

MR. DALTON'S

Journal from Singapore to Coti, Borneo.

On the 3rd October 1827, I left Singapore after a residence, in that Settlement of 27 months, and went on board a small prow belonging to the Sultan of Coti, and bound to that place.

COTI lies to the S. E. of Borneo in Lat. 1. 30. S. and Long. 123. E. Few Europeans had hitherto traded so far eastward on this island; the last European (Major Mullen of the Dutch service) was murdered by the natives about two years since. Misfortunes having long pressed me hard, I was determined to leave for a time the society of Europeans altogether, and strike into a path hitherto untrodden in hopes of either procuring for myself a comfortable independence during the remainder of my life in England, or of losing a life, the misfortunes in which had for many years preponderated over the good. Knowing I should have plenty of vacant time, I proposed filling it up in writing a diary, or journal of my proceedings, considering that on visiting a strange country, I might have matters to relate somewhat new and entertaining. However, should it be otherwise, my purpose will be served, as I write for my own amusement, and as waste paper this will do as well as the best.

Previous to my departure from Singapore, I obtained a very favorable letter from the Sultan of that island to the Sultan of Coti, who also gave order to the Anacodas, or Captains of the prows to pay particular attention to me. The Resident and Assistant Resident likewise called the principal natives, and told them in my presence that should any misfortune occur to me, the Coti and Bugis prows, with their cargoes would be confiscated and themselves hanged. These threats, altho' empty, did not appear so to them, so that in reality my danger was not so great as otherwise it appeared to be, and as most of the people of Singapore represented.

The prow was burden 15 Coyans, or 30 tons; had 40 people on board, which with the number on deck rendered a walk of two yards impossible. We should have sailed in a fleet of 20 prows, but most of them had the start of us, and others were not ready, so we were only five in company. Having some previous knowledge of these vessels, I was not surprised to find there were neither chart nor compass, on board. Few persons would like to trust themselves in one of these crazy tubs during a run of 900 or 1000 leagues, without a nautical instrument of any kind. 'Tis true they usually run along the coasts, but nevertheless are frequently three weeks or a month without seeing land. They are often lost, but the principal danger arises from the numerous pirates that infest the numerous islands in this part of the world. These marauders, particularly those from the island of Lingin, (an island laying near the Straits of Banca,) respect nothing; every vessel is fair game with them; their first object is the plunder on board; the second the prisoners, whom they sell at various places, at high prices. Lingin has always been known as the principal hold of the most desperate pirates, and it is surprising the European powers do not at once crush their strength, as the inhabitants are few and cowardly, and the country incapable of defence. This island has been twice taken by the Dutch, who laid waste the country with fire and sword, but the unwholesomeness of the climate caused them to leave it. The last time the Dutch paid them a visit in 1776, the Sultan and his family fled to the main land, but soon returned, and his grandson now governs the place, carrying on the game of robbery with great success. Malayan and Bugis prows are the favorite objects; European vessels they seldom attack unless stranded on their coast, or in some great distress. The British flag is the most respected, they not only being aware of its influence, but from the circumstance of having made many unfortunate mistakes regarding it, particularly one in 1816, when five large prows, mistaking, on a very hazy morning, an English sloop of war for an Arab, attacked her. The consequence was in less than five minutes four of the five were sunk, each having received one broadside only. The fifth got under the land, by help of her oars. These prows had 6 guns each and 170 men, not one of whom were picked up by the sloop, but killed whilst swimming in the water by grape shot, and musketry. This circumstance makes them approach the British flag with great caution.

I have already mentioned that on board the prow, there was not room to walk. My sleeping place was 7 feet by 3, and in height 2 feet 6 inches, so that in no part could I sit up right. It was roofed with rushes, (cadjans) leaving on one side a small hole to creep through.

4th. Under weigh with fine wind. On the 6th heavy rain with squalls. 7th passed Rhio a Dutch settlement on the island of Bintang.

It is but little known to Europeans navigating among these islands that excellent water is to be found on most of them. Very often vessels have

been in the greatest distress when becalmed near these islands for the want of this necessary article, while the native prows at once send their boat on shore, and get it without difficulty. A man may sail about this part of the world all his life and know nothing of the matter, without he takes one trip in a prow. These prows carry very little water, when about to sail from any port; they are therefore obliged to replenish frequently, and naturally prefer the islands to Rhio on account of the detention and expense of the latter place. There is a spring of excellent water on a small island off Rhio, which I am inclined to think the Dutch themselves are not aware of notwithstanding they are so close. This spring will be found to bear nearly south, from the Resident's house, in the centre of a small island about 7 miles from it. The place cannot be mistaken as there are but three islands within that distance, and this is the middle one. On approaching, an aperture or cleft in the jungle is seen, and there is the water; but should trouble occur in finding the exact spot, it will be better for the boat to pull round the island the circumference being about 2 miles, and in so doing the labor may probably be compensated by turning over a few turtle, which are frequently seen on the beach.

