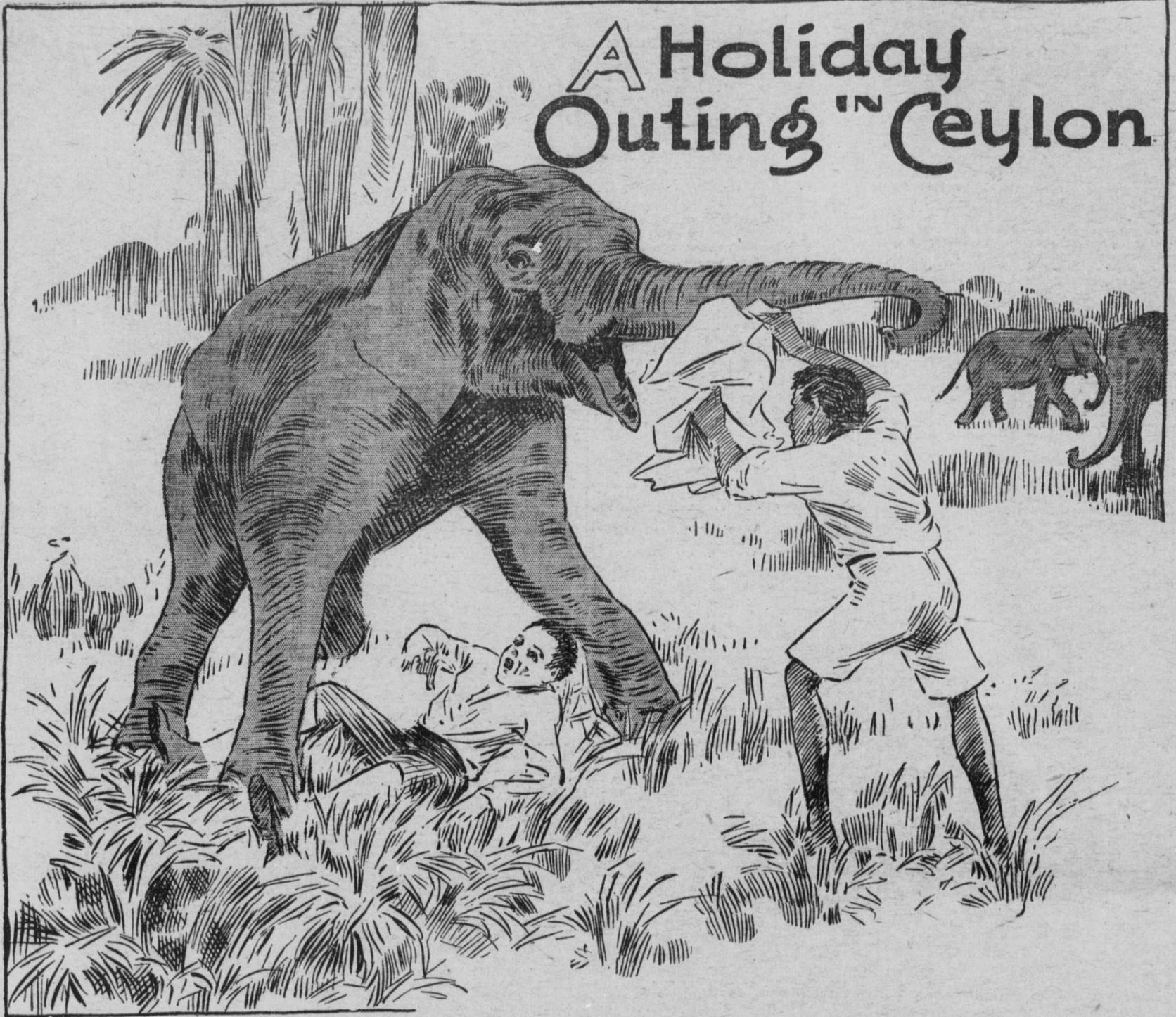


A Holiday Outing "Ceylon.



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NOTHING can be more strange and fascinating than a saunter along a jungle path in the low country of Ceylon. The month is January, and the northeast monsoon has fairly set in, with little prospect of rain for some few months. The time is between ten and eleven at night, and it wants but one day to the full moon.

