

JAVA

THE GARDEN OF THE EAST

I

SINGAPORE AND THE EQUATOR



SINGAPORE (or S'pore, as the languid, perspiring, exhausted residents near the line most often write and pronounce the name of Sir Stamford Raffles's colony in the Straits of Malacca) is a geographical and commercial center and cross-roads of the eastern hemisphere, like to no other port in the world. Singapore is an ethnological center, too, and that small island swinging off the tip of the Malay Peninsula holds a whole congress of nations, an exhibit of all the races and peoples and types of men in the world, compared to which the Midway Plaisance was a mere skeleton of a suggestion. The traveler, despite the overpowering, all-subduing influence of the heat, has some thrills of excitement at the tropical pictures of the shore, and the congregation of varicolored humanity grouped on the Singapore wharf; and there and in Java, where one least and last expects to find

such modern conveniences, his ship swings up to solid wharves, and he walks down a gang-plank in civilized fashion—something to be appreciated after the excitements and discomforts of landing in small boats among the screaming heathen of all other Asiatic ports.

On the Singapore wharf is a market of models and a life-class for a hundred painters; and sculptors, too, may study there all the tones of living bronze and the beauties of human patina, and more of repose than of muscular action, perhaps. Japanese, Chinese, Siamese, Malays, Javanese, Burmese, Cingalese, Tamils, Sikhs, Parsees, Lascars, Malabars, Malagasy, and sailor folk of all coasts, Hindus and heathens of every caste and persuasion, are grouped in a brilliant confusion of red, white, brown, and patterned drapery, of black, brown, and yellow skins; and behind them, in ghostly clothes, stand the pallid Europeans, who have brought the law, order, and system, the customs, habits, comforts, and luxuries of civilization to the tropics and the jungle. All these alien heathens and picturesque unbelievers, these pagans and idolaters, Buddhists, Brahmans, Jews, Turks, sun- and fire-worshippers, devil-dancers, and what not, have come with the white man to toil for him under the equatorial sun, since the Malays are the great leisure class of the world, and will not work. The Malays will hardly live on the land, much less cultivate it or pay taxes, while they can float about in strange little hen-coops of house-boats that fill the river and shores by thousands. Hence the Tamils have come from India to work, and the Chinese to do the small trading; and the Malay rests, or at most goes a-fishing, or sits by the canoe-

loads of coral and sponges, balloon-fish and strange sea treasures that are sold at the wharf.

A tribe of young Malays in dugout canoes meet every steamer and paddle in beside it, shrieking and gesticulating for the passengers to toss coins into the water. Their mops of black hair are bleached auburn by the action of sun and salt water, and the canoe and paddle fit as naturally to these amphibians as a turtle's shell and flipper. They bail with an automatic sweep of the hollowed foot in regular time with the dip of the paddle; and when a coin drops, the Malay lets go the paddle and sheds his canoe without concern. There is a flash of brown heels, bubbles and commotion below, and the diver comes up, and chooses and rights his wooden shell and flipper as easily and naturally as a man picks out and assumes his coat and cane at a hall door. And in their hearts, the civilized folk on deck, hampered with their multiple garments and conventions, envy these happy-go-lucky, care-free amphibians in the land of the breadfruit, banana, and scant raiment, with dives into the cool, green water, teeming with fish and glittering with falling coins, as the only exertion required to earn a living. Cold and hunger are unknown; flannels and soup are no part of charity; and even that word, and the many organizations in its name, are hardly known in the lands low on the line.

