

II

IN "JAVA MAJOR"



IN the earliest morning a clean white lighthouse on an islet was seen ahead, and as the sun rose, bluish mountains came up from the sea, grew in height, outlined themselves, and then stood out, detached volcanic peaks of most lovely lines, against the purest, pale-blue sky; soft clouds floated up and clung to the summits; the blue and green at the water's edge resolved itself into groves and lines of palms; and over sea and sky and the wonderland before us was all the dewy freshness of dawn in Eden. It looked very truly the "gem" and the "pearl of the East," this "Java Major" of the ancients, and the Djawa of the native people, which has called forth more extravagant praise and had more adjectives expended on it than any other one island in the world. Yet this little continent is only 666 miles long and from 56 to 135 miles wide, and on an area of 49,197 square miles (nearly the same as that of the State of New York) supports a population of 24,000,000, greater than that of all the other islands of the Indian Ocean put together. With 1600 miles

of coast-line, it has few harbors, the north shore being swampy and flat, with shallows extending far out, while the southern coast is steep and bold, and the one harbor of Tjilatjap breaks the long line of surf where the Indian Ocean beats against the southern cliffs. Fortunately, hurricanes and typhoons are unknown in the waters around this "summer land of the world," and the seasons have but an even, regular change from wet to dry in Java. From April to October the dry monsoon blows from the southeast, and brings the best weather of the year—dry, hot days and the coolest nights. From October to April the southwest or wet monsoon blows. Then every day has its afternoon shower, the air is heavy and stifling, all the tropic world is asteam and astew and afloat, vegetation is magnificent, insect life triumphant, and the mountains are hidden in nearly perpetual mist. There are heavy thunder-storms at the turn of the monsoon, and the one we had watched from the sea the Hallowe'en night before our arrival had washed earth and air until the foliage glistened, the air fairly sparkled, nature wore her most radiant smiles, and the tropics were ideal.

It was more workaday and prosaic when the ship, steaming in between long breakwaters, made fast to the stone quays of Tandjon Priok, facing a long line of corrugated-iron warehouses, behind which was the railway connecting the port with the city of Batavia. The gradual silting up of Batavia harbor after an eruption of Mount Salak in 1699, which first dammed and then sent torrents of mud and sand down the Tjiliwong River, finally obliged commerce to remove to this deep bay six miles farther east, where the

colonials have made a model modern harbor, at a cost of twenty-six and a half million gulden, all paid from current revenues, without the island's ceasing to pay its regular tribute to the crown of Holland. The customs officers at Tandjon Priok were courteous and lenient, passing our tourist luggage with the briefest formality, and kindly explaining how our steamer-chairs could be stored in the railway rooms until our return to port. It is but nine miles from the Tandjon Priok wharf to the main station in the heart of the original city of Batavia—a stretch of swampy ground dotted and lined with palm-groves and banana-patches, with tiny woven baskets of houses perched on stilts clustered at the foot of tall cocoa-trees that are the staff and source of life and of every economical blessing of native existence. We leaped excitedly from one side of the little car to the other, to see each more and more tropical picture; groups of bare brown children frolicking in the road, and mothers with babies astride of their hips, or swinging comfortably in a scarf knotted across one shoulder, and every-day life going on under the palms most naturally, although to our eyes it was so strange and theatrical.

At the railway-station we met the *sadoe* (dos-à-dos), a two-wheeled cart, which is the common vehicle of hire of the country, and is drawn by a tiny Timor or Sandalwood pony, with sometimes a second pony attached outside of the shafts. The broad cushioned seat over the axles will accommodate four persons, two sitting each way. The driver faces front comfortably; but the passenger, with no back to lean against but

the driver's, must hold to the canopy-frame while he is switched about town backward in the footman's place, for one gulden or forty cents the hour.

Whether one comes to Java from India or China, there is hasty change from the depreciated silver currency of all Asia to the unaltered gold standard of Holland, and the sudden expensiveness of the world is a sad surprise. The Netherlands unit of value, the gulden (value, forty cents United States gold), is as often called a florin, a rupee, or a dollar—the “Mexican dollar” or the equivalent “British dollar” of the Straits Settlements, a coin which trade necessities drove British conservatism to minting, which act robs the Briton of the privilege of making further remarks upon “the almighty dollar” of the United States, with its unchanging value of one hundred cents gold. This confusion of coins, with prices quoted indifferently in guildens, florins, rupees, and dollars, is further increased by dividing the gulden into one hundred cents, like the Ceylon rupee, so that, between these Dutch fractions, the true cents of the United States dollar that one instinctively thinks of, and the depreciated cents of the British or the battered Mexican dollar, one's brain begins to whirl when prices are quoted, or any evil day of reckoning comes.

