



A quaint rare book is the "Hakayit Abdulla," or Autobiography of Abdulla, Munshi of Malacca, translated from the Malay by F. T. Thomson (H. S. King and Co.). For a native of the Far East to write an autobiography is, we are told, a signal event, yet nothing else so fully enables us to realise the inner life of an Oriental race, or learn so much of what they really think about their Western lords and masters. Unfortunately for this latter point, our author, a Malayan British subject, but only three removes in descent from an Arab ancestor, belongs to the generation preceding our own. Employed in youth as clerk and interpreter to Mr., afterwards Sir, Stamford Raffles, his reminiscences sweep over the times when Malacca passed from English to Dutch, and back again to English hands, when Java was conquered and restored, and Singapore, through Raffles' foresight, made a centre point of British commerce. Clever and warm-hearted, with a strong affection for his English patrons, above all, for the beloved of all natives, Sir Stamford, yet with a fair slice of harmless vanity and pride in his own linguistic skill, Abdulla gives us keen criticisms and photographic portraits of Dutch and English officials, and pictured incidents of native life—the tortures of Malay school discipline, the great elephant hunt of Colonel Farquhar, from which all Malacca dated everything for years, the treachery of the Raja of Siak, or the visit to the wild tribes of the interior—minute, naïve, and forcible as Defoe. There is a quaintness, too, in Mr. Thomson's version which goes very well with the grave amusing simplicity of the narrator.