

THE LITERARY EXAMINER.

*Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Samarang, during the years 1843—46; employed Surveying the Islands of the Eastern Archipelago; accompanied by a brief Vocabulary of the principal Languages.* By Captain Sir Edward Belcher, R.N. Commander of the Expedition. With Notes on the Natural History of the Islands, by Arthur Adams, Assistant-Surgeon, R.N. Reeve and Co.

When the *Samarang* quitted England on the voyage described in these volumes, the Chinese war had been recently brought to a close, and the understood object of the expedition was to survey the coasts, ports, and rivers of China laid open by the new treaty of 1842. Her Majesty's plenipotentiary, however, in that spirit of submission to Chinese prejudice in trifles which has encouraged nine-tenths of the serious encroachments made by the Government of China on the rights of foreign traders, and which has given an indirect sanction (we grieve to say it) to even such deplorable calamities as the recent massacre of unoffending Englishmen, took upon him to forbid all approach to the Chinese territories north of Canton.

Observe what was lost by this, in the present case. Throughout the whole of the outlying chain of islands east of Formosa which extends from the Meïa-coshimahs to the coast of Korea, and at Nangasaki, Sir E. Belcher found that the news of the victories of England in China had preceded him. He found that the intelligence had predisposed the inhabitants and officers of Government to treat him with the greatest deference. And by a deportment in which consideration and firmness were happily blended (we are glad to render Sir Edward this justice, and to remove an impression which we lately quoted from what turns out to be but indifferent authority), he in every instance but one made this pre-existent feeling of fear

compatible with one of friendship and confidence. The same end could have been attained by the same conduct off the coast of China, but pedantic rules inherited from The Company's factory at Canton forbade the experiment.

Warned off from China, Sir E. Belcher was left pretty much at the dictates of his own discretion to cruise about the eastern Archipelago, and to examine the chain of islands we have named.

The greater part of his two volumes is so occupied. By far the greater part of the four years' cruise was spent off the north-west coast of Borneo, or off the north-east coast and among the islands between it and the Philippines, or in passing between that cruising-ground and Hong Kong or Singapore. The employments of the *Samarang's* commander and crew while in these latitudes were sufficiently varied and rather desultory. The surveying duties were resumed when no more exciting occupation offered; but fighting with pirates among the Sooloos, opening negotiations with Malay chiefs on the north-east coast of Borneo, or assisting the diplomacy of the Rajah of Sarawak, appear to have been in preference much more assiduously attended to.

One cannot read this part of the narrative without being frequently reminded of the enormous range of powers and functions allotted to captains of English men-of-war in semi-civilized countries. They make war and peace as their own consciences dictate; they contract alliances and promote the foundation of colonies; they patronize missionaries or keep them in check, adjusting the contending claims of rival faiths for precedence; and amid these tasks, equivalent to the governing of half a world, they find time occasionally for scientific pursuits, partly professional, partly of general interest. For such avocations it is obvious that men of universal genius are required, and every sea captain feels himself comfortably possessed of the intellectual greatness and versatility implied by his office. Nominally they are responsible to the British Government; but as that Government knows nothing of the localities, persons, or relations with which they have to deal, they are virtually independent. They are a sort of modern Vikingar, with all the polish, professions of religious and moral earnestness, and superficial accomplishments, of the nineteenth century. Truly a remarkable mission for a race of men, not always overstocked with education or intelligence.

Sir E. Belcher much resembles his colleