

## II

It was in the most unknown perhaps of such spots, a small bay on the coast of New Guinea, that young Pata Hassim, the nephew of one of the greatest chiefs of Wajo, met Lingard for the first time.

He was a trader after the Wajo manner, and in a stout sea-going prau armed with two guns and manned by young men who were related to his family by blood or dependence, had come in there to buy some birds of paradise skins for the old Sultan of Ternate; a risky expedition undertaken not in the way of business but as a matter of courtesy toward the aged Sultan who had entertained him sumptuously in that dismal brick palace at Ternate for a month or more.

While lying off the village, very much on his guard, waiting for the skins and negotiating with the treacherous coast-savages who are the go-betweens in that trade, Hassim saw one morning Lingard's brig come to an anchor in the bay, and shortly afterward observed a white man of great stature with a beard that shone like gold, land from a boat and stroll on unarmed, though followed by four Malays of the brig's crew, toward the native village.

Hassim was struck with wonder and amazement at the cool recklessness of such a proceeding; and, after; in true Malay fashion, discussing with his people for an hour or so the urgency of the case, he also landed, but well escorted and armed, with the intention of going to see what would happen.

The affair really was very simple, "such as"--Lingard would say--"such as might have happened to anybody." He went ashore with the intention to look for some stream where he could conveniently replenish his water casks, this being really the motive which had induced him to enter the bay.

While, with his men close by and surrounded by a mop-headed, sooty crowd, he was showing a few cotton handkerchiefs, and trying to explain by signs the object of his landing, a spear, lunged from behind, grazed his neck. Probably the Papuan wanted only to ascertain whether such a creature could be killed or hurt, and most likely firmly believed that it could not; but one of Lingard's seamen at once retaliated by striking at the experimenting savage with his parang--three such choppers brought for the purpose of clearing the bush, if necessary, being all the weapons the party from the brig possessed.

A deadly tumult ensued with such suddenness that Lingard, turning round swiftly, saw his defender, already speared in three places, fall forward at his feet.

Wasub, who was there, and afterward told the story once a week on an average, used to horrify his hearers by showing how the man blinked his eyes quickly before he fell. Lingard was unarmed. To the end of his life he remained incorrigibly reckless in that respect, explaining that he was "much too quick tempered to carry firearms on the chance of a row. And if put to it," he argued, "I can make shift to kill a man with my fist anyhow; and then--don't ye see--you know what you're doing and are not so apt to start a trouble from sheer temper or funk--see?"

In this case he did his best to kill a man with a blow from the shoulder and catching up another by the middle flung him at the naked, wild crowd. "He hurled men about as the wind hurls broken boughs. He made a broad way through our enemies!" related Wasub in his jerky voice. It is more probable that Lingard's quick movements and the amazing aspect of such a strange being caused the warriors to fall back before his rush.

Taking instant advantage of their surprise and fear, Lingard, followed by his men, dashed along the kind of ruinous jetty leading to the village which was erected as usual over the water. They darted into one of the miserable huts built of rotten mats and bits of decayed canoes, and in this shelter showing daylight through all its sides, they had time to draw breath and realize that their position was not much improved.

The women and children screaming had cleared out into the bush, while at the shore end of the jetty the warriors capered and yelled, preparing for a general attack. Lingard noticed with mortification that his boat-keeper apparently had lost his head, for, instead of swimming off to the ship to give the alarm, as he was perfectly able to do, the man actually struck out for a small rock a hundred yards away and was frantically trying to climb up its perpendicular side. The tide being out, to jump into the horrible mud under the houses would have been almost certain death. Nothing remained therefore--since the miserable dwelling would not have withstood a vigorous kick, let alone a siege--but to rush back on shore and regain possession of the boat. To this Lingard made up his mind quickly and, arming himself with a crooked stick he found under his hand, sallied forth at the head of his three men. As he bounded along, far in advance, he had just time to perceive clearly the desperate nature of the undertaking, when he heard two shots fired to his right. The solid mass of black bodies and frizzly heads in front of him wavered and broke up. They did not run away, however.

Lingard pursued his course, but now with that thrill of exultation which even a faint prospect of success inspires in a sanguine man. He heard a shout of many voices far off, then there was another report of a shot, and a musket ball fired at long range spurted a tiny jet of sand between him and his wild enemies. His next

bound would have carried him into their midst had they awaited his onset, but his uplifted arm found nothing to strike. Black backs were leaping high or gliding horizontally through the grass toward the edge of the bush.

He flung his stick at the nearest pair of black shoulders and stopped short. The tall grasses swayed themselves into a rest, a chorus of yells and piercing shrieks died out in a dismal howl, and all at once the wooded shores and the blue bay seemed to fall under the spell of a luminous stillness. The change was as startling as the awakening from a dream. The sudden silence struck Lingard as amazing.

He broke it by lifting his voice in a stentorian shout, which arrested the pursuit of his men. They retired reluctantly, glaring back angrily at the wall of a jungle where not a single leaf stirred. The strangers, whose opportune appearance had decided the issue of that adventure, did not attempt to join in the pursuit but halted in a compact body on the ground lately occupied by the savages.

Lingard and the young leader of the Wajo traders met in the splendid light of noonday, and amidst the attentive silence of their followers, on the very spot where the Malay seaman had lost his life. Lingard, striding up from one side, thrust out his open palm; Hassim responded at once to the frank gesture and they exchanged their first hand-clasp over the prostrate body, as if fate had already exacted the price of a death for the most ominous of her gifts--the gift of friendship that sometimes contains the whole good or evil of a life.

"I'll never forget this day," cried Lingard in a hearty tone; and the other smiled quietly.

Then after a short pause--"Will you burn the village for vengeance?" asked the Malay with a quick glance down at the dead Lascar who, on his face and with stretched arms, seemed to cling desperately to that earth of which he had known so little.

