

XII

ACROSS THE PREANGER REGENCIES



ONE may ride all day by train from Buitenzorg before reaching the limits of the Preanger regencies, where native princes still hold pretended sway; and it is a continuous landscape feast from the sunrise start to the sunset halt of the through-train. The railway line, after curving around the shoulder of Salak, runs through the vaunted hill-country, the region of the great tea, coffee, and kina estates; and from Soekaboemi to Bandung, the two great headquarters for planters, one perceives that the planter is paramount, the cultivator is king. The new cultures have not dispossessed the old, however, and the *sawas*, or flooded rice-fields, break the level of plain and valley floor with their myriad waving lines of division, and climb by terraces to the very hilltops—a system of cultivation and irrigation as old as the human race, and followed in these same valleys by these same Sundanese since the beginning of their recorded time. To them rice is a holy grain, the offspring of a god, and the gods' best gift to man; a

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

capital of Bandung, and on its confines rises the Tangkoeban-Praoe, the Ararat of the natives, who see in its square summit-lines the reversed *praoe* in which their ancestors survived the flood, and, turning their boat over carefully to dry, descended, as the waters fell, to people the Malay universe. One may ascend the butte-like peak, passing up first through a belt of old coffee-plantations, whose product ranked first in the good old days before the blight, and by the villa and experimental grounds of Herr Junghuhn, the botanist, who first succeeded with the kina-culture and introduced so many other economic plants and trees to the island. At Lembang, ten miles from Bandung, the mountain-climber gives up his pony or carriage, and is carried in a *djoelie*, or sedan-chair, through a magnificent jungle to the edge of the open crater, where bubbling sulphur-pools in an ashy floor, and a wide view over the fertile valley, are sufficient reward for all exertion on the climber's part.

Bandong itself, as the capital of the Preanger regencies and the home of the native regent and the Dutch resident, is a place of great importance to both races. The regent, as a mere puppet and pensioner of the colonial government, supports the shadow of his old state and splendor in a large *dalem*, or palace, in the heart of the town. He has also a suburban villa in European style, to which are attached large racing-stables, and this progressive regent is a regular cup-winner at the Buitenzorg and Bandong races at every summer, or dry-season, meet, when the "good monsoon" inspires all the islanders to their greatest social exertions.

As one gets farther into the center of the island, native life becomes more picturesque, and every station platform offers one more diverting study. There is more color in costume, and the wayside and platform groups are kaleidoscopic with their gay sarongs and kerchiefs. More men are seen wearing the military jacket of rank with the native sarong, and the boat-handled kris thrust in the belt at the back. The little children, who ride astride of their mothers' hips and cling and cuddle so confidently in the slandang's folds, seem of finer mold, and their deep, dark Hindu eyes tell of a different strain in the Malay blood than we had seen on the coast—these the Javanese, as distinguished from the Sundanese. The clumsy buffalo, or water-ox, is everywhere, plowing the fields, wallowing in mud, or browsing the stubble patch after the gleaners, always with a patient, statuesque, nude little brown boy on his blue-gray back, the fine, polished skins of these small herders glowing in the sun as if they were inanimate bronze figurines.

The train climbs very slowly from Bandung to Kalaidon Pass, and, after toiling with double engines up the steep grades, it rests at a level, and there bursts upon one the view of the plain of Leles—the fairest of all tropical landscapes, a vision of an ideal promised land, and such a dream of beauty that even the leaden blue clouds of a rainy afternoon could not dim its surpassing loveliness. The railway follows a long shelf hewn high on the mountain wall, that encircles an oval plain set with two conical mountains that rise more than two thousand feet above the level of this plain of Leles, itself two thousand feet above