S'pore is the great junction where travelers from the East or the West change ship for Java; a commercial cross-roads where all who travel must stop and see what a marvel of a place British energy has raised from the jungle in less than half a century. The Straits Settlements date from the time when Sir Stamford

Raffles, after Great Britain's five years' temporary occupancy of Java, returned that possession to the Dutch in 1816, the fall of Napoleon removing the fear that this possession of Holland would become a French colony and menace to British interests in Asia. It had been intended to establish such a British commercial entrepôt at Achin Head, the north end of Sumatra; but Sir Stamford Raffles's better idea prevailed, and the free port of Singapore in the Straits of Malacca has won the commercial supremacy of the East from Batavia, and has prospered beyond its founder's dreams. It is a well-built and a beautifully ordered city, and the municipal housekeeping is an example to many cities of the temperate zone. Even the untidy Malay and the dirt-loving Chinese, who swarm to this profitable trading-center, and have absorbed all the small business and retail trade of the place, are held to outer cleanliness and strict sanitary laws in their allotted quarters. The stately business houses, the marble palacé of a bank, the long iron pavilions shading the daily markets, the splendid Raffles Museum and Library, are all regular and satisfactory sights; but the street life is the fascination and distraction of the traveler before everything else. The array of turbans and sarongs gives color to every thoroughfare; but the striking and most unique pictures in Singapore streets are the Tamil bullock-drivers, who, sooty and statuesque, stand in splendid contrast between their humped white oxen and the mounds of white flour-bags they draw in primitive carts. Tiny Tamil children, shades blacker, if that could really be, than their ebon- and charcoal-skinned parents, are seen on suburban roads, clothed only in silver chains,



A STREET IN SINGAPORE.

After photograph by E. S. Platt.

bracelets, and medals; and these lithe, lean people from the south end of India are first in the picturesque elements of the great city of the Straits. The Botanical Garden, although so recently established, promises to become famous; and one arriving from the farther East meets there for the first time the beautiful red-stemmed *Banka* palm, and the symmetrical traveler's palm of Madagascar, the latter all conventionalized ready for sculptors' use. Scores of other splendid palms, giant creepers, gorgeous blossoms and fantastic orchids, known to us only by puny examples in great conservatories at home, equally delight one—all the wealth of jungle and swamp growing beside the smooth, hard roads of an English park, over which one may drive for hours in the suburbs of Singapore.

The Dutch mail-steamers to and from Batavia connect with the English mail-steamers at Singapore; a French line connects with the *Messagerie's* ships running between Marseilles and Japan; an Australian line of steamers gives regular communication; and independent steamers, offering as much comfort, leave Singapore almost daily for Batavia. The five hundred miles' distance is covered in forty-eight or sixty hours, for a uniform fare of fifty Mexican dollars or ninety Dutch gulden—an excessive and unusual charge for a voyage of such length in that or any other region. The traveler is usually warned long beforehand that living and travel in the Netherlands Indies is the most expensive in the world; and the change from the depreciated Mexican silver-dollar standard and the profitable exchange of the far East to the gold standard of Holland dismays one at the start. The

completion of railways across and to all parts of the island of Java, however, has greatly reduced tourist expenses, so that they are not now two or three times the average of similar expenses in India, China, and Japan.

At Singapore, only two degrees above the equator, the sun pursues a monotony of rising and setting that ranges only from six minutes before to six minutes after six o'clock, morning and evening, the year round. Breakfasting by candle-light and leaving the hotel in darkness, there was all the beauty of the gray-and-rose dawn and the pale-yellow rays of the early sun to be seen from the wet deck when our ship let go from the wharf and sailed out over a sea of gold. For the two days and two nights of the voyage, with but six passengers on the large blue-funnel steamer, we had the deck and the cabins, and indeed the equator and the Java Sea, to ourselves. The deck was furnished with the long chairs and hammocks of tropical life, but more tropical yet were the bunches of bananas hanging from the awning-rail, that all might pick and eat at will; for this is the true region of plenty, where selected bananas cost one Mexican cent the dozen, and a whole bunch but five cents, and where actual living is far too cheap and simple to be called a science.

