

# Queer Stories About the Island of Sumatra



A BATAK CANNIBAL WOMAN.

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**S**INGAPORE, Straits of Malacca, Nov. 14.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee)—I sailed for two days along the coast of Sumatra in coming to Singapore.

The island belongs almost entirely to the Dutch, but it has vast tracts still inhabited by savages and a large section which the Dutch have been trying for years to subdue. During my conversation with the governor general of the Dutch East Indies he referred to this war and pointed out the province of Achin on the map. It lies at the extreme northern part of Sumatra and is inhabited by Malays, who are better fighters and more rebellious than our own Tagalos.

In Achin every man is a soldier and every village has its army ready for service in time of war. The people have been fighting foreigners for hundreds of years. Their country was one of the first in this region to be discovered by white men. Marco Polo visited it in 1291 and about the time of the discovery of America another European landed there and wrote of its pepper, aloes and silk. Queen Elizabeth made a treaty with its sultan and considerable trading was done before the country came into the hands of the Dutch.

From time to time the different foreign nations tried to subdue the Achinese, but they fought them one after another, and at the end of five centuries are still unconquered. Already the Dutch have lost about 10,000 men in trying to control them and have spent, it is said, more than \$85,000,000. They now have an army in the field against them, and although they possess a part of the coast they are no nearer conquering them than they were a generation ago. The country of the Achinese is about as large as West Virginia. It contains rich pepper districts and has also, it is said, much gold and silver. Its people are Mohammedans and they use the Arabic characters in writing. They are said to be treacherous, but of late years on account of the wars no one has been able to travel among them.

## An Unknown Island.

The greater part of Sumatra is practically unknown, and still it is one of the richest islands of the far east. It has enormous tracts of fertile soil, and it produces pepper, coffee and rice in vast quantities. It is the largest island of the world, with the exceptions of Borneo, New Guinea and perhaps Greenland. It is longer than from New York to Chicago and in one place as wide as from Washington to Albany. Its area is four times that of Ohio plus that of Massachusetts. It is a land of mountains and plains. Along the west coast there are peaks from two to three miles in height, while on the east opposite this town of Singapore there is a vast plain, much of which is under water during a part of the year. This is especially so of the Lampongs, the province nearest Java. The word Lampongs means bobbing in the water. Here you can travel 150 miles over lands almost perfectly level and then by going thirty miles further reach the tops of peaks which are two miles above the sea.

The very best of our Java coffee comes from Sumatra. This statement I made in my coffee letter on Java and the information came to me from the coffee exporters at Batavia. There is a town called Padang about the center of the west coast of Sumatra which is surrounded by coffee plantations, and there are other regions in which the berry grows well. It is cultivated in the mountainous districts, the Arabian plant being used. The exports are large and the most of them go to the United States. The methods of cultivation are about the same as in Java.

## Tobacco Trust Which Pays.

The best tobacco lands are on the north side of the island. Much is raised about Dill, on the Straits of Malacca. The leaf is especially valuable for wrappers, the best of the product going to Europe and thence to Cuba, where it is used for the finest of

the Havana cigars. The exports of tobacco amount to about \$15,000,000 a year. One company—the Dill Maatschappij—has paid a dividend of 75 per cent per annum for twenty-five years. This is the leading tobacco company of Sumatra.

It is along this same coast that pepper is found. Sumatra raises more pepper than any other island of the world, and it has been raising it for centuries. It was the trade in spices which brought the Dutch to the far east, and a large part of their first pepper shipments were from Sumatra, although they got some from India. They lost India through the overcharges of the pepper trust. About the time of Queen Elizabeth they had settlements both in India and in these islands, and were doing most of the carrying trade of this part of the world. They then sold their pepper at 75 cents a pound, but, trustlike, as they had the monopoly, thought they could double the price, water their stock and still declare big dividends. The English merchants, however, objected to paying \$1.50 a pound, and organized the famous East India company, which drove the Dutch out of Hindoostan and gave India to England.

Here in Sumatra the Dutch still own pepper plantations. The sultan of Achin has his pepper districts, and in the Lampongs there are other pepper estates which yield well. In a good year Sumatra exports in the neighborhood of 400,000 pounds, or about two-thirds of all the pepper that tickles the palates of humankind.

## Pepper for the Philippines.

I have made some inquiries as to the pepper business and as far as I can learn it will pay the Agricultural department to investigate it for the Philippines. Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago have plenty of land suited to the crop, and the moist, warm climate there is just right for it.

