

Java

The Garden of the East

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SINAGAR



SCIENTISTS and lay tourists have equally exhausted their adjectives in laudations of Java, Miss Marianne North calling it "one magnificent garden of luxuriance, surpassing Brazil, Javaica, and Sarawak combined"; and Alfred Russel Wallace epitomizing it after this fashion: "Taking it as a whole, and surveying it from every point of view, Java is probably the very finest and most interesting tropical island in the world. . . . The most fertile, productive, and populous island in the tropics." Lesser folk have been as sweeping in their superlatives, and all agree that, of all exiled cultivators in the far parts of the world, the Java planter is most to be envied, leading, as he does, the ideal tropical life, the one best worth living, in a land where over great areas it is always luxurious, dreamy afternoon, and in the beautiful hill-country is always the fresh, breezy, dewy summer forenoon of the rarest June.

The most favored and the most famous plantations

nibbled their reward of tasseled rice-heads, brought on carrying-poles from the granaries, where legions of rice-sparrows twittered in perpetual residence. We sat on a bank near the little race-course, or manège, where the colts are trained, and the favorites were led past and put through their paces and accomplishments one by one. It was almost dusk, with the swiftness with which day closes in the tropics, when the banteng, or wild cow (*Bos sondaicus*), was trotted out—a clumsy, dun-colored creature, with a strange, musky odor, that was brought as a calf from the wild south-coast country, and was at once mothered and protected by a fussy little sheep, "the European goat," as the natives call the woolly animal from abroad, that was still guiding and driving it with all the intelligence of a collie.

The bachelor planter partner showed us his bungalow, full of hunting-trophies—skulls and skins of panthers, tigers, and wild dogs; tables made of rhinoceros-hide resting on rhinoceros and elephant skulls, and tables made of mammoth turtle-shells resting on deer-antlers. The great prizes were the nine huge banteng skulls, trophies of hunting-trips to the South Preanger, the lone region bordering on the Indian Ocean. There were also chandeliers of deer-antlers, and a frieze-like wall-bordering of python-skins, strange tusks and teeth, wings and feathers galore, and dozens of kodak pictures as witnesses and records of the many camps and battues of this sportsman—all gathered in that same wild region of big game, as much as fifty or a hundred miles away, but referred to in the Buitenzorg neighborhood as New York sportsmen

grain both cultivated and worshiped. It argues for the industry of a tropical race that they should grow this troublesome grain at all, the grain that demands more back-breaking toil and constant attention from planting to harvest-time than any other grain which grows. It would seem discouraging to rice-cultivation, too, when in old times the natives were taxed according to the area of their rice-lands only, and mulcted of a fifth of their rice when it was harvested—all in this happy land, where they might sit under the breadfruit- and banana-trees and doze at their ease, while those kindly fruits dropped in their laps. These picturesque rice-fields have won for Java the name of "the granary of the East," and enabled it to export that grain in quantities, besides supporting its own great population, one of the densest in the world, and averaging four hundred and fifty inhabitants to each square mile. No fertilizer of any kind is applied to these irrigated rice-fields, save to burn over and plow under the rich stubble, after the *padi*, or ripe ears of grain, have been cut singly with a knife and borne away in miniature sheaves strung on carrying-poles across the peasants' shoulders.

Beyond the region of the great plantations, where every hillside is cleared and planted up to the kina limit, and only the summits and steepest slopes are left to primeval jungle, there succeed great stretches of wild country, where remarkable engineering feats were required of the railway-builders. With two heavy engines the train climbs to Tjandjoer station, sixteen hundred feet above the sea; and there, if one has telegraphed the order ahead, he may lunch at ease in his

compartment as the train goes on. He may draw from the three-storied lunch-basket handed in either a substantial riz tavel, consisting of a little of everything heaped upon a day's ration of boiled rice, or a "tiffin," whose *pièce de résistance* is a huge *bifstek mit ard appelen*, that would satisfy the cravings of any three dragoons. Either feast is followed by bread or bananas, with a generous section of a cheese, with mangosteens or other fruits, and one feels that he has surely reached the land of plenty and solid, solid comforts, where fate cannot harm him—when all this may be handed in to fleeting tourists at a florin and a half apiece.

After this station of abundant rations, all signs of cultivation and occupancy disappear, and the station buildings and the endless lantana-hedges along the railway-track are the only signs of human habitation or energy in the wilderness of hills covered with alang-alang or bamboo-grass, and the coarse *glagah* reeds which cattle will not touch. The banteng, the one-horned rhinoceros, and the tigers that used to roam these moors, fled when the shriek of the locomotive was heard in the cañons, and the sportsmen have to seek such big game in the jungles and grass-lands of the south coast. The streams that come cascading down from all these green heights have carved out some beautiful scenery, and the Tjitaroem River, foaming in sight for a while, disappears, runs through a mountain by a natural tunnel, and reappears in a deep gorge, of which one has an all-too-exciting view as the train crosses on a spidery viaduct high in air.

A great, fertile green plain surrounds the native