


XXII

“TJILATJAP,” “CHALACHAP,” “CHELACHAP”

“ JILATJAP! Tjilatjap!” Often as one may sound those syllables aloud, they seem absurd; and the very idea of spending the night in a town of such name, of buying a railway ticket with that name printed on it, and asking to have one’s luggage labeled to that destination, was enough to tickle the fancy. Could there be solemn men and serious women living there? and had the station a sign-board? and could the pale, grave little Dutch children keep their faces straight and glibly pronounce the name of that town without sneezing?

Whether it is printed “Tjilatjap,” “Chalachap,” or “Chelachap,” it at once suggests enough puns to spare one printing them, and surely no town on the north side of the equator could support such a name with any dignity.

But Tjilatjap is one of the oldest foreign settlements in Java, the one good harbor on the whole south coast; and the “Tjilatjap fever” is a distinguished specialty of the region that surpasses all the deadly forms of fever

in Java. The place proved to be such a cemetery for European troops that the government was finally forced to abandon the extensive barracks, magazines, and fortifications it had once constructed there. A considerable white population remains, however, and the passer is one of great local importance to the natives. The completion of the railway brought new life to the old settlement; and with such easy access, Tjilatjap is well worth visiting, if it were only to see its shade-trees. All the post-roads running into the town, every street and lane, are such continuous isles, arcades, and tunnels of living green that one is repaid for coming, even after all the other teak and tamarind, kanari and waringen avenues he may have seen elsewhere in Java. Not the allées of Versailles, nor the *cryptomeria* avenues of Japan, can surpass these tree-lined streets of Tjilatjap, the endless vistas of straight trunks and arching branches, the lofty canopies of solid, impenetrable shade, rejoicing one in every part of the town. Tamarind may be the coolest and waringen the densest shade, but kanari-trees give the most splendid and inspiring effect, and Tjilatjap is the place of their greatest perfection.

We drove during the late afternoon and until dusk through kanari avenues, whose great green cathedral aisles, with fretted arches a hundred feet overhead, dwarfed everything that moved or stood beneath them; and then under cool, feathery tamarind bowers, and past arrays of noble teak, everywhere exclaiming with delight. The use of the big-leaved teak for street and post-road shade-trees seemed to me the acme of botanical extravagance,—as ill ordered as putting Pegasus

to a cart,—since we of the temperate zone are used to even speaking of that expensive timber with respect. While we drove through the magnificent avenues in the late afternoon light, past parade-grounds and parks, over canals and along their embankments, the rising mists and the solid blue vapors massing in the distances were so much actual, visible evil—malaria almost in tangible form. One felt that he should dine on so many courses of quinine only, taking the saving sulphate first with a soup-spoon, if he expected to survive the mad venture into Tjilatjap’s fever-laden air. A crowded, neglected cemetery gave one further creeps and gruesome thoughts; and the evil-smelling sugar and copra warehouses on the harbor front seemed to seal our doom—that old ignorant instinct or idea asserting itself that the bad smell must necessarily be the bad air. There is a beautiful view from the old military encampment out over the land-locked harbor, with a glimpse of the open ocean through a narrow entrance. The dark mass of Noesa Kambangan (“Floating Island”) rises beyond the silvery waters—a tropical paradise deliberately depopulated by the Dutch as a strategic measure, that there might be no temptation of sustenance to induce an attack or siege from that quarter. The island is mountainous, and contains much fine scenery, many floral marvels, curious stalactite caverns of holy repute where Siva is secretly worshiped, hot springs, and even gold-mines, and is famous in the old Javanese poems and legends. The great surf of the Indian Ocean beats upon its precipitous south shore, where the clefts and caves in the bold cliffs are inhabited by myriads of sparrows, who

build there their edible nests. Nest-hunting furnishes employment to the few islanders, and, like everything else, is strictly regulated and taxed by the colonial government. The nest-hunters only pursue their perilous quest after the young sparrows are well grown each season, as only new, fresh, one-season-old nests serve to make the "bad vermicelli" soup Celestial gourmets adore; and the hunters are often suspended over the cliffs by ropes in order to reach their carefully hidden homes. The glutinous white lumps are as much esteemed in Java as in China, and this rare dainty commands a high price from the moment it is secured.

There is a typical little country colonial hotel at Tjilatjap—a large building containing the offices, drawing-room, and dining-room in the center of a garden, with long, low buildings at either side of it, where rows of bedrooms open upon the long arcade or bricked porch, which is a general corridor, screened off into as many little open sitting-rooms, each with its table, lamp, and lounging-chairs. After our malarial drive we were served an excellent dinner, which concluded with a dessert course of kanari *ambon*, the "Java almond," or nut of the kanari-tree, soaked in brandy. The kanari *ambon* has the shape and shell of a butter-nut; but the long, solid white kernel is finer and firmer than even an almond, and of a richer, more distinct and delicate flavor. These nuts of the Tjilatjap region are superior to those grown elsewhere in Java, but we learned this too late, when we tried to buy them elsewhere.