Lingard hesitated.

"No," he said, at last. "It would do good to no one."

"True," said Hassim, gently, "but was this man your debtor--a slave?"

"Slave?" cried Lingard. "This is an English brig. Slave? No. A free man like myself."

"Hai. He is indeed free now," muttered the Malay with another glance downward. "But who will pay the bereaved for his life?"

"If there is anywhere a woman or child belonging to him, I--my serang would know--I shall seek them out," cried Lingard, remorsefully.

"You speak like a chief," said Hassim, "only our great men do not go to battle with naked hands. O you white men! O the valour of you white men!"

"It was folly, pure folly," protested Lingard, "and this poor fellow has paid for it."

"He could not avoid his destiny," murmured the Malay. "It is in my mind my trading is finished now in this place," he added, cheerfully.

Lingard expressed his regret.

"It is no matter, it is no matter," assured the other courteously, and after Lingard had given a pressing invitation for Hassim and his two companions of high rank to visit the brig, the two parties separated.

The evening was calm when the Malay craft left its berth near the shore and was rowed slowly across the bay to Lingard's anchorage. The end of a stout line was thrown on board, and that night the white man's brig and the brown man's prau swung together to the same anchor.

The sun setting to seaward shot its last rays between the headlands, when the body of the killed Lascar, wrapped up decently in a white sheet, according to Mohammedan usage, was lowered gently below the still waters of the bay upon which his curious glances, only a few hours before, had rested for the first time. At the moment the dead man, released from slip-ropes, disappeared without a ripple before the eyes of his shipmates, the bright flash and the heavy report of the brig's bow gun were succeeded by the muttering echoes of the encircling shores and by the loud cries of sea birds that, wheeling in clouds, seemed to scream after the departing seaman a wild and eternal good-bye. The master of the brig, making his way aft with hanging head, was followed by low murmurs of pleased surprise from his crew as well as from the strangers who crowded the main deck. In such acts performed simply, from conviction, what may be called the romantic side of the man's nature came out; that responsive sensitiveness to the shadowy appeals made by life and death, which is the groundwork of a chivalrous character.

Lingard entertained his three visitors far into the night. A sheep from the brig's sea stock was given to the men of the prau, while in the cabin, Hassim and his two friends, sitting in a row on the stern settee, looked very splendid with costly metals and flawed jewels. The talk conducted with hearty friendship on Lingard's

part, and on the part of the Malays with the well-bred air of discreet courtesy, which is natural to the better class of that people, touched upon many subjects and, in the end, drifted to politics.

"It is in my mind that you are a powerful man in your own country," said Hassim, with a circular glance at the cuddy.

"My country is upon a far-away sea where the light breezes are as strong as the winds of the rainy weather here," said Lingard; and there were low exclamations of wonder. "I left it very young, and I don't know about my power there where great men alone are as numerous as the poor people in all your islands, Tuan Hassim. But here," he continued, "here, which is also my country--being an English craft and worthy of it, too--I am powerful enough. In fact, I am Rajah here. This bit of my country is all my own."

The visitors were impressed, exchanged meaning glances, nodded at each other.

"Good, good," said Hassim at last, with a smile. "You carry your country and your power with you over the sea. A Rajah upon the sea. Good!"

Lingard laughed thunderously while the others looked amused.

"Your country is very powerful--we know," began again Hassim after a pause, "but is it stronger than the country of the Dutch who steal our land?"

"Stronger?" cried Lingard. He opened a broad palm. "Stronger? We could take them in our hand like this--" and he closed his fingers triumphantly.

"And do you make them pay tribute for their land?" enquired Hassim with eagerness.

"No," answered Lingard in a sobered tone; "this, Tuan Hassim, you see, is not the custom of white men. We could, of course--but it is not the custom."

"Is it not?" said the other with a sceptical smile. "They are stronger than we are and they want tribute from us. And sometimes they get it--even from Wajo where every man is free and wears a kris."

There was a period of dead silence while Lingard looked thoughtful and the Malays gazed stonily at nothing.

"But we burn our powder amongst ourselves," went on Hassim, gently, "and blunt our weapons upon one another."

He sighed, paused, and then changing to an easy tone began to urge Lingard to visit Wajo "for trade and to see friends," he said, laying his hand on his breast and inclining his body slightly.

"Aye. To trade with friends," cried Lingard with a laugh, "for such a ship"--he waved his arm--"for such a vessel as this is like a household where there are many behind the curtain. It is as costly as a wife and children."

The guests rose and took their leave.

"You fired three shots for me, Panglima Hassim," said Lingard, seriously, "and I have had three barrels of powder put on board your prau; one for each shot. But we are not quits."

The Malay's eyes glittered with pleasure.

"This is indeed a friend's gift. Come to see me in my country!"

"I promise," said Lingard, "to see you--some day."

The calm surface of the bay reflected the glorious night sky, and the brig with the prau riding astern seemed to be suspended amongst the stars in a peace that was almost unearthly in the perfection of its unstirring silence. The last hand-shakes were exchanged on deck, and the Malays went aboard their own craft. Next morning, when a breeze sprang up soon after sunrise, the brig and the prau left the bay together. When clear of the land Lingard made all sail and sheered alongside to say good-bye before parting company--the brig, of course, sailing three feet to the prau's one. Hassim stood on the high deck aft.

"Prosperous road," hailed Lingard.

"Remember the promise!" shouted the other. "And come soon!" he went on, raising his voice as the brig forged past. "Come soon--lest what perhaps is written should come to pass!"

The brig shot ahead.

"What?" yelled Lingard in a puzzled tone, "what's written?"

He listened. And floating over the water came faintly the words:

"No one knows!"