The pepper grows upon bushes, which rise to a height of from twenty to thirty feet. The plants are set out from cuttings so near together that one acre will bear 2,500 plants. In Sumatra, where wages are perhaps a little lower than in the Philippines, it costs only \$20 to bring an acre of pepper plants into bearing, and after that it is said the pepper from them can be annually sold for about \$400. So you see the profits are enormous. The plants begin to bear at three years in some regions and in some it takes from five to eight years for them to reach full maturity, after which they will produce from ten to fifteen years longer. The pepper is in the form of berries, which are first green and then red and when ripe are yellow. They are picked as they begin to ripen and dried on mats in the open air. When dry they turn black. The white pepper is made by washing and rubbing the black berries and drying them in the sun.

## Among the Battaks.

Some of the best pepper plantations in Sumatra are in the land of the Battaks, a vast tribe of semi-savages, who live in the hills south of Achin. These people are Malays intermixed with Dyaks of Borneo and with Hindoos. They are taller than our Filipinos, darker in complexion and more heavily haired. Many of them have beards. In the wilder portions of the country they are very savage and cannibals are found. The penalties for certain crimes are that the guilty shall be cut in pieces and be eaten alive. These practices, however, pre-

vail only in back districts. Those Battaks who have come in contact with the Dutch are semi-civilized and many of them can read and write. They have an alphabet of their own and write upon palm leaves instead of paper.

The Battaks are pagans, but I doubt whether missionaries would be allowed by the Dutch to go among them, as they think missionary work disturbs the natives. Some of the people are Mohammedans and others believe in three deities—a creator, a preserver and a destroyer. They have also a touch of Hindooism. They are on the whole mild and peaceable, hospitable and very courteous.

I have several pictures of Battak girls brought to Batavia by a recent traveler in that country. I am surprised at their looks. They have better forms and features than the Javanese and they dress better. Young girls wear a great deal of jewelry—every maiden carries her whole dowry on her person. Her arms are covered with bracelets from her wrists to her shoulders and in her ears are buttons and hooks of silver and gold.

Some girls have high back combs plated with gold and some have sarongs of silk interwoven with gold threads and decorated with small coins. It is not uncommon for a woman to cover the whole upper part of her person with silver dollars, beginning with a row at the neck and running in concentric rows down to the depths of a very decollete dress. I am told that some of the women wear silver nail protectors, such as are used by the Chinese, and that many have gold belts and gold and silver buckles to fasten their sarongs.

## Queer Marriage Customs.

Marriage is largely a case of courtship and love in many parts of Sumatra. Still the daughters have to be bought by their husbands from the parents. This purchase is secret, but it is necessary, nevertheless, and is always insisted upon unless the girl is old and tough and the prospective husband has little. Then he may be taken into the family of his bride with no payment whatever. In the latter case, however, the ceremony is different from the regular marriage ceremony and the husband's rights are also different. He becomes, in short, the slave of his wife's parents and his wife is his legal boss. If he should get tired of his condition he may apply for a divorce, but the wife keeps the property and the children.

Indeed, there is a part of Sumatra where the women are said to be the real rulers. This is in the middle of the island, in a part of the country seldom penetrated by travelers. There the women have more property rights than the men. If a man dies his possessions go to his father and mother, but if the woman dies her property goes to the children. For this reason the men give their property to their wives, and the result is that most of the wealth of the tribe is owned by the women. The husband can divorce his wife whenever he chooses, but he must allow her to keep the property in her possession. For this reason there are few divorces and the people are said to be uncommonly moral.

They are generally monogamists, notwithstanding their Mohammedanism. Several families will often live in one house. If a daughter gets married a new addition is built on at the back and in this she lives and brings up her children. The various

additions can be recognized by the prongs which extend up from the roof, and you see sometimes half a dozen houses so joined together.

In some villages there are houses somewhat like the club houses of New Guinea. In the Lampongs even small places have their town halls, where the men, women and children meet together and where all public business is done. About these the peddlers and marketmen collect, story tellers stand and sing their tales and here dancing is sometimes held, lasting for several days and nights.

