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A NATURALIST'S WANDERINGS

IN THE

EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO

A NARRATIVE OF TRAVEL AND EXPLORATION

FROM 1878 TO 1883

BY

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of the Quadramana to be met with in this region, the Orangutan not being found so far in the south.

Continuing my journey, skirting round an elbow of Mt. Tengamus, I descended on the village of Terratas, looking down on the Bay of Semangka with its mountainous shores, and on the peaked summit of the island of Tabuang standing out of the motionless water. In one of the little ravines I gathered specimens of a singular climbing shrub (*Lagenaria*) with immense semi-globular fruits over two feet seven inches in circumference. Though in size so large they are quite light, their seeds being small and winged with a broad glancing membrane, thinner than the finest white tissue paper, which serves as a float to disseminate them.

Two days later I made the ascent of the mountain, which, owing to its fissured and chasmed character, was tedious and difficult. Passing through a dense belt of wild bananas and Zingiberiaceous plants, then a zone of disagreeable rattan-palms, we broke into the deep, dark virgin forest, beneath whose shade little or nothing was to be found growing, save here and there an arum with a curious serpent-head-like spathe, or in bright scarlet fruit; but at 3000 feet I was gladdened by entering a belt of *Ixora* trees in one mass of scarlet flowers, which, as the mountain rose abruptly, had a fine effect viewed from above. In the damper regions a little higher, the tree-trunks began to be more densely clothed with orchids and ferns and climbers of all kinds; and here and there, high in the angles of the branches, scarlet *Azaleas*, which had crept down the mountain out of the temperate heights as far as they might dare. At 5000 feet I gathered Horsfield's *Dipteris* fern, which seems too delicate to thrive well at home though it is a denizen of the higher mountains of the tropics, accompanied by great fields of a handsome species of bracken (*Gleichenia glauca*). At 5400 feet I halted for the night in a small hut that I had a day or two previously had erected for our accommodation on the verge of the more temperate region of the mountain, where the trees became smaller and more stunted and were loaded with lichens, mosses and feathery lycopods, and which turned out to be the lowest limit of the pitcher-plants.

Few signs of animal life were observed, except the spoor of

the tapir, and high up the wallowing holes of the rhinoceros, and footprints of the rare mountain antelope (*Antilocarpa sumatrana*); the intermittent low booming note of the large fruit-pigeons (*Carpophaga badia*) answering each other at roost, and the chattering cries of flocks of Babblers (*Garrulax palliatus*) at play in the distant tree-tops, filled the woods, but they never approached near enough to afford a chance of securing them for specimens.

The night was very disagreeable, for our hut of branches and leaves leaked freely, and the dense smoke which issued from the wet wood fire, round which my boys crouched with chattering teeth, was painful to eyes and throat. I have often been surprised that the native, who, in the low grounds, goes about and even sleeps in all weathers nearly naked, when I with my European clothing have felt it quite chilly, almost at once succumbs to the low temperature in the mountain heights, and often actually dies before he can descend. A few hours round a blazing fire after a hot jorum of coffee re-invigorated them somewhat, and far into the night the woods resounded to the weird monotonous chant of one of those epics to which the Lamponger is never tired of listening, and which his country is famed for, such as the Herculean exploits of that great hero, Anak Dalom, who, miraculously escaping from the interior of a bamboo, played the part of another Æneas along these shores. At length, when one by one they dropped off to doze, with their chins on their knees, their heads buried in their sarongs, the intense silence of the forest reigned, which even the moaning of the trees and the shrill screaming of the cicads could not disturb.

Resuming our ascent, I found that at 5800 feet the *Dipteris horsfieldi* increased in abundance, while lichens and mosses padded every stone, tree-trunk, and lower branch with a thick springy cushion of moss, among which everywhere the elegant flagons of the Pitcher-plants were embedded or swayed gracefully from projecting twigs. Here also, among the moss and on the fallen trees, a pretty *Cymbidium*, an epiphytic orchid with dark-green crisp foliage, carpeted in profusion the hollows and knolls. The whole mountain above 5800 feet seemed as if intentionally laid out in a gigantic rockery, up which the path wound under moss-padded arches, and over boulders on

CHAPTER III.

SOJOURN IN THE PALEMBANG RESIDENCY.

From Batavia to Anjer—Return to Telok-betong—Proceed to Beneawang—Leave this for the Blalau region—Camp at Sanghi—Camp in the forest—Phosphorescent display—Camp again in forest—Reach Bumi-padang—Pass on to Batu-brah—Description of the village—Move on to Kenali—Description of the village—Proceed to Hoodjoong—Description of the village—Its tobacco industry—Its rice-fields—Planting and reaping—Superstitions—Goitre—Fauna and flora of the Besagi volcano—Birds and insects of the neighbourhood.

