

SIX YEARS IN THE
MALAY JUNGLE

CARVETH WELLS



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PREFACE

THE Malay Jungle is an interesting place—to read about—but to be sent there for two years and to be forced to stay there for six would try the temper and the constitution of most people.

And that was what happened to Mr. Wells—sent there in 1913 to survey a route for a railway, he was by the fortunes of war kept there for six years, for like the eruptions of Krakatau the effects of the World War were felt around the globe, especially in British Possessions.

Fortunately for Mr. Wells he possessed a stock of good nature, or philosophy, call it whichever you like, together with good powers of observation, and some of the things he saw and some of the things that happened he has told us in this book. Mr. Wells seems to take delight in so telling the truth that with Hamlet the reader will “doubt truth to be a liar,” though naturally this is not so evident in his writing as in his lectures.

In my boyhood days, more than half a century ago, there was a story current among sailor men—quoted

and misquoted often—of the Glasgow laddie who ran away to sea and after an absence of three years returned to visit his old grandmother, who naturally wished to hear of some of the wonderful things Jamie had seen. He told her of the Mountains of Sugar and Rivers of Rum he had seen in Jamaica, but this was only what the old lady expected. Then he related how, when they hove up anchor in the Red Sea, they brought up a wheel of one of Pharaoh's chariots—which did not surprise his aunt at all as the good book told how Pharaoh's host had been overwhelmed. But when, his imagination having given out, Jamie said that he had seen fishes that flew, the grandmother broke in: "Na, na, Jamie, ye must na tell lees to your old grannie."

So when Mr. Wells tells you of shooting a deer, which he put in his pocket and ate for supper, the reader—like the Chautauqua lady—is tempted to ask if Mr. Wells ever heard of Ananias. Yet Mr. Wells might have eaten two or three of these same little Chevrotains and still have gone to bed hungry.

And for the fish stories, the fish that climbed trees and winked at him, his floating islands—not in any sense deserts; and his other wonders of the East—they are no more imagination than Jamie's fish that flew. There are plenty of facts for the serious-minded in Mr. Wells's book, and for the very serious there is an