

JAVA--A Tropic Wonderland

A Talk Broadcast Recently
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WHEN first I planned my trip abroad, and the opportunity for giving rein to the wanderlust actually came my way, I registered a vow that if I could possibly manage it, I would include at least a portion of the Far East in my travels.

After a few disappointments in an endeavour to arrange satisfactory sailings, I found in the Haymarket the London agency for the Rotterdamsche Lloyd Royal Mail Line, and finalised with them for a voyage on the *Patria*, bound for Batavia, and calling on her way at Tangiers, Marseilles, Port Said, Colombo, Sabang, Singapore, Belawan Deli, and finally Tandjong Priok and Java. Of my voyage I can say only this: That I was the only British-born subject from Port Said onward, and yet, such was the kindness and good-fellowship of the Dutch passengers, and the unfailing courtesy of the officers, that I never was permitted to have a dull moment.

One's first glimpse of the Malay Archipelago comes as one enters the very lovely densely-wooded harbour of Sabang on the little island of Poeloh Weh at the northern extremity of Sumatra. From there the ship threads her way down the Malacca Straits, to Singapore, whence Batavia is less than two days' sail. Sabang and Singapore are both free harbours.

Java is a land of contrasts. The primitive lives on here in immediate contact with modern life, but apparently untouched by it. In Batavia the newest in automobiles speed up town and down town, along the Molenvliet Canal that connects the new and the old sections of the city, and in the water that runs between those swirling currents of modern traffic, the Javanese modestly perform their daily ablutions as their ancestors have done for hundreds of years. Motor trucks thunder down to the docks with the many products of Javanese agriculture, rubber, tea, rice, pearl tapioca, sugar, coffee, quinine and so on, and beside them lumber native carts, drawn by slow-moving yokes of oxen. Enter a village and you will see the women pound the rice in large wooden mortars, and crush the juice from the sugar-cane with a primitive press which is turned by a stolid ox, while nearby the machines of a hulling-mill or sugar factory are humming a song of modern efficiency in speed.

In Middle Java, the Susuhunan of Solo, and the Sultan of Djokjakarta are still living the feudal life that age-long tradition has consecrated, while around them are hundreds of menials who, when approaching their august persons, must creep in a squatting position.

Economically and politically Java is by far the most important island of the

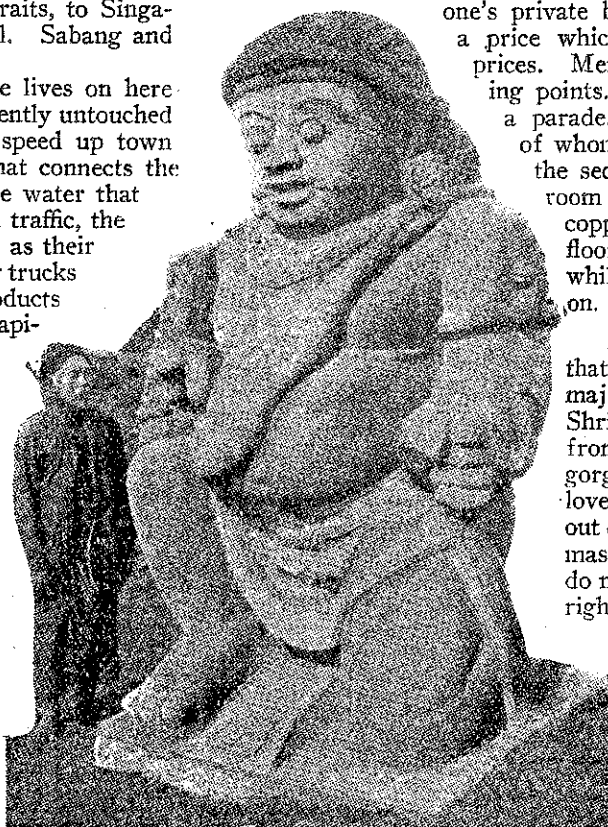
Archipelago, but in size it is the smallest of the Greater Sunda Isles. It has an area of 50,000 square metres, which is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ times the size of Holland or, to bring it nearer home, is approximately that of the South Island of New Zealand. The population is 38,000,000. Like the South Island, too, it is traversed by a range of mountains, but in Java these have active volcanic cones. The total number of volcanoes exceeds one hundred, but not all of them are active.

ONE of these, Mount Merapi, near the famous Boro Boedoe Temple, was in violent eruption not long after my visit. I had heard of Merapi and asked my guide to show it to me. My knowledge of Malay was by this time sufficient for my ordinary needs, but it could not cope with mountains. So we fell to signs, and by an ingenious but perfectly lucid system of signs with his hands, my Malay boy told me that Merapi was behind the clouds, but that when it was meal-time (mid-day) it would be visible.

Hotels in the main tourist centres are extremely good. On account of the extreme heat they are architecturally different from the ordinary hotel. They are frequently planned in three blocks—administrative, social and dining-rooms in the centre, and private suites on either side. At the Hotel Preanger in Bandung, I had a comfortable and commodious room, with telephone, the latest in lighting, and as always one's private balcony with easy-chairs and writing-desk at a price which compared favourably with New Zealand prices. Mention of hotels brings to mind several interesting points. One is rijstafel, the meal which is almost a parade. Another is the Dutch wife, the mention of whom scandalises the unsophisticated tourist, until the secret is told. Yet another is the funny bathroom one sometimes stumbles upon. It contains a copper full of ice-cold water set on a concrete floor, from which one ladles out one's shower while tjitjaks and gomboks and mosquitoes look on.

Among the kaleidoscopic panorama of pictures that come before the mind, one that stands out majestic and wonderful is the Boro Boedoe—the Shrine of a Thousand Buddhas. The journey from Djokja to its mountain home is one of gorgeous beauty, luxuriant and varied; and its loveliness intensifies as one ascends the low hill out of which grows Boro Boedoe. Who built this masterpiece of human art and craftsmanship we do not know; but in setting it in the Kedu plateau, rightly named the Garden of Java, with four imposing volcanoes skirting it as virile sentinels, they stamped themselves for all time as tremendously alert to the beauty that surrounded them.

Beneath a vault of blue sky is stretched a plateau brilliant with every shade of green, from the emerald of the young rice crops to the almost blue of the tropical (Concluded on page 31.)



A guardian of the Shrine of a Thousand Buddhas.