No Europeans live at Tandjon Priok, nor in the old city of Batavia, which from the frightful mortality during two centuries was known as “the graveyard of Europeans.” The banks and business houses, the Chinese and Arab towns, are in the “old town”; but Europeans desert that quarter before sundown, and betake themselves to the “new town” suburbs, where

every house is in a park of its own, and the avenues are broad and straight, and all the distances are magnificent. The city of Batavia, literally "fair meadows," grandiloquently "the queen of the East," and without exaggeration "the gridiron of the East," dates from 1621, when the Dutch removed from Bantam, where quarrels between Portuguese, Javanese, and the East India Company had been disturbing trade for fifteen years, and built Fort Jacatra at the mouth of a river off which a cluster of islands sheltered a fine harbor. Its position in the midst of swamps was unhealthy, and the mortality was so appalling as to seem incredible. Dutch records tell of 87,000 soldiers and sailors dying in the government hospital between 1714 and 1776, and of 1,119,375 dying at Batavia between 1730 and August, 1752—a period of twenty-two years and eight months.¹ The deadly Java fever occasioning this seemingly incredible mortality was worst between the years 1733 and 1738, during which time 2000 of the Dutch East India Company's servants and free Christians died annually. Staunton, who visited Batavia with Lord Macartney's embassy in 1793, called it the "most unwholesome place in the universe," and "the pestilential climate" was considered a sufficient defense against attack from any European power.

The people were long in learning that those who went to the higher suburbs to sleep, and built houses of the most open construction to admit of the fullest sweep of air, were free from the fever of the walled town, surrounded by swamps, cut by stagnant canals, and facing a harbor whose mud-banks were exposed at

¹ See Sir Stamford Raffles's "History of Java," Appendix A.

low tide. The city walls were destroyed at the beginning of this century by the energetic Marshal Daendels, who began building the new town. The quaint old air-tight Dutch buildings were torn down, and streets were widened; and there is now a great outspread town of red-roofed, whitewashed houses, with no special features or picturesqueness to make its street-scenes either distinctively Dutch or tropical. Modern Batavia had 111,763 inhabitants on December 31, 1894, less than a tenth of whom are Europeans, with 26,776 Chinese and 72,934 natives. While the eighteenth-century Stadhuis might have been brought from Holland entire, a steam tramway starts from its door and thence shrieks its way to the farthest suburb, the telephone "hellos" from center to suburb, and modern inventions make tropical living possible.

The Dutch do not welcome tourists, nor encourage one to visit their paradise of the Indies. Too many travelers have come, seen, and gone away to tell disagreeable truths about Dutch methods and rule; to expose the source and means of the profitable returns of twenty million dollars and more for each of so many years of the last and the preceding century—all from islands whose whole area only equals that of the State of New York. Although the tyrannic rule and the "culture system," or forced labor, are things of the dark past, the Dutch brain is slow and suspicious, and the idea being fixed fast that no stranger comes to Java on kindly or hospitable errands, the colonial authorities must know within twenty-four hours why one visits the Indies. They demand one's name, age, religion, nationality, place of nativity, and occupation,

the name of the ship that brought the suspect to Java, and the name of its captain—a dim threat lurking in this latter query of holding the unlucky mariner responsible should his importation prove an expense or embarrassment to the island. Still another permit—a *toelatings-kaart*, or "admission ticket"—must be obtained if one wishes to travel farther than Buitenzorg, the cooler capital, forty miles away in the hills. The tourist pure and simple, the sight-seer and pleasure traveler, is not yet quite comprehended, and his passports usually accredit him as traveling in the interior for "scientific purposes." Guides or efficient couriers in the real sense do not exist yet. The English-speaking servant is rare and delusive, yet a necessity unless one speaks Dutch or Low Malay. Of all the countries one may ever travel in, none equals Java in the difficulty of being understood; and it is a question, too, whether the Malays who do not know any English are harder to get along with than the Dutch who know a little.

Thirty years ago Alfred Russel Wallace inveighed against the unnecessary discomforts, annoyances, and expense of travel in Java, and every tourist since has repeated his plaint. The philippics of returned travelers furnish steady amusement for Singapore residents; and no one brings back the same enthusiasm that embarked with him. It is not the Java of the Javanese that these returned ones berate so vehemently, but the Netherlands India, and the state created and brought about by the merciless, cold-blooded, rapacious Hollanders who came half-way round the world and down to the equator, nine thou-

sand miles away from their homes, to acquire an empire and enslave a race, and who impose their hampering customs and restrictions upon even alien visitors. Java undoubtedly is "the very finest and most interesting tropical island in the world," and the Javanese the most gentle, attractive, and innately refined people of the East, after the Japanese; but the Dutch in Java "beat the Dutch" in Europe ten points to one, and there is nothing so surprising and amazing, in all man's proper study of mankind, as this equatorial Hollander transplanted from the cold fens of Europe; nor is anything so strange as the effect of a high temperature on Low-Country temperament. The most rigid, conventional, narrow, thrifty, prudish, and Protestant people in Europe bloom out in the forcing-house of the tropics into strange laxity, and one does not know the Hollanders until one sees them in this "summer land of the world," whither they threatened to emigrate in a body during the time of the Spanish Inquisition.