To the left are low hills covered with the densest jungle from base to summit. Stately palms stand out in relief against the clear sky, shaking their serrated leaves; clumps of bamboos sway and nod their feathery heads with a murmuring rustle, as the night wind creeps gently over them.

On our right is a "tank" over four miles long, edged with arecas, bamboos and wild plantains. While watching its surface, a silver streak is seen every now and then, announcing the presence of alligators, which protrude their glassy eyes for a moment above the water.

Far in the distance are elephants bathing—elephants in their native wilds, undisturbed and unfearing. The margin of the lake is here impossible to walk upon. Soft mud and decomposed rushes form the abode of alligators and snakes, which lie in horrible enjoyment upon these pestilential beds.

A dark and moving shadow is seen upon the glittering surface of the water, and on looking up we see the form of a huge owl floating noiselessly through the still air.

Its cry makes one's blood run cold, and would cause the poor natives to live in dread of the death of some one dear to them. This is the Devil-bird of the Cinghalese, who affirm that any living thing upon which its shadow falls will die.

Its cry is a horrible and spasmodic gurgling, preceded and followed by screams of agony. Its flight being perfectly noiseless, renders this most startling.

Across undulating slopes of waving managras, past gigantic ant-hills, through clumps of cacti and tree ferns, starred with many a luminous insect, by hundred rooted banyan trees, covered with rattans and parasites, along the orchid-clad sides of water-courses we wend our way, breaking through the clinging and thorny tendrils of many a jungle creeper, wading across many a ferny swamp, climbing over the upraised roots of enormous forest trees, or stooping under their spreading branches until a sudden snort is heard, then a crash and sound of hurrying feet, and we know that some old boar has been disturbed in his favorite "form."

These are the recollections of my outing in Ceylon, recalled by the memories of the adventures I am about to describe.

"Now then, boys," said Manley, "we really must turn in, or we shall be getting a touch of fever. Let us get the coolies to rig up the mosquito curtains over the bamboos.

The little pests keep me awake half the night."

The rest of the party, Stockton and myself, took his advice, and after some time spent in fixing up the bulky canoe as a sleeping apartment, we turned in.

In saying that the rest of our party consisted of only Stockton and myself, I omitted to include Andi, the principal character, who performed with varying success the function of cook, head caterer, interpreter, butler, coxswain, tracker and other posts too numerous to mention, whose importance was only discovered when any of us had to fill them ourselves.

A Cinghalese tracker, a Malay tracker, four coolies and three dogs completed the muster roll of our outfit.

The trip down the Mahawelli-gangi River had so far been made with fair success. During the first week of the cruise, hours, almost days, had been spent in unloading and re-loading the canoes.

These, it must not be supposed, bore any resemblance to the shapely birch bark canoes in which rapids are shot in Canada, and which can be carried by their occupants over a five barred gate, if necessary.

Our canoes were nothing more or less than hollowed trees, with a couple of outriggers lashed across them, made of bamboo, to which a spar of light wood was attached, and which floated in the water parallel to the canoe itself. This, of course, was a safeguard against a capsizing.

During the first four days we shot nothing but snipe, quail, jungle-fowl and sandpipers, together with one spotted deer, which the kangaroo hounds aided us to pull down.

On the fifth day we came across a herd of six elephants, and, by waylaying them before daybreak, both Stockton and I made our maiden shots.

I cannot dwell upon mine. Nervousness or bad luck conspired to make a failure of it. I fired, and—the result was a crashing of bamboos. Stockton was more fortunate, and brought down a huge fellow at twelve paces.

The next morning, after packing up and loading our belongings on to the canoe, we set off down stream. Manley calculated that our other coolies and baggage would be waiting for us about eight miles lower down, as they had been directed to make a small hut and comfortable camp opposite an island in the river.

The encampment was reached in the afternoon, and all our traps were removed from the boat and stowed away in the hut, as we intended making this our headquarters for at least a week.

Our coolies said that there was a small encampment of "Veddahs" within a mile, and as these wretched people might prove very interesting to us, Manley and I set off to pay them a visit, leaving Stockton to shoot some jungle-fowl and superintend dinner.

