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“TO TISSAK MALAYA!”



THE sun fell at six o'clock, and in the fast-gathering twilight of the tropics the train shrieked past Tjihondje and Radjapolah, stopped but a minute at Indihiang, and panted into Tissak Malaya like an affrighted creature, to put up for the night. We were whirled through avenues of pitch-darkness, with illuminated porticos gleaming through splendid shrubberies, to the *passagrahan*, or government rest-house. At first we thought the Parthenon had been restored and whitened, and leased to some colonial landlord, or at least that we had come to the deserted summer palace of some great sovereign, so lofty were the columns, so enormous the shining white portico before which the sadoes halted. Quite feudal and noble we felt ourselves, too, when the sadoe-drivers crouched on their heels in that abject position of the *dodok*, or squatting obeisance, and when they raised the coins to their foreheads in a reverent *simbah*, or worshipful thanksgiving. Truly we were reaching the heart of a strange country, and experiences were thickening!

The passagrahan was an object for sight-seers by itself. The great open space under the portico was the usual living-room, with huge tables, reading-lamps, and lounging- and arm-chairs fitted for a giant's ease. A grand hallway running straight through the center of the building held the scattered and massive furniture of a banquet-hall. Bedrooms with latticed doors opened from either side of this noble hall, the least of these chambers twenty feet square, with ceilings twenty feet high; while the beds, measuring seven by nine feet, suggested Brobdingnagian nightmares to match.

At nine o'clock we followed a silent, beckoning Malay with a lantern off into pitch-darkness, down a deserted street, around a hedge, to a smaller white portico with lamps and rocking-chairs and center-tables. We were dazed as we came suddenly into the glare of lights; and the other guests at the *table d'hôte* of the little hotel viewed us as they would have viewed sudden arrivals by balloon.

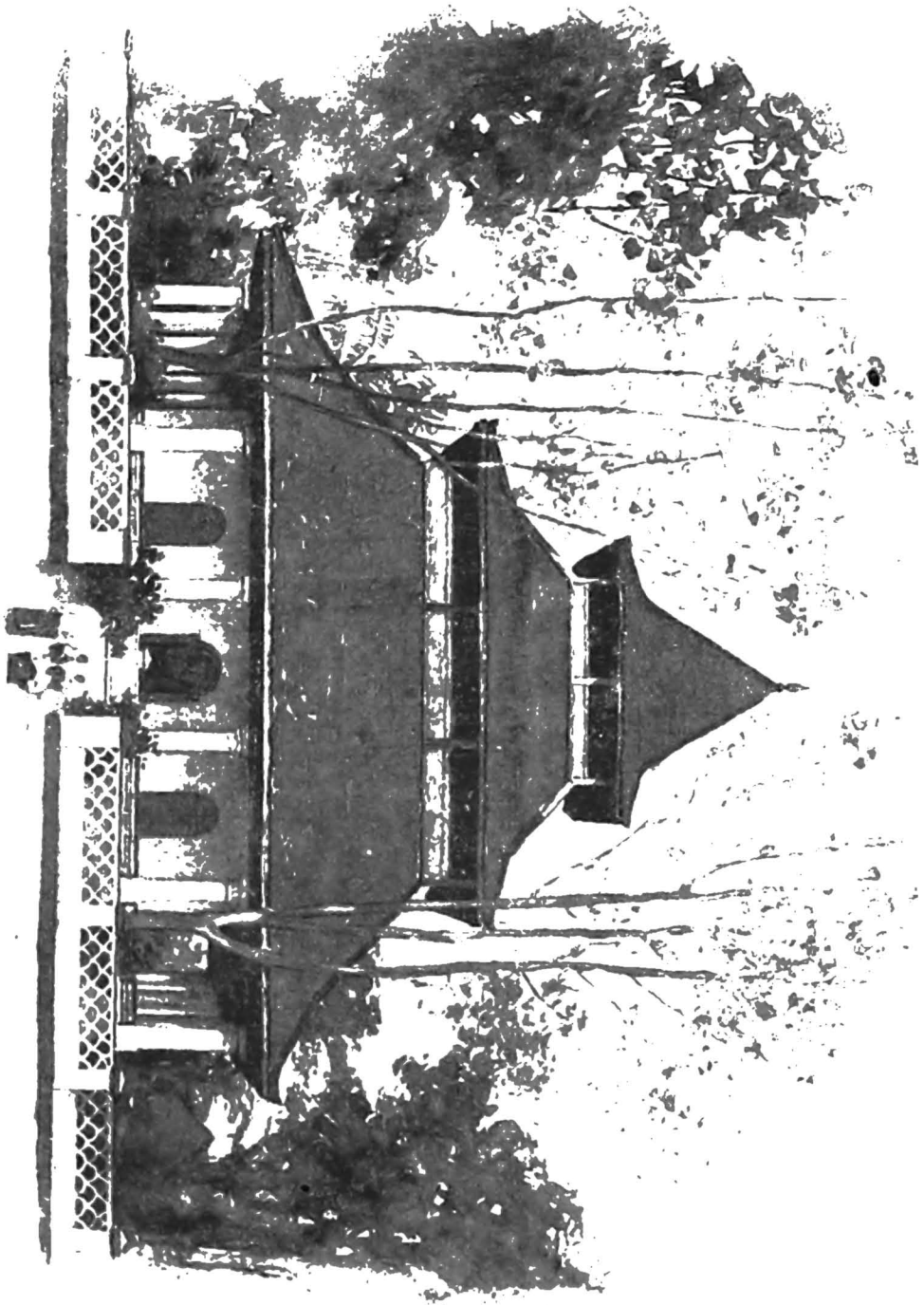
"From America! To Tissak Malaya!" they all exclaimed, and we almost apologized for having come so far. There was an amiable and charming young Dutch woman in the company, who, speaking English, benefited all her compatriots with the details of our present itinerary, our past lives and mutual relationships, after each little conversational turn she took with us.