On the morning of the 8th, found ourselves close in with the island of Lingin, the much dreaded place of pirates. A dead calm, and the current setting towards the shore drove the prow within musket shot of it, much nearer than any of us wished to be. At this time there was a square rigged vessel within five miles of us; whether this circumstance deterred them from coming out, or they did not think us worth the trouble of taking, I cannot say—however we passed unmolested, and at 10 A. M. a smart breeze enabled us to get quickly out of their reach. In the afternoon spoke the square rigged vessel; she proved to be an Arab from Rhio, bound to Batavia. It was well the pirates offered no symptom of annoyance, as this pariah vessel neither could or would have assisted us. Although the Arabs are undoubtedly looked upon by the people of the East as the most favored of all nations, being the immediate descendants of Methomet, yet of all other people they are the least liked by Europeans, and I have heard many persons of consequence say, (who have themselves been pirates) that it is from the Arabs they get their intelligence and advice how to act. They are the most impudent, dirty race in Asia, and for cunning and roguery may be matched against the sircars and Dabashes of Calcutta and Madras. They are partial to European vessels, knowing their superiority, but cannot themselves navigate them; therefore they get some unfortunate or discarded officers for the purpose giving them a miserable pittance. These poor fellows are looked upon by their masters as dogs, and treated little better. I never knew an European go twice in the same vessel, the treatment received on board, together with the scanty pay, (*id est*, when they get any) prevent a second voyage. This conduct in the Arabs does not always pass with impunity, as I know several instances when Europeans have purposely lost the vessel as some satisfaction for the wrongs received, and as none of them ensure, the loss must be great on such occasions.

The ship we spoke was commanded by an Englishman, (the only European on board) and she belonged to Sid Hoosen, who was formerly well known at Pacalongan in Java.

At ten P. M. a strong breeze sprung up which to my astonishment sent our frail back forward at the rate of 8 knots an hour. By day light the next morning, we had run the Arab vessel out of sight.

9th. Very heavy rain, which completely drenched us all; it continued until the evening of the 10th, then ceased for an hour when it returned and continued 12 hours. Heavier rain I never saw. On the evening of the 11th calm, and all hands fishing—the tackle of these people is of a very superior quality; they have a method of preparing the cotton, and after the lines are spun they rub them well with gum, taken from the tree Allak. They are as strong and look as well as gymph. The hooks are inferior, being made of brass, well hardened by beating. Some excellent fish are caught; one upon which I dined was about the size and little inferior in flavor to the salmon. The continued rain and chilly nights had much cut up the people. There were only three persons on board who were free from colds, viz. myself, Mr. Kechsler, who accompanied me; and the D'ragon, or commander. During the heavy rain, a glass of grog was of much service. About this time, I began to find out the character of the people with me; there were several Bugis passengers, men of property who had frequently asked of me, various articles which I never refused, it being both my inclination and interest to keep friends with all. This

day I was refused a piece of fish by one of the Bugis, altho' they had plenty on board. I now locked up my medicine chest, and would no longer be doctor. Several of them came to me in a body begging my assistance in various ways, but I plainly told them I would rather see them die than live. The Bugis and Malays are in manner and disposition very different; from the highest to the lowest they are beggars, (the Bugis) who will ask for every thing they see, & altho' abounding in riches will take the shirt off your back if they can get it, but the most trifling article in return they instantly refuse, and after such refusal, will immediately return to the charge of asking for some thing else. They are most treacherous, and will steal in any way so that a person cannot be too much upon his guard. They have the character of being much superior to the Malays in point of courage; in this there may be some truth but the Malay will in every respect be found a superior character.

Throughout the 11th torrents of rain with much wind; it was so dark we could not see 30 yards any way. This was rather perplexing, as by my calculation we could not be far from the S. E. point of Borneo; however, our commander did not give himself much trouble, but in the evening took in sail and employed himself in fishing all night with much success. I purchased seven fish for half a guilder, a (shilling) each as large as a salmon, and almost as delicious. This fish the calcub, called by us the rock cod is caught in deep water, not less than 30 fathoms. They are caught in most parts of these seas, particularly off the coast of Java; however I do not recollect seeing any of this particular kind either at Penang, Malacca or Singapore. The people at these settlements are too lazy to fish in deep water, contenting themselves with what swims upon the surface. Indeed it is proverbial throughout India that the fishermen in every English settlement get their money much too easy.

On the morning of the 13th sailed past numerous islands flanking the S. E. point of Borneo. A noon, we were well in with the mainland off Banjarmasin. The appearance of the coast is wild and mountainous; none of the islands are inhabited, or indeed seldom visited, even by pirates, on account of the difficulty and danger approaching

the shore. They are all surrounded with sharp sunken rocks, amongst which sharks of the largest size continually play. There are several other kind of fish evidently different from the shark, but quite as ravenous. We caught two with heads like a fox, and teeth of an amazing length. The largest was eleven feet long. The people on board said this peculiar kind is not caught elsewhere. On the 15th close in with the main land. The Bugis quite at home, as there is not a point or a single feature in the country with which they are not intimately acquainted. This morning the D'ragon or Captain was detected breaking open a case of brandy, and stealing some bottles. On being taxed with the theft, he got into a violent rage and threatened to murder Mr. Hecksler and myself. This however was treated with such contempt that all the people burst into a loud laugh; however knowing the vindictive character of the man, I set people to watch him, lest some attempt might be made when we were asleep; awake I did not fear any attempt; we were well armed, with many of the best people in our favor, and in case of disturbance our determination was to shoot the D'ragon, with one or two others of the most forward, which would have ensured quietness very soon. In such cases as this, if an European hesitates, he is lost. In all the Bornean states there is little or no law on the subject; therefore it is always best to begin—shoot two or three, the remainder will submit instantly; if this is not done, the European life is worth nothing. Let no man content himself with merely wounding a Bugis; after receiving the slightest hurt, he will follow through the world, the person who inflicted it, and never give over until his object of murder is accomplished. God knows what may occur to me, but should I be attacked openly by these wretches, I make little doubt of taking a few of them out of the world with me."

To be concluded in our next.