need of medicine.

A moment later, still another seladang appeared at the edge of the salt lick, obviously a much younger animal. He sniffed the air and tested it in every direction. What he discovered evidently gave him a fright, for suddenly he wheeled around and dashed back into the darkness, followed by the old bull.

"You see, that's what I suspected," said Hubbard. "The old bull had bad eyesight and couldn't smell properly, so he brought the young bull with him to do his seeing and smelling for him."

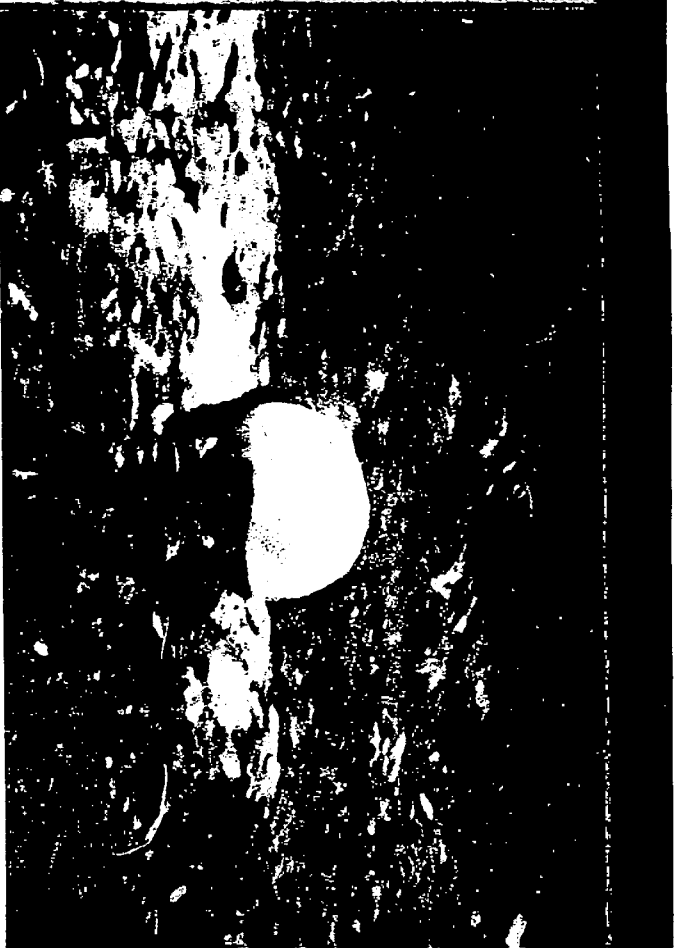
When a seladang is in its prime no tiger would dream of attacking it. But when the animal begins to show signs of senile decay, the tiger will make friends with it. The seladang and the tiger can then be seen travelling about together in apparent friendship. But the tiger is only waiting for the fateful day when the seladang totters and falls, or perhaps is unable to struggle to its feet after resting. Then the tiger cuts him. Hubbard told me that a seladang knows when it is being watched and that it is important not to stare too long at one, because the animal becomes alarmed and dashes away.

Hubback continued, "When an elephant has a baby, the mother elephant engages a nurse for it, and the baby is usually seen walking between two large females." Just as he spoke, along came three elephants, two large ones and a baby that could only have been a few days old. The mother was

easy to identify on account of her distended breasts which, unlike the udder of a cow, are placed forward in an elephant. It was all the baby could do to keep up with the two adults. All three walked straight into the puddle of muddy water. Soon a big bull elephant came rumbling along; it was interesting to observe how the two females placed themselves between him and the baby. Several times the bull tried to shove the females away, but they held their ground and refused to allow him to appropriate all the drugstore for himself. Elephants like their medicine strong, so they continually stirred up the mixture with feet and trunks, and, by the time they left the lick they had made such a mess of it that no animal would think of coming near the place for weeks.

The greatest thrill of all was to see a tiger suddenly appear on the edge of the clearing. His protective coloration was so good that Hubback had to describe its position to me before I could see it clearly. Evidently the animal had heard the noise of the camera or had noticed a slight movement inside the blind, for it froze in its tracks and for at least thirty seconds stood as still as a rock, staring straight into the camera. Not an eyelid flickered; the tiger might have been carved from stone. Then the animal flicked its ears, shook its head and leisurely looked around. Satisfied with its inspection, it walked up to a tree and sniffed it. Then its attention was drawn to the clicking of the camera, but instead of again freezing in its tracks, it walked toward the blind.

The picture came to a sudden end. "What happened then?" I asked. "Well," laughed Hubback, "that tiger continued to walk straight up to the camera, and I have an idea that someone stopped taking the picture and moved rather too suddenly, because the tiger saw me. He curled his lips, snarled,



Courtesy of Theodor Hubback

The rear end of animals is the one usually pointed at the camera. Here's a Tapir.

