

TRAPPING WILD ANIMALS
IN MALAY JUNGLES

CHARLES MAVER



TRAPPING WILD
ANIMALS IN
MALAY JUNGLES

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TRAPPING WILD
ANIMALS IN
MALAY JUNGLES
By CHARLES MAYER

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TO
MY SISTER DORA

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. CIRCUS DAYS	9
II. JUNGLE STRATAGEMS	45
III. ELEPHANTS	67
IV. SHIPPING WILD ANIMALS	103
V. THE SEA TRAGEDY OF THE JUNGLE FOLK	135
VI. "KILLING A MAN-EATER"	173
VII. UP A TREE IN THE JUNGLE	193



I

CIRCUS DAYS

TRAPPING WILD ANIMALS IN MALAY JUNGLES

I

CIRCUS DAYS

IT was the lure of the circus—the tug that every boy feels when a show comes to town—that started me on my career as a collector of wild animals. I use the word collector rather than hunter, because hunting gives the idea of killing and, in my business, a dead animal is no animal at all. In fact, the mere hunting of the animals was simply the beginning of my work, and the task of capturing them uninjured was far more thrilling than standing at a distance and pulling a trigger. And then, when animals were safely in the net or stockade, came the job of taking them back through the jungle to the port where they could be sold. It was often a case of continuous performance until I stood on the dock and saw the boats steam away with the cages aboard. And I wasn't too sure of the success of my expedition even then, because the animals I had yanked from

the jungle might die before they reached their destination.

I was nearly seventeen when Sells Brothers' Circus came to Binghamton, New York, where I was living with my parents. That day I joined some other boys in playing hookey from school, and we earned our passes by carrying water for the animals. It wasn't my first circus, but it was the first time that I had ever worked around the animals and I was fascinated. I didn't miss the big show, but all the rest of the day I was in the menagerie, listening to the yarns of the keepers and doing as much of their work as they would allow. That night, when the circus left town, I stowed away in a wagon.

The next morning, in Elmira, I showed up at the menagerie bright and early. The men laughed when they saw me. I had expected them to be surprised and I was afraid that they might send me away, but I found out later that it was quite an ordinary thing for boys to run away from home and join the circus. And the men didn't mind because the boys were always glad to do their work for them. I worked hard and, in return, the men saw that I had something to eat. That night I stowed away again in the wagon.

In Buffalo I was told to see the boss—the head property-man—and I went, trembling for fear he was going to send me back home. Instead, he told me that I might have the job of property-boy,

which would give me \$25 a month, my meals and a place to sleep—if I could find one. There were no sleeping accommodations for the canvas and property crews ; we rolled up in the most comfortable places we could find, and we were always so dead tired that we didn't care much where we slept.

Since those early days in the circus, I've been around the world many times, and I've seen all sorts of men, living and working in all sorts of conditions, but I've never found a harder life than that of property-boy, unless, perhaps, it's that of a Malay prisoner. Sometimes I wonder how I stood it and why I liked it. But I did stand it and, what is more, I loved it so much that I persuaded the boss to keep me on when we went into winter quarters.

The moment we arrived at a town, the head canvas-man rode to the lot on which we were to show and laid it out ; that is, he measured it and decided on the location of the tents. The men with him drove small stakes to indicate where the tent-pegs were to be placed. In the meantime, the property gang unloaded the show. Then we drove the four-foot stakes for the dressing-tent into whatever kind of ground the lot happened to have. A man can work up a good appetite by swinging a fourteen-pound hammer for an hour or so before breakfast, but before we started we had also many other things to do. The dressing-tent had to be spread and hoisted ; then the properties were sorted