Andi carried our rifles, and one of the Cinghalese trackers accompanied us as interpreter.

Of course, the mile which the coolies told us turned out to be a good two, but we had occasional shots at snipe, peacock or jungle-fowl, which made the walk seem a short one. I brought down a fine specimen of the low-country kingfisher, which is rather an uncommon bird in Ceylon, although plentiful enough in the Malay Peninsula.

While passing under some large trees, a piece of honeycomb fell down upon Manley's hat, and, on looking up, we saw what at a first glance appeared to be monkeys, but which the trackers informed us were two Veddahs robbing a bees' nest.

The bees were careering wildly about and settling on everybody and everything in an obtrusive manner, so Andi put a match to some dried ferns and lantana.

The smoke from this soon cleared away our tormentors, and we beckoned to the Veddahs to come down. This they did not like doing, and "coo-eeed" loudly to their companions.

In answer to the summons, seven or eight mop-headed and dirty-looking wretches appeared slinking through the bushes, with their bows and arrows.

They were far more afraid of us than we could think possible, and suddenly laid down their bows and jabbered something which sounded like "dishlooth," but which evidently meant peace at any price.

The tracker now spoke some gibberish to them, and reassured them completely. They came up and looked at the game we had shot. It puzzled them exceedingly to think how snipe could be bagged, except with springs, and they were utterly unable to comprehend the tracker's account of how they had been killed while flying.

These poor creatures were the most wretched examples of human beings I have ever seen. When the whole party had assembled they numbered seventeen. Nine of these were men and boys and six of them women, two of whom carried children.

The men carried trumpery-looking bows and arrows, and were munching large pieces of honeycomb, covered with bits of bark, moss and insects.

The women seemed to be left out of this little ceremony altogether. All of them looked unspeakably hungry and miserable, although they may not have been. We measured the tallest, and he barely reached five feet.

They live almost entirely upon honey, fruit and the flesh of whatever they can shoot. Their arrows were tipped with bone; but they knew the use of metals, and begged of us for nails.

They took us to their encampment, which merely consisted of some undressed skins stretched against the twisted roots of trees, and there told us a pitiful story about a bear which had caused them much terror and an-

noyance, and wounded one of their number. All of them were anxious to show us the place into which the bear had been tracked, and where they affirmed he still was. Between a tall ant-hill and the roots of a huge tree was a small cave half blocked up with tree ferns, and into this place the beast had retreated.

As they had kept no watch, Manley thought it probable that the bear might have gone off; but the Veddahs pointed out to him that the most recent claw-marks were those going inward, which quite settled the matter in our minds.

The hole did not look deep, and was formed in a very crumbling kind of clay, so that we thought it might be broken down.

After the natives had beaten vainly on all sides of the cave with heavy logs, we decided to try fire. The tracker had a large buffalo-horn powder-flask, which he had filled before starting. There would be amply sufficient powder here to blow up the entire lair, which could not be as large as an ordinary coal-bin.

To effect this purpose, we directed that it should be blocked up with logs, stones and earth, merely leaving a small aperture through which to introduce a bamboo stem filled with gunpowder.

An enormous cane was cut down, the length of which was so great that both Manley and myself undertook to push in the loaded end, as we should be quite out of danger.

The bottom joint of the bamboo was as large around as a good-sized flower pot, and was, of course, hollow. A small hole was bored and the entire horn of powder poured in. A match was applied, and, after a period of anxious waiting, the explosion took place.

A muffled noise and a cloud of dust were the effects. The entire top and sides of the cave were blown down. We heard angry growls among the debris, and, catching sight of something large and black, I fired into it, with the effect of seeing a bear roll over. It immediately recovered its legs, however, and came savagely on. The tracker, who was on one side, half hidden by a tree, gave it a chop on the back of the head with a small hatchet that completely knocked all life out of it.

I heard rapid firing and shouts, but the dust had got into my eyes so badly that I could not look up.

A minute afterwards a half-grown bear shambled past and got the contents of my left barrel in its ribs, at the same time receiving a smaller contribution of half a dozen arrows on its other side. Manley effectually finished it off after firing both barrels of his rifle and one of his gun.

The other cub had carried away the shot from his left barrel and was being hotly pursued by all the natives.

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