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ROMANTIC JAVA AS IT WAS & IS

A DESCRIPTION OF THE DIVERSIFIED PEOPLES, THE DEPARTED GLORIES & STRANGE CUSTOMS OF A LITTLE KNOWN ISLAND, REMARKABLE BOTH FOR ITS ARTS, DECORATIVE & DRAMATIC, & FOR ITS NATURAL BEAUTY & THE RICHNESS OF ITS RESOURCES

BY

HUBERT S. BANNER

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killer has been met with threats of a strike on the part of the slaughterers.

The wild animals of Java, like the flora, are all of southern Asiatic type. The elephant, though found in Java up to about 1650, is now quite extinct there. In Sumatra, however, it is common, and does enormous damage to the crops. The rhinoceros, despite constant announcements that he is at last extinct in Java, continues to crop up at intervals. I can recollect at least three occasions while I was out there on which "the very last rhinoceros" was shot. The Java rhino is the one-horned variety, his Sumatran cousin the two-horned. Of wild pig there are several varieties, of which the most singular is the *babi rusa*, or "pig-deer" of East Java, a creature with phenomenally long, curling tushes.

A very formidable—perhaps the most formidable—denizen of the Java forests is the *banteng* (*bos sondaicus*), or wild ox. His danger, however, lies less in size than in his extreme ferocity. The bulls are of a dark, purplish brown, the cows of a lighter and redder shade, but both are conspicuously marked with a large white disc, like a target, on the quarters just below the root of the tail. The *banteng* is often confused with the *seladang* of Malaya. But the latter, identical with the *gaur* of India, more nearly resembles the Cape buffalo than the *banteng*, and is far taller and heavier.

There are three well-known varieties of deer: the *menjangan*, a fair-sized stag; the *kidang*, a smaller species, and the dainty little *kanchil*, or mouse-deer. This last, as in Malaya, is popularly reputed among the Javanese to be the chosen law-giver of the jungle.

The cat family is represented by the tiger, the panther, and the wild-cat. Generally speaking, tigers are now rare in Java, though abounding in Sumatra and Bali. It is a notable fact that whenever a season of drought descends upon Bali, and the deer die off, tigers become more numerous in Java, and passengers on steamers have actually seen them swimming the Bali Straits. Panther, both black

and spotted, are far more common, and their depredations figure almost daily in the Press. A few years ago a panther caused much consternation in Tretes, a little hill-station near Surabaya, by stalking down the village street in broad daylight. In the same place a panther paid a nocturnal visit to a bungalow occupied by some personal friends of mine, breaking down an outhouse door and making off with a dog. All the great cats love dog-flesh, and tigers and panthers kept in captivity in Java are invariably fed on canine strays.

In the Tengger Mountains there are wild dogs, which hunt in packs, and have been known to attack human beings when game was scarce. In colour they are a warm, foxy red. I kept a bitch of the species at one time, which was one of the sweetest-tempered animals I ever owned. One precaution, however, had to be observed with her: she must never be touched when asleep.

The Indian fox, everyone tells me, is unknown to Java. But I shall still maintain at the Day of Judgment that I once saw one near Nongkojajar. I was sitting very still, waiting for driven pig, and he trotted across the glade almost close enough for me to touch.

Monkeys of every sort abound, from great black fellows down to the common little grey variety, but I believe I am correct in saying there are no apes native to Java. The natives are exceedingly fond of monkeys as pets, though too much given to teasing them. In Cheribon I had a monkey which much annoyed Wolf, one of my dogs, by pulling faces at him from the safety of a high perch. One day the monkey escaped and took up his quarters on the roof of the house. For days Wolf "blockaded" him, so to speak, and the monkey made matters worse by frequently descending to the gutter and grimacing. I was away up-country at the time, or I would, of course, have broken the blockade. Alas! Jacko was at last forced to descend for food, and Wolf made short work of him.

The orang-utan, though a native of Sumatra and

by the lie of his hairs and other entirely superficial attributes. He might be goose-rumped, roach-backed, ewe-necked, and afflicted with splints, spavins, and curbs on every leg; but should his muzzle show a well-emphasized groove running down to the upper lip, he would always fetch his price. For such is the token of a *pen-naikan rajah*—a “royal mount.” I have a little volume entitled *Ilmu Kuda*, or “Book of the Horse.” But one may only conjecture what Captain Hayes would have to say of it, for from cover to cover it is concerned solely with peculiarities in colour-markings and unusual twists in the lie of the coat.

A curiosity which I, at any rate, have never once seen in Europe, but which is of comparative frequency in Java, is a chicken with its feathers set in the wrong direction. By what biological accident this abnormality occurs I must leave to more scientific pens to say; but the result is indescribably grotesque—the bird looks like a mop dipped in a glue-pot—and is considered very lucky by the natives. Such a chicken will never be killed for food, but will be guarded with infinite care, that it may bring good fortune to the house blest by its possession.

Certain animals it is “unlucky” to kill. A notable example is the *tokké* (see page 149), for should his leathery call sound seven times in succession, or in a multiple of seven, good fortune lies in store for those who hear, and the destruction of a *tokké*, accordingly, is the destruction of a potential bringer of luck. Another creature no man slays is the crow. For are not crows but earthly caskets for the restless souls of those who have died by their own hand?

Like that of all Orientals, the world of the Javanese is filled with an innumerable company of ghosts. And among these, animal spirits have a definite place. There is a particular spur of the Gedéh Mountain which no native will approach even by daylight, for terror of the ghost-tigers that have their habitation there.

As among all primitive or semi-primitive peoples, the actions of animals and birds are continually interpreted into omens, good or otherwise. Should a snake, for example, cross your path, all depends upon whether he passed from right to left or in the opposite direction. If the former was the case, you may expect a stroke of good fortune. But supposing the snake to have travelled from the left, some disaster lies in store.

In the rules laid down for the reading of dreams, too, animals and birds figure largely. In 1812, for example, when the British fortunes in Java hung upon the issue at Jockakarta, a priest at Surabaya dreamed he saw two eagles, a black and a white, fighting in the sky, and that the black was the victor. The premature outbreak of rebellion at that place, indeed, was actually due to local trust in the accuracy of the omen.

There would be no end to the tale of the magical medicinal properties ascribed by the Javanese and Chinese to various parts of animals. A friend of mine lucky enough to shoot a rhinoceros in Sumatra had the additional good fortune to sell its horns to a Chinese for no less than fl.800 (£64). The practice is to soak the horn for half an hour in a basin of hot water and then drink the liquid as a sovereign prophylactic against fever, malaria, and evil spirits.

There is, too, a widespread belief that by hanging the genital organ of a tiger (or sometimes, of a crocodile) over the bed, a similar rejuvenation will be achieved to that which we Europeans associate with monkey-glands.