The ship slipped out from the harbor through the glassy river of the Straits of Malacca, and on past points and shores that to me had never been anything but geographic names. There was some little thrill of excitement in being "on the line" in the heart of the tropics, the half-way house of all the world, and one expected strange aspects and effects. There was

a magic stillness of air and sea ; the calm was as of enchantment, and one felt as if in some hypnotic trance, with all nature chained in the same spell. The pale, pearly sky was reflected in smooth stretches of liquid, pearly sea, with vaporous hills, soft green visions of land beyond. Everywhere in these regions the shallow water shows pale green above the sandy bottom, and the anchor can be dropped at will. All through the breathless day the ship coursed over this shimmering yellow and gray-green sea, with faint pictures of land, the very landscapes of mirage, drawn in vaporous tints on every side. We were threading a way through the thousand islands, the archipelago lying below the point of the Malay Peninsula, a region of unnamed, uncounted "summer isles of Eden," chiefly known to history as the home of pirates.

The high mountain-ridges of Sumatra barred the west for all the first equatorial day, the land of this "Java Minor" sloping down and spreading out in great green plains and swamps on the fertile but unhealthy eastern coast. The large settlements and most attractive districts are on the west coast, where the hills rise steeply from the ocean, and coffee-trees thrive luxuriantly. Benkoelen, the old English town, and Padang, the great coffee-mart, are on that coast, and from the latter a railway leads to high mountain districts of great picturesqueness. There are few government plantations on Sumatra, where land-tenures and leases are the same as in Java. Immense areas have been devoted to tobacco-culture near Deli, on the north or Straits coast, planters employing there and on lower east-coast estates more than forty-three

thousand Chinese coolies—the Chinese, the one Asiatic who toils with ardor and regularity, whom the tropics cannot debilitate, and to whom malaria and all germs, microbes, and bacilli seem but tonic agents.

When the British returned Java, after the Napoleon scare was over, they retained Ceylon and the Cape of Good Hope, and sovereign rights over Sumatra, relinquishing this latter suzerainty in 1872, in exchange for Holland's imaginary rights in Ashantee and the Gold Coast of Africa. The Dutch then attempted to reduce the native population of Sumatra to the same estate as the more pliant people of Java; but the wild mountaineers and bucaners, of the north, or Achin, end of the island in particular, warned by the sad fate of the Javanese, had no intention of being conquered and enslaved, of giving their labor and the fruit of their lands to the strangers from Europe's cold swamps. The Achin war has continued since 1872, with little result save a general loss of Dutch prestige in the East, an immense expenditure of Dutch gulden, causing a deficit in the colonial budget every year, a fearful mortality among Dutch troops, and the final abandonment, in this decade of trade depression, of the aggressive policy. Dutch commanders are well satisfied to hold their chain of forts along the western hills, and to punish the Achinese in a small way by blockading them from their supplies of opium, tobacco, and spirits. In one four years of active campaigning the Achin war cost seventy million gulden, and seventy out of every hundred Dutch soldiers succumbed to the climate before going into an encounter. The Achinese morely retired to their swamps and jungles and waited, and

the climate did the rest, their confidence in themselves only shaken during the command of General Van der Heyden, who for a time actually crushed the rebellion. This picturesque fighter, a half-brother of Baron de Stuers, inherited Malay instincts from a native mother, and carried on such a warfare as the Achinese understood. He lost an eye in one encounter, and the natives, then remembering an old tradition that their country would be conquered by a one-eyed man, practically gave up the struggle—to resume it, however, as soon as General Van der Heyden retired and sailed for Holland, and military vigilance was relaxed in consequence of Dutch economy. The Achinese leader, Toekoe Oemar, has several times apparently yielded to the Dutch, only to perpetrate some greater injury; and his treachery and crimes have given him repute as the very prince of evil ones.

One's sympathy goes naturally with the brave, liberty-loving Achinese; and in view of their indomitable spirit, Great Britain did not lose so much when she let go unconquerable Sumatra. British tourists are saddened, however, when they see what their ministers let slip with Java, for with that island and Sumatra, all Asia's southern shore-line, and virtually the far East, would have been England's own.