Having commanded a sunrise breakfast for the next morning, we followed the lantern and the silent Malay back through blackness to our illuminated Parthenon of a passagrahan, and had entomological excitement

and entertainment for an hour, while all the strange flying things filled the air and strewed the table beneath the lamps. The usual lizards chuck-chucked and called for "Becky" in the shadows, and thin wraiths of lizards ran over the great columns and walls; but a house-front that was not decorated with lizards would be the strangest night sight in Java. When we had laid ourselves out on the state catafalques in the great bedrooms, stealthy whisperings and rustlings of palm-trees beyond the latticed windows, other strange sounds, and startled bird-calls throughout the night suggested the great snakes we had expected to encounter daily and nightly in Java. The tiny light floating in a tumbler of cocoanut-oil threw weird shadows over the walls, and within the bed-curtains one had space to dance a quadrille or arrange a whole set of ordinary bedroom furniture, while the open construction of the upper partition-walls let one converse at will with the occupant of the farthest apartment.

In the first clear light of the dewy morning we saw that a beautiful garden surrounded the pas-sagrahan, and our vast Parthenon of the darkness did not seem so colossal when seen in the shadow of the magnificent kanari-trees that shaded the street before it. While lost in admiration of this splendid aisle of shade-trees, I saw a solitary pedestrian coming down the green avenue, just the pygmy touch of human life needed to complete the picture and give one measure for the soaring tree-trunks and vast canopy of leaves. The slender figure, advancing with the splendid, slow stride of these people, was visible now in a glorifying

A MOHAMMEDAN MOSQUE.



shaft of earliest, level yellow sunlight, and then almost invisible against the tall hibiscus-hedges or the green shadows of tree-trunks. A nearer flash of sunlight gilded a tray he was carrying—a tray furnished with three small cups of coffee and a plate with six thin wafers of toast, which, well cooled by the long promenade in the fresh air of the morning, constituted the breakfast of three able-bodied travelers, who were to pass the rest of the day on the train, with only opportunity for a sandwich lunch before the evening's nine-o'clock dinner. We sent back those thin blue cups, and they were refilled with the same lukewarm, indefinite, muddy gray fluid; but finally, by personal exertions and a hasty trip down the magnificent avenue, some solid additions were secured to the usual scant, skeleton, impressionist breakfast of the country—some marmalade, some eggs, and a bit of the cold blue meat of the useful buffalo. Everywhere in Java one's first, best instincts and finer feelings of the day are hurt and the appetite affronted by just such early morning incidents; protest and prevision are alike useless, and travel on the island is beset with unnecessary hardships.

The semi-weekly passer of Tissak Malaya was then beginning in a park, or open market-place, in front of the passagrahan, and picturesque processions of venders and buyers came straggling down the arched avenues, and filled the shady quadrangle with a holiday hum. There were double panoramas and stages of living pictures along each path in the passer encampment, that grew like magic; and the glowing colors of the fruit-, the flower-, and the pepper-markets,

the bright sarongs and turbans, and, above all, the cheerful chatter, were quite inspiring. We bought everywhere—fruits, and a queer three-story basket to hold them; yards of jasmine garlands, bunches of roses, and great double handfuls of the green, lindenish ylang-ylang flowers, pinned with a thorn in a plantain-leaf cornucopia—this last lot of perpetual fragrance for three gulden cents only. Odd bottles of home-made attars of rose and jasmine were sold as cheaply, and gums in straw cases, ready for burning. There was a dry-goods district, where booths were piled high and hung round with Cheribon and other gay sarongs of Middle Java, slandangs and kerchiefs of strongest colors and intricate borderings. We were distracted with the wide choice offered, but could not rouse the phlegmatic dealers to any eagerness or excitement in bargaining; the whole overcharge, reductions, and slow-descending fall in prices proceeding, on the part of the dealers, with a well-assumed indifference, an uninterrupted betel-chewing, a bored and lethargic manner that wore one sadly. A long row of country tailors, thirty or forty of them in a line, sat like so many sparrows around the edges of the passer in the comforting shade of the kanari-trees. All were spectacled like owls, and sat cross-legged before their little American sewing-machines. The customers brought their cloth, the tailors measured them with the eye, and in no time at all the machines were humming up and down the seams of the jackets, that needed no fitting nor trying on, and were made while the candidates sat and smoked and chatted with the sartorial artists. From the chatter-chatter along this

tailors' row one might conclude that what the barbers are to Seville, as purveyors of news, the tailors are to Tissak Malaya.