HAVING despatched my collections to England, in the middle of December, I turned my steps once more to Sumatra, to investigate the Highlands of the Bencoolen and Palembang Residencies. Just then, because of a break in the cable between Anjer and Telok-betong, a Government steamer was plying to keep up communication between the two stations, which the authorities kindly allowed me to make use of, if I should choose to proceed by that way. Accordingly, a day's ride in a *Kahar* brought me to Anjer, where I renewed my acquaintance with the beautiful view obtained from the verandah of the little that *was* there. Alas! that I should have to write *was*; for the cruel Krakatoa wave of dawn of the 23rd August, 1883, washed away the village, and with it the little inn and the kind Dutch landlady and her whole family. Having crossed to Telok-betong, I proceeded after a short delay across country to Beneawang at the top of the Semangka Bay. As I was making for the slopes of the Besagi volcano, the easiest route would have been to take steamer to Krœe, on the west coast, and thence by road eastwards; but I was desirous of seeing the scenery and the vegetation along the valley of the Semangka river, which, running south through the Sawah Mountains, falls into the sea at the top of its own bay. Although it was reported to be a very rarely followed route, I decided to attempt the journey; but it proved a more

the evening before. Resuming our journey faint and in low spirits, we reached the dammar-gatherer's hut within an hour's walk. The dead fowl, hastily boiled with a little rice which had soured in the rain, was partaken of without complaint. The nearest baggage came in some two hours after us, the porters having camped without fire or shelter not far from myself, but the heavier part did not arrive till late in the afternoon, and not until I had sent out a relief convoy. When it arrived the men were too tired to proceed further that day, so we spent the night where we were. At sunset we feasted luxuriously, we thought, on the solitary fowl belonging to the owner of the hut, carefully reserving a limb for next day's breakfast.

The remembrance of our dismal surroundings on that evening haunts me still—a miserable hovel gauntly raised like a railway signal-box on high posts, in a clearing in the heart of the forest, amid the wild and melancholy confusion of felled trees, and with our view shut in by grey fleecy rain-clouds hanging in banks on the hills and low down on the tree-tops. The screaming of the cicads and the “koo-ow” of the Argus pheasants seemed more mournful than usual; there was nothing lively anywhere to relieve the gloom. In the little space which they had respectfully railed off for me I retired early to rest, and slept comfortably, notwithstanding the smoke from a wood fire and a spluttering dammar lamp, the steam from drying clothes and the aroma that filled the cabin, into which twenty-eight of us had managed to squeeze.

Next day the grey morning had hardly appeared before we were again on the march, striding along as fast as the deep tracks made by a bevy of elephants which had traversed the road the night before, permitted us. Mr. Wallace, in his ‘Malay Archipelago,’ says “of the great Mammalia of Sumatra, the elephant and the rhinoceros, the former is much more scarce than it was a few years ago, and seems to retire rapidly before the spread of civilisation. About Lobo Raman [a district more to the north-east in the Palembang Residency] tusks and bones are occasionally found, but the living animal is now never seen.” In the district I was traversing the opposite seemed to hold. Within twenty miles of Telok-betong I have crossed a wide area over which elephants had committed

depredations but a few hours before my coming. The village people in these districts complained of the constant ravages done by them in their fields and pepper gardens, while the forest everywhere abounded with their tracks. Of the rhinoceros, on the other hand, I saw traces only a few times.

Some miles on in the forest we came upon a large stone by the side of the path, supposed to possess some influence over things terrestrial, for, as each of the porters passed it, he plucked a handful of leaves and, placing them on the stone, prayed for a dry day and good luck.* Whether it was through the influence of the stone or not we got a dry day, and I only wished that we had met with it somewhat sooner. All that day we pushed on by the side of the Semangka, which glided past us deep and noiselessly through a level plateau, crossing more than once from the one side to the other by some giant tree that had fallen from bank to bank, through dense forest in a sombre winding lane, beyond which we could see nothing but blinks of the sky, except where now and then it opened out on pretty sandy beaches which swarmed with species of metallic tiger-beetles and sand-bees, and where Sulphur (*Terias*) and Swallow-tailed butterflies (*Charaxes* and *Appias*), in gyrating flocks played on the damp ground by the water's edge.

Towards evening, emerging from the forest, our eyes were delighted by the sight of a small cluster of houses, the village of Bumi-padang, "the field of the world," lying a mile off, in a large open alluvial amphitheatre. But, the path suddenly giving out, presently we found ourselves floundering to the thighs at every step in a deep morass swarming with enormous leeches, out of which we could not extricate ourselves, as it seemed to stretch in every direction except behind us. On observing us the head of the marga and his chieflings, with the usual crowd following, came out to welcome and attend us back to the village. They came to the edge of the bog and sat down to await us; and doubtless the sight of our scattered cavalcade floundering in the slough afforded them not a little amusement—it was ludicrous enough to ourselves.

Here I dismissed the porters brought from the coast, and with a new retinue pressed forward with the break of day.

* See below in the closing Chapter of this book.