## Towns of Sumatra.

I have talked with the Dutch officials about the towns of Sumatra. The natives nearly everywhere live in villages and there are only a few cities of any size. I have already spoken of Padang. This is the capital of the west coast. It has about 35,000 people and of these about 1,700 are Europeans. The province is ruled by the Dutch and the town has many beautiful Dutch villages, somewhat like those of Java. Many also live in bungalows, constructed of wood and bamboo, with the floors several feet above the ground. Some of the villas are roofed with thatch of tapa leaves.

The natives live in thatched huts with curiously pointed roofs. Their houses are shaded by cocoanut trees, and Padang makes you think of an immense park with these curious houses scattered through it. The town is close to the mountains and it is said to be very healthy. It is not far from coal fields, which are connected with it by rail.

Not far from Padang is Benkulen, which was once the English capital of the country. It has 12,000 people, but is not prosperous. Dill is the Dutch capital of the east coast. It is at the mouth of a river on Malacca strait, just a little below Padang. Here the Dutch civil and military officials live as well as many European merchants, making a very pleasant foreign colony. Dill is laid out in modern style, its streets being lighted with electricity. It has two banks, two good hotels, two clubs, a racing association and many Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Malay and Kling business houses. It is the center of the tobacco exporting trade and it imports a great deal of rice from the Straits Settlements.

In eastern Sumatra is the largest city of the island. It is known as Palembang and is the capital of the residency of that name. It has a population of about 60,000 and has considerable export and import trade with Singapore, Siam, Batavia and China. It has a European quarter, with the usual assortment of clubs, business houses, etc. The people are largely Mohammedans and it has one mosque, floored with marble, which has a minaret 100 feet high.

## How the Dutch Govern Sumatra.

The Dutch have applied the same government to Sumatra as to Java, but their success in controlling the people has been far greater in the latter island. The Malays of Sumatra are more wild and savage than the Javanese. Many of them, like the Achinese, refuse to be controlled and there are frequent rebellions. Eastern Sumatra is still divided into a number of semi-independent states, each ruled by its own prince or chief, who may be called sultan, rajah or datto. These rulers are assisted by the Dutch officials, and as far as possible the government is carried on through them. The Dutch have a court at Dill and also native courts elsewhere. The most important cases are taken to Batavia to be tried and matters of note are referred to the governor general of the Dutch East Indies at that point.

Lands may be leased of the princes for a certain number of years and labor may be hired under certain conditions. The laws require that the wages must be paid by the month and that the employer must furnish his laborers with medical attendance and food when they are sick. All land contracts to Europeans are subject to the consent of the resident Dutch governor and mining contracts have to be approved by the Dutch governor general. In nearly all the provinces the Dutch collect the customs duties and ordinary revenues.

I have not been able to discover much as to the mineral wealth of Sumatra. Gold and silver are known to exist and the country has a Mount Ophir, but whether its name has anything to do with the gold of Ophir I do not know. There are gold fields about Padang which have been noted for centuries and placer mines in other parts of the island which are still in operation. There is some tin along the coast of the strait and there are copper mines near the



MALAY WOMEN FROM THE EAST COAST OF SUMATRA.

Merapi volcano. Iron has been smelted for centuries by certain of the tribes and there are coal oil fields which are the source of much speculation in the stock markets of the various ports of the far east. There is one oil region known as the Langkat which has made fortunes on paper for the foreigners in Shanghai, but so far as I can learn no great quantity of petroleum has yet come from them.

## Tin Mines of Banka.

Among the richest mineral regions of this part of the world are those on some of the smaller islands about Sumatra. I passed the island of Banka in coming to Singapore. This island is separated from Sumatra by the Banka straits. Almost adjoining it is the island of Billiton. Banka is about half again as large as Porto Rico and Billiton about one and one-half times the size of Rhode Island. Both these islands have enormous deposits of tin, their output amounting to several million dollars annually. The mines are a monopoly of the Dutch government, which works them with Chinese cheap labor. Much of the tin is alluvial; it is washed out and smelted by the Chinese. The chief town of Banka is Muntok, which is the seat of the Dutch government. It is a little city of 4,000 and is a port of call for Dutch steamers between Batavia and Singapore.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

## Excessive Smoking

Edison, when he is deeply absorbed in work, consumes about twenty cigars a day; when he is less active, mentally, about ten. They are always strong cigars. The inventor says that this excessive smoking has never, so far as he can discover, done him any harm. His family has been one of smokers, his grandfather, who lived to be 103, having been an inveterate smoker and a chewer of tobacco as well.

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GATHERING PEPPER IN SUMATRA—THE PEPPER GROWS UPON BUSHES.