These are Seladang, cow and calf, said to be the most dangerous animal in the world but not acting it here.

Courtesy of Theodor Hubback





Penang's fine railway station sees no trains, for first you must take a steamer to the mainland.

Photo by Zetta Wallis

Penang's ladies go in for quantity of clothing as well as quality.



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swung round very quickly and loped off in the direction he had come—this time with his tail well tucked in, and no signs of being at all pleased with himself. On the edge of the jungle he stopped a moment, stretched up a tree to clean his claws on the bark, and was gone."

The rocks in the vicinity of salt licks are usually polished smooth by animals wiping their mouths after drinking. This is not for table manners, but to wipe off a peculiar type of small leech which lives in sulphur salts. The rhinoceros, in particular, is bothered by these leeches and it is not surprising that a rock should become smooth and polished by centuries of rubbing with the bristly upper lip of a rhino.

That great numbers of rhinoceroses once roamed the Malay jungle is easily proved by examining one of their old trails that passes through the limestone country in the far north of Pahang. This trail passes between two huge limestone boulders, both of which are polished to a height of about three feet. The boulders rest on solid limestone which has been worn down several inches by the toenails of thousands of rhinoceroses.

In the Malay Peninsula, the rhinoceros is rapidly approaching extinction, as a result of the slaughter of the animals by poachers, for the sake of their horns and blood. Ever since the days of Marco Polo, and probably long before his time, magical properties have been attributed to rhinoceros horn. Drinking cups made of the horn were sure protection against poisoning. When powdered and taken with a liquid, rhinoceros horn is said to be a powerful aphrodisiac; when the solid horn is placed against an aching stomach, the pain vanishes instantly. A deep seated thorn immediately comes to the surface when the spot is rubbed with rhinoceros horn. Where the actual

horn is not available, the next best thing is the blood of the animal. This is sold in the form of blood-soaked paper which fetches \$1 an ounce in Chinese drug stores. The powdered horn fetches a much higher price—\$10 per ounce and up, according to the strength of the particular specimen of horn.

To catch a rhinoceros alive is much easier than to shoot one. They are probably the most wily and difficult animals to hunt. Not only do they choose extremely inaccessible mountainous places in which to roam, but they also choose a certain kind of jungle that is full of terrible thorns and dangerous bamboo. Hubback once devoted forty days to tracking an old rhino. He heard the animal three times, was very close to him on several occasions, but never got a glimpse of him. When surveying the railway in the mountains between Pahang and Kelantan I came across rhino tracks frequently but I never saw the animal.

The rapid slaughter of rhinoceroses in Malaya is due to the animals' habit of always walking along the same old trail. Chinese poachers dig deep pits in the middle of the trail, then cover the pits with branches and earth. The first rhino that comes along falls down the pit. Instead of avoiding the place, the other rhinoceroses merely walk around the pit and get back to the old trail as soon as they can.

It was three o'clock in the morning before Hubback and I went to bed. "I think I'd better confine my efforts on this trip to getting pictures of fish climbing up trees," I remarked as we wished one another good-night.

Hubback laughed. He was so accustomed to seeing the thing that he had never bothered to photograph it.

"I can tell you where you'll find plenty of them—good big ones too," he said. "Just go to Malacca and get hold of one

of those old Portuguese fisherman. Tell him what you want, and I'm sure you'll have no trouble in seeing your fish. But photographing it is another matter."

Before going to bed, I took a bath in the good old-fashioned Malay way of dipping the water from a tall earthenware jar. As I did so, three fat toads hopped out to join me. They were very old fellows. They even allowed me to scratch their backs before hopping away into the night. I wondered. Twenty-five years ago I had three toads that used to do exactly the same thing. Hubback's house might even be on my old campsite. Perhaps they were the same toads. Who knows?

I couldn't sleep. My brain kept on working like a steam engine. What a precious possession true friendship is. How rarely do we find unselfish hospitality. I had travelled thousands of miles in the hope that, by some great stroke of luck, I might secure a few motion pictures of animals. It never entered my head that Hubback might give me some of his. I did not even know that he was still in Malaya. But of his own accord, he gave me some of his very best, including the tiger pictures.

I doubt if anything will ever induce Theodore Hubback to leave his home in the jungle of Pahang. He loves to hear "the distant call of the seladang, the faraway trumpet of an elephant, the moaning of a tiger and the wonderful call of the Argus pheasant."

My hope is that the peace and comfort that his appreciation of nature has brought to him may never be disturbed by the dreadful drone of bombing aeroplanes coming down from the north.