After the sun fell the air grew heavier and hotter—

a stifling, sodden, steaming, reeking atmosphere of evil that one could hardly force in and out of the lungs. We gasped at intervals all through the long evening, and wondered if some vast vacuum bell had not been dropped down over Tjilatjap, while we batted flying things from our faces and swept them from the writing-table. Lizards ran over the walls, of course; and one pale-gray, clammy thing was picked from the bed-curtains, and thrown out with a sickening “ugh!” The invisible one, in agony, called for “*Becky! Becky! Becky!*” and a hoarser voice cried for “*Tokee! Tokee! Tokee!*” of whom we had never heard before.

Wearily, without rustle of leaves, stir, or any provocation, a sullen rain began to fall, and saturating the atmosphere, made it that much heavier. The rain ceased as wearily as it had begun, and the awful, sodden stillness was only broken by the slow, heavy drip of the listless foliage, and the occasional thud of a falling mango. Far, far away, faintly in the air was heard a smothered booming, moaning sound—the ceaseless surf of the Indian Ocean. Overhead there was darkness, profound and intense, beyond even heat-lightning’s illumining, with a more impenetrable blackness where the double rows of ancient kanari-trees shaded the street beyond the hotel garden. The possibilities of its effects, the awful, desperate depression that loneliness in such surroundings would surely cause, made me wonder how great was the proportion of suicides’ graves in that damp, weedy cemetery we had driven past in the gloaming.

Then three guests came over from the other part of the hotel, and, spreading themselves out on chairs in

the section of porch beyond our partition screen, began conversation, all in Dutch consonants and palatal garglings, with a volume and lung-power, a fervor and emphasis, that made the languid air vibrate and the mangos fall in showers. Their voices could have easily been heard at the harbor's edge or the railway-station, in a stamp-mill or in a boiler factory; and the humor of it—the three Dutchmen in the stilly night bellowing away as if conversing through a half-mile of fog—greatly relieved the sodden melancholy of the malarial evening. Clouds of dense, rank, Sumatra tobacco-smoke rose from the talkers' mouths in volumes to match their voices, and until long past midnight those three men on a silent porch conversed *more Hollandico*, the roar of voices and the pungent smoke sending us dreams of Chicago fires and riots, passing freight-trains, and burning forests.

We had been warned betimes that there would be no opportunity to lunch at wayside stations or from compartment baskets during the long ride from Tjilatjap to Garoet, and we planned accordingly. Our gentle Moslem, who made such inconsequent, irresponsible child's play at waiting on us, was shown the bread and the cold buffalo beef, and bidden make sandwiches in plenty. I even went into details as to salt and pepper, the "mustard" and "no mustard" varieties, and insisted on white paper only for wrapping, before leaving him to the task.

After all Tjilatjap's evil name, we never had any ill effects from venturing into it, and we had a sense of complacent rejoicing when we took train, that next morning, for Maos on the main line of the railway,

and knew that a few hours would put us beyond the *terra ingrata*.

Nearly always, in our railway rides in Java, we had the first-class compartments to ourselves; and we often looked longingly, despite the heat, at the crowded second-class compartments, where many Europeans, nice, intelligent-looking people and interesting families, traveled in sociable numbers. The only companions ever of our first-class solitude were, once, the chief constructor of the railways, who for a sudden short trip had dispensed with his official car; and, again, a young Holland geologist and mining expert returning from a season's survey in Borneo—both traveling at government expense. Only the more extravagant planters, native princes, tourists, and officials with passes or under orders seem to use the first-class cars, although the additional comforts and the extra space are actual necessities of travel in the tropics. That the second-class carriages were always well filled with Europeans showed that at least one thrifty notion of the Hollanders' home survived transplantation in this matter of railway fares. From the two chance fellow-passengers whom we had the fortune to meet on the train I derived enough, by a day's steady questioning and comment, to atone for the dearth of travelers' talk I had suffered before. Both men were cyclopedias of things Javanese, geologic and botanical, and those were very red-letter days in the guide-bookless land.

