

X

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, Jamaica, 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

are those around Buitenzorg and in the Preanger regencies, which lie on the other side of Gedeh and Salak, those two sleeping volcanoes that look down upon their own immediate foot-hills and valleys, to see those great, rolling tracts all cultivated like a Haarlem tulip-bed. Above the cacao limit, tea-gardens, coffee-estates, and kina-plantations cover all the land lying between the altitudes of two thousand and four thousand feet above the level of the sea. The owners of these choicest bits of "the Garden of the East" lead an existence that all other planters of growing crops, and most people who value the creature comforts, the luxuries of life, and nature's opulence, may envy. The climate of the hills is all that Sybarite could wish for,—a perpetual 70° by day, with light covering required at night,—the warm sun of the tropics tempering the fresh mountain air to an eternal mildness, in which the human animal thrives and luxuriates quite as do all the theobromas and caffeine plants in the ground. In the near circle of these two great peaks there is no really dry season, despite the southeast monsoon of the conventional summer months. Every day in the year enjoys its shower, swept from one mountain or the other; and the heavy thunder-storms at the change of the monsoons and during the winter rainy season are the joy of the planter's heart, shaking out myriads of young tea-leaves by their jar and rushing winds, and freshening the coffee-trees like a tonic. As every day has its shower, each day has its tea-crop gathered and cured in this favorable region; and that profitable industry is as continuous and unchanging as the seasons on the

Preanger hillsides, and paramount there, now that coffee is no longer king.

The two great plantations of Sinagar and Parakan Salak, principalities of twelve and fifteen thousand acres respectively, that lie in the valley between Salak and Gedeh, are the oldest and the model tea-gardens of Java, the show-places of the Preangers. Parong Koeda and Tjibitad, an hour beyond Buitenzorg, are practically private railway-stations for these two great estates. The post-road from Tjibitad to Sinagar follows the crest of a ridge, and gives magnificent views between its shade-trees over twenty miles of rolling country, cultivated to the last acre. Blue vapors were tumbling in masses about the summit of Salak the afternoon we coursed along the avenues of shade-trees, and the low growls of distant thunder gave promise of the regular afternoon benefit shower to the thirsty plants and trees that ridged every slope and level with lines of luxuriant green. The small ponies scampered down an avenue of magnificent kanari-trees, with a village of basket houses like to those of Lilliput at the base of the lofty trunks, and, with a rush and a sudden turn around tall shrubbery, brought up before the low white bungalow, where the master of Sinagar sat in his envied ease under such vines and trees as would form a *mise en scène* for an ideal, generally acceptable paradise. A sky-line of tall areca-palms, massed flame-trees, and tamarinds, with vivid-leafed bougainvillea vines pouring down from one tree-top and mantling two or three lesser trees, filled the immediate view from the great portico-hall, or living-room, where the welcoming cups of afternoon tea were at once served.

With the nearest neighbor ten miles away, and the thousand workmen employed upon the place settled with their families in different villages within its confines, Sinagar is a little world or industrial commune by itself, its master a patriarchal ruler, whose sway over these gentle, childlike Javanese is as absolute as it is kindly and just. The "master" has sat under his Sinagar palms and gorgeous bougainvilleas for twenty-six out of the thirty-three years spent in Java, and his sons and daughters have grown up there, gone to Holland to finish their studies, and, returning, have made Sinagar a social center of this part of the Preangers. The life is like that of an English country house, with continental and tropical additions that unite in a social order replete with pleasure and interest. Weekly musicales are preceded by large dinner-parties, guests driving from twenty miles away and coming by train; and, with visitors in turn from all parts of the world, the guest-book is a polyglot and cosmopolitan record of great interest. Long wings have been added to the original bungalow dwelling, inclosing a spacious court, or garden, all connected by arcades and all illuminated by electric lights. The ladies' boudoir at the far end of the buildings opens from a great portico, or piazza, furnished with the hammocks, the ratan furniture, and the countless pillows of a European or American summer villa, but looking out on a marvelous flower-garden and an exquisite landscape view. To that portico were brought the rarest flowers and fruits for our inspection,—such lilies and orchids and strangely fragrant things!—and we cut apart cacao-pods, and those "velvety,

cream-colored peaches" inclosing the nutmeg, and dissected clove-buds with a zeal that amused the young hostesses, to whom these had all been childhood toys. The telephone and telegraph connect all parts of the estate with virtually all parts of the world; and with the great news of Europe clicking in from Batavia, or "helloed" over by some friend at Buitenzorg, one could quite forget the distance from the older centers of civilization, and wonder that all the world did not make Java its playground and refuge of delight, and every man essay the rôle of Java planter.

While we sat at tea that first afternoon, two brilliant scarlet minivers flashed across the screen of shrubbery like tongues of flame, followed by crimson-and-black orioles; while at the master's call a flock of azure-and-iris-winged pigeons came whirling through the air and settled before us in all the sheen and beauty of their plumage. A great wire house full of rare tropic birds was the center of attraction for all the wild birds of the neighborhood, and gorgeously feathered and strangely voiced visitors were always on wing among the shrubbery. In that big aviary lived and flew and walked in beauty the crested Java pigeon, a creature flashing with all intense prismatic blues, and wearing on its head an aigret of living sapphires trembling on long, pliant stems—one of the most graceful and beautiful birds in the world. Other birds of brilliant plumage, wonderful cockatoos, parrots, long-tailed pheasants, and beauties of unknown name, lived as a happy family in the one great cage, around which prowled and sat licking its whiskers a cat of most enterprising and sagacious mien—a

cat that had come all the way from Chicago, only to have its lakeside appetite tormented by this Barmecide feast of rainbow birds.

We were led past flower-beds nodding with strange lilies, past rose-gardens and oleander-hedges, down a paved path that was a steep tunnel through dense shrubbery and overarching trees, to a great white marble tank, or swimming-pool, as large as a ball-room; though few ball-rooms can ever have such lavish decorations of palms, bamboos, and tree-ferns as screen that pool around, with the purple summit of Salak showing just above the highest plumes and fronds—a landscape study just fitted for a theatrical drop-curtain. We might swim or splash, dive or float, or sit on marble steps and comfortably soak at will in that great white tank, the clear spring water warmed by the sun to a soothing temperature for the long, luxurious afternoon bath, and cooled sufficiently through the night to give refreshing shock to early morning plungers. Only the approaching storm, the nearer rumbles of thunder, and finally the first small raindrops induced us to leave that fairy white pool, deep sunk in its tropic glen.

After a half-hour of soft rain, accompanied by three sharp thunder-claps, the climate had done its perfect work; every tree, bird, flower, and insect rejoiced, and all nature literally sang. The warm red earth breathed pleasant fragrance, every tree had its aroma, and the perfumed flowers were overpowering with fresh sweetness. Then the master led the house party for a long walk, first through the oldest tea-gardens, where every leaf on every plant was erect, shining, as if ready

for dress-parade, and more intensely, softly green than ever after the daily shower-bath and wind toilet. We strolled on through a toy village under a kanari avenue, where all the avocations and industries of Javanese life were on view, and the little people, smiling their welcome, dropped on their heels in the permanent courtesy of the *dodok*, the squatting attitude of humility common to all Asiatics. The servants who had brought notes to the master, as he sat on the porch, crouched on their heels as they offered them, and remained in that position until dismissed; and the villagers and wayfarers, hastily dropping on their haunches, maintained that lowly, reverent attitude until we had passed—an attitude and a degree of deference not at all comfortable for an American to contemplate, ineradicable old Javanese custom as it may be. The tiny brown babies, exactly matching the brown earth in tone, crawled over the warm lap of nature, crowing and gurgling their pleasure, their plump little bodies free from all garments, and equally free from any danger of croups or colds from exposure to the weather. We took a turn through the great cement-floored *fabrik* with its ingenious machines all silent for that night, and only the electric-light dynamos whirling to illuminate the great settlement of out-buildings around the residence. The stables were another great establishment by themselves, and fifty odd Arabian and Australian thoroughbreds, housed in a long, open-fronted stable, were receiving their evening rub and fare from a legion of grooms. Morphine, Malaria, Quinine, Moses, and Aaron, and other cup-winners, arched their shining necks, pawed to us, and

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

used to speak of the buffalo country—"the south coast" and "out West," equally synonyms for all untamed, far-away wildness. Elephant-hunting must be enjoyed in Sumatra, since that animal has never existed in a wild state in Java.

With the younger people of the master's family, his young managers and assistants, fresh from Amsterdam schools and European universities, speaking English and several other languages, *au courant* with all the latest in the world's music, art, literature, and drama, plantation life and table-talk were full of interest and varied amusements. By a whirl of the telephone, two of the assistants were bidden ride over from their far corner of the estate for dinner, and afterward a quartet of voices and instruments made the marble-floored music-room ring, while the elder men smoked meditatively, or clicked the billiard-balls in their deliberate, long-running tourney. The latest books and the familiar American magazines strewed boudoir and portico tables, and naturally there was talk of them.

"Ah, we like so much your American magazines—the 'Century' and the others. We admire so much the pictures. And then all those stories of the early Dutch colonists at Manhattan! We like, too, your great American novelists—Savage, Howells, Gunter—'The Rise of Silas Lapham,' 'Mr. Potter of Texas,' and all those. We read them so much."

They were undoubtedly disappointed that we did not speak Dutch, or at least read it, since all Hollanders know that Dutch is the language of the best families in New York, of the cultivated classes and all

polite society in the United States, since from the mynheers of Manhattan came the first examples of refined living in the New World. "The English colonists were of all sorts, you know, like in Australia," said our informants at Buitenzorg and everywhere else on the island, "and that is why you Americans are all so proud of your Dutch descent."