All too soon we had to tear ourselves away from the fascinating passer, and, loaded down with our mixed marketing, fly by sadoe to the station at the far end of town. We saw then the magnificent aisle of kanari-trees we had passed through in darkness the night before—an avenue more fitted for an emperor's triumphal procession than for our queer little two-wheeled carts, drawn each by a mite of a pony, that was all but lifted from the ground by the shafts when I stepped on the after foot-board untimely, the driver dodoking like a hop-toad on the ground in respectful humility. The natives were streaming down the great *allée* and in from all the side streets and by-paths toward the passer, and we half wished we might miss the train when we realized what a spectacle that Tissak Malaya passer was about to be.

In Middle Java, where the railway descends from the Preanger hills to the *terra ingrata's* succession of jungle and swamp at the coast-level, one experiences the same dull, heavy, sickening, depressing heat as in Batavia. After the clear, fresh, mildly cool air, the eternal southern-California climate of the hills, this sweltering atmosphere gave full suggestion of the tropics' deadly perils. Hour after hour the train followed a raised embankment across an endless swamp, the brilliantly flowered lantana-hedges still accompanying the tracks, and a dense forest wall, tangled and matted together with ratans and other creepers, shutting off the view on either side. The malaria and the

deadly fever-germs that haunt this region were almost visible, so dense was the air. While this section of the railway was building, even the native workmen were carried back each day to sleep in camps in safer neighborhoods. No white man could work, nor remain there directing work, and Chinese, who are germ-, bacillus-, microbe-, and miasma-proof in every climate, superintended work between the flying visits of European engineers. Beside these tangled and noisome swamps there are quicksand regions, into which car-loads of solid materials were dumped for week after week, and where the track is still always being raised and rebuilt, and the floating earth-crust trembles with each passing train.

As we coursed along past those miles of rankest vegetation, not a waft of perfume reached us, nor did any mass of color or cloak of blossoms delight the eye—a green monotony of uninteresting vegetation, save for the ratan-palms which decorated every tree with their beautiful pinnate leaves. There was one luxuriant vine, half covering a tall tree, which bore clusters of large white blossoms and pendent red berries; but that was the one ideal vine of the imagined tropical jungle's mad riot of stranger and more gorgeous things than bougainvillea. No clouds, cascades, or festoons of gorgeous flowers, no waves of overpowering perfume, no masses of orchids, rewarded eager scrutiny; no birds of brilliant plumage flashed across the jungle's front; no splendidly striped tigers licked their chops and snarled in the jungle's shade; no rhinoceros snorted at the iron horse; and not a serpent raised a hissing head, slid away through dank grass, or looped

itself from tree-top to tree-top in proper tropical fashion, as we steamed across the deadly, uninhabitable *terra ingrata*. Nor had even the first construction gangs of railway-builders met with any such sensational incidents, so the chief engineer of the railways afterward informed us. Seeing our disappointment and dejection, this obliging official racked his memory and at last recalled that he himself had once seen a wild peacock walking the track in the *terra ingrata*.

“And yes! so there was. I remember now that one of our engineers, who was running a special locomotive along there, did see a tiger sitting on the track. He whistled loudly, and the tiger trotted up the track until he found the engine gaining on him, and then the royal beast bounded off into the jungle, snarling and spitting like an angry cat.”

“But there are great snakes in the swamps surely? You must run over them often?” we persisted.

“Doubtless; but we rarely see snakes here in Java. There are many in Borneo, Sumatra, and the other islands that are so wild yet. But you will see them all at the zoölogical garden in Batavia.”

Closer questioning could only elicit the statement that, while all the terrible Java snake-stories we had read might be true, we had no need in this modern day to shake the pillows gently each night and morning to dislodge the ‘sleeping cobra or python; nor to draw the bed-curtains closely at sounds like dry leaves blowing over the floor; nor to regard the harmless hop-toad as the certain pilot and advance-guard of a snake. I almost began to doubt, to discredit that standard favorite, that typical tropical snake-story of

the man who fell asleep on the edge of a Java sawa, or rice-field, and waking with a sensation of great dampness around one knee, found that a huge but harmless sawa snake had swallowed his leg to that point. I was ready even to hear that there never had been any skeleton-strewn, deadly upas-tree valley on Papandayang's slope, since every expected sensation had fled my approach—had removed to Borneo, to Sulu, to more remote and impossible islands.

All travel, though, is only such disillusionment and disappointment, and he who would believe and enjoy blood-curdling things should stay by his own fireside. The disillusioned traveler has but to choose, on his return, whether he will truthfully dispel others' fondest illusions, or, joining that nameless club of so many returned travelers, continue to clothe the more distant parts of the world with the glamour of imagination.