There was always interest enough in watching the people by the way; and as the through railway-trains were then novelties of a few days' and weeks' experience

in that section of Middle Java, the station platforms were crowded with native sight-seers. Native officials and their trains of attendants, Mohammedan women with gorgeous head-gear and the thinnest pretenses of veils, stolid planters with obsequious, groveling servants, and planters' wives, barefooted, wrapped in scant sarongs, and as often wearing red velvet jackets and other traveling toilets of eccentric combination, the costume of the tropics and a Northern winter at the same time—processions of these entertained us not a little as they went their way to the other compartments of the long train.

After the scorching hours spent running through swamp and jungle, we drew near the mountains; life became more bearable, and we beckoned our Moslem at the next stopping-place.

“Bring the sandwiches; they are not in this basket.” He looked blankness, as if a little vaguer and more becalmed in mind than usual. “The sandwiches that you made at the Tjilatjap hotel this morning,” I explained slowly. “Where are they?”

“Oh, I eat them—jus' now,” said the soft-voiced one, naïvely, his hand unconsciously traveling to the digestive region and comfortably stroking it.

Language was useless at such a crisis, and sadly, silently, I resigned myself to the rest of the ten hours' empty ride. An hour later we reached Tjiawi, near which the finest pineapples of the island are grown; and we bought them on the platform, great fragrant, luscious globes of delight, regardless of the almost prayerful requests made to us on arrival, that we would not touch a pineapple in Java. We did a

tourist's whole duty to specialties of strange places for that one day, buying the monster nanas in most generous provision; and we made up for all previous denials and lost pineapple opportunities as we tore off the ripe diamonds of pulp in streaming sections that melted on the tongue; nor did we feel any sinking at heart nor dread of the future for such indulgence. Then, at Tissak Malaya, we bought strings of mango-steens through the car-windows. But after the light, evanescent, six-o'clock breakfast of the country, these noonday feasts of juicy fruits did not satisfy one for long, and soon we hungered again.

At Tjipeundeui, in the shadow of the great volcanic range that walls the west, a local chief, or village head man, was foremost on the station platform, that was crowded with cheerful, chattering groups of natives, hung over with bundles as if come from a fair. With great excitement the chief announced that the Goenoeng Galoengoeng, or "Great Gong Mountain," was in eruption again. Two weeks before it had rumbled, as its name indicates it has a habit of doing, and sent out a shower of stones that ruined a large coffee-plantation, scorching and half burying the budding trees in the hot rocks, pebbles, and sand. It had begun rumbling and shaking again, the village wells had emptied, and the people had fled, remembering too well the eruption of 1822, when one hundred and fifteen villages were destroyed, twenty thousand people were killed, and plantations ruined for twenty miles around by the rain of hot stones and ashes, and the hot water and mud overflowing from the blown-out crater. But such a gentle, happy, cheerful, chattering lot of

refugees as they were, saving their best sarongs and finery by wearing them, and tying the rest of their treasures in shapeless bundles, as they went picnicking forth to visit relatives until the volcanic disturbance might subside! They were not a whit more care-worn or anxious than the crowd on the next station platform, where two or three hundred pleasure-seekers were returning from a famous country passer, whose rare meetings attract people from afar. Even the chief of the volcanic village radiated joy and pride all over his wrinkled old brown face as he related the moving events occurring in his bailiwick. Eruptions were evidently his pastime, a diversion quite in his line, since he had only come down to the railway to see his family off to a place of safety, while he would return, play Casabianca on his burning heath, and have it out with the resounding Galoen-goeng at his leisure.

We had an hour to wait at Tjibatoe station before the Garoet train left, and the refreshment-room keeper offered tea and biscuits—the inevitable, omnipresent Huntley & Palmer biscuits, that are the mainstay and salvation, the very prop and stay and staff, of tourist life in Netherlands as well as British India, and for whose making the great Reading bakers buy the entire tapioca-crop of Java each year. After a short wait in the room, redolent of gin and schnapps and colonial tobacco, a boy sauntered in the back door with an iron tea-kettle, and the proprietor was about to make the tea with that warm water, when we chorused a protest. He good-naturedly allowed me to gather up tea-pot, tea-kettle, small boy, and all, and

go a hundred yards down the road, climb a bamboo ladder laid against a bank, and restore the cooling kettle to its place on the home fire in the airiest, dearest little fancy basket of a home, in which one could imagine grown people playing “keep house.” A bright-eyed little woman stirred the fire, gave me a box to sit upon, and herself crouched before the sullen tea-kettle, chattering and crooning like a child at play. “*Bodedit? Bodedit?*” (“Does it boil? Does it boil?”) she asked seriously, putting her ear to the spout, or sliding the lid and peering into the still interior; but it finally did boil energetically. We made the tea; and, at risk of every bone, I descended that slanting half-ladder in a gentle rain, and returned to enjoy quite a feast that the kind refreshment-room keeper had conjured up in the meantime.