Geologically this whole Malay Archipelago was one with the Malay Peninsula, and although so recently made, is still subject to earthquake change, as shown in the terrible eruption of the island of Krakatau in the narrow Sunda Strait, west of Java, in August, 1883. Native traditions tell that anciently Sumatra, Java, Bali, and Sumbawa were one island, and "when three

thousand rainy seasons shall have passed away they will be reunited"; but Alfred Russel Wallace denies it, and proves that Java was the first to drop away from the Asiatic mainland and become an island.

While the sun rode high in the cloudless white zenith above our ship the whole world seemed aswoon. Hills and islands swam and wavered in the heat and mists, and the glare and silence were terrible and oppressive. One could not shake off the sensation of mystery and unreality, of sailing into some unknown, eerie, other world. Every voice was subdued, the beat of the engines was scarcely felt in that glassy calm, and the stillness of the ship gave a strange sensation, as of a magic spell. It was not so very hot,—only 86° by the thermometer,—but the least exertion, to cross the deck, to lift a book, to pull a banana, left one limp and exhausted, with cheeks burning and the breath coming faster, that insidious, deceptive heat of the tropics declaring itself—that steaming, wilting quality in the sun of Asia that so soon makes jelly of the white man's brain, and that in no way compares with the scorching, dry 96° in the shade of a North American, hot-wave summer day.

At five o'clock, while afternoon tea and bananas were being served on deck, we crossed the line—that imaginary parting of the world, the invisible thread of the universe, the beginning and the end of all latitude—latitude 0° , longitude 103° east, the sextant told. The position was geographically exciting. We were literally "down South," and might now speak disrespectfully of the equator if we wished. A breeze sprang up as soon as we crossed the line, and all that evening

and through the night the air of the southern hemisphere was appreciably cooler. The ship went slowly, and loitered along in order to enter the Banka Straits by daylight; and at sunrise we were in a smooth river of pearl, with the green Sumatra shores close on one hand, and the heights of Banka's island of tin on the other. A ship in full sail swept out to meet us, and four more barks under swelling canvas passed by in that narrow strait, whose rocks and reefs are fully attested by the line of wrecks and sunken masts down its length. The harbor of Muntuk, whence there is a direct railway to the tin-mines, was busy with shipping, and the white walls and red roofs of the town showed prettily against the green.

The open Java Sea was as still and glassy as the straits had been, and for another breathless, cloudless day the ship's engines beat almost inaudibly as we went southward through an enchanted silence. When the heat and glare of light from the midday sun so directly overhead drove us to the cabin, where swinging punkas gave air, we had additional suggestion of the tropics; for a passenger for Macassar, just down from Penang and Malacca, showed us fifty freshly cured specimens of birds, whose gorgeous plumage repeated the most brilliant and dazzling tints of the rainbow, the flower-garden, and the jewel-case, and left us bereft of adjectives and exclamations. Here we found another passenger, who spoke Dutch and looked the Hollander by every sign, but quickly claimed citizenship with us as a naturalized voter of the great republic. He asked if we lived in Java, and when we had answered that we were going to Java *en touriste*,

“merely travelers,” he established comradeship by saying, “I am a traveling man myself—New York Life.” This naturalized American citizen said quite naturally, “We Dutchmen” and “our queen”—Americanisms with a loyal Holland ring.

After the gold, rose, gray, and purple sunset had shown us such a sky of splendor and sea of glory as we had but dreamed of above the equator, banks of dark vapor defined themselves in the south. A thin young moon hung among the huge yellow stars, that glowed steadily, with no cold twinkling, in that intense night sky; but before the Southern Cross could rise, dense clouds rolled up, and flashes, chains, and forks of angry lightning made a double spectacular play against the inky-black sky and the mirror-black sea. The captain promised us a tropical thunder-storm from those black clouds in the south, and went forward to give ship's orders, advising us to make all haste below when the first drop should fall, as in an instant a sheet of blinding rain would surround the decks, against which the double awnings would be no more protection than so much gauze, and through which one could not see the ship's length. The clouds remained stationary, however, and we missed the promised sensation, although we waited for hours on deck, the ship moving quietly through the soft, velvety air of the tropic's blackest midnight, and the lightning-flashes becoming fainter and fainter.