the level of the sea. The finely wrought surface of the plain—networked with the living green dikes and terraces of rice-fields, which, flooded, gleam and glitter in the fitful sun-rays, or, sown and harvested, glow with a mosaic of green and gold—is one exquisite symphony in color, an arrangement in greens that holds one breathless with delight. All the golden greens of rice seed-beds, the intense, vivid greens of young rice transplanted, the opaque and darker greens of advanced crops, and the rich tones of stubble are relieved by the clumps and masses of palms and fine-leaved trees, which, like islands or mere ornamental bits of shrubbery, are disposed with the most admirable effect to be attained by landscape art. Each of these tufted clumps of trees, foregrounded with broad, translucent banana-leaves, declares the presence of toy villages, where the tillers of the plain, the landscape-farmers, and the artist-artisans have woven and set up their pretty basketry homes. A masterpiece, a central ornament or jewel, to which the valley is but the fretted and appropriate setting, a very altar of agriculture, a colossal symbol and emblem of abundance, is the conical Goenong-Kalaidon, a mountain which rises three thousand feet from the level of the plain, and is terraced all the way from base to summit with narrow ribbons of rice-fields—the whole mountain mass etched with myriad fine green lines of verdure, wrinkled around and around with the curving parapets and tiny terraces that retain the flooded hanging gardens. Beyond this amazing piece of agricultural sculpture stands Goenong-Haroeman, a more perfect pyramid, a still rarer trophy of the landscape-

farmer's art, even more finely carved in the living green lines of ancient terrace-culture. The rush of the thousand rills, dropping from one tiny terrace to another, fills the air with a peculiar singing undertone, an eerie accompaniment that adds the last magic touch to the fascination of the plain of Leles. Hardly the miles of sculptured bas-reliefs on Boro Boedor and Brambanam temple walls make them any more impressive as monuments and records of human toil than these great green pyramids of Kalaidon and Haroeman, on which human labor has been lavished for all the seasons of uncounted generations—the ascending lines, the successive steps of the great green staircases of rice-terraces, recording ages of toil as plainly as the rings within a tree-trunk declare its successive years of growth.

The railway, dipping nearly to the level of the plain as it describes a great curve around the gloriously green Kalaidon, again ascends along the side of the mountain wall, loops itself around the Haroeman pyramid, and halts at the station of Leles. From that point one has a backward view over the enchanting picture (a line of white bridges and culverts marking the path of the railway along the mountain-side) and he looks directly across at the soft green slopes of Haroeman, which faces him—that vast green dome or pyramid, which is a little world in itself, with uncounted villages nestling under clumps of palm-trees that break the lines of singing terraces, and those peasants of the hanging gardens looking down upon the most pleasing prospect, the most beautiful landscape in all Java, which should be world-famous, and

whose charm it is as impossible to exaggerate as to describe.

The sesquipedalian names of the railway-stations throughout the Preanger regencies, are something to fill a traveler's mind between halts, and almost explain why the locomotives not only toot and whistle nearly all the time they are in motion, but stand on the track before station sign-boards and shriek for minutes at a time, like machines demented. Radjamendala is an easy arrangement in station names for the early hours of the trip, and all that family of names—Tjitjoeroek, Tjibeber, Tjirandjang, Tjipenjeum, Tjitjalenka, and also Tagoogapoe—will slip from the tongue after a few trials; but when one strains his eyes toward the limits of the plain of Leles, he may almost see the houses of Baloeboer-Baloeboer-Limbangan. People actually live there and pay taxes, and it is my one regret that I did not leave the train, drive over, and have some letters postmarked with that astonishing aggregation of sound-symbols. Only actual sight, too, could altogether convince one, that one small village of metal-workers could really support so much nomenclature together with any amount of profitable trade. In the intervals of practising the pronunciation of that particular geographic name, the artisans of Baloeboer-Baloeboer-Limbangan do hammer out serviceable gongs, bowls, and household utensils of brass and copper. In earlier times Baloeboer-Baloeboer-Limbangan was the Toledo of the isles, and the kris-blades forged there had finer edge than those from any other place in the archipelago. In these railroad and tramp-steamer days of universal, whole-

sale trade rivalry, the blade of the noble kris more often comes from abroad, and the chilled edges from Birmingham or those made in Germany have displaced the blades made at the edge of the plain of Leles, and the glory of Baloeboer-Baloeboer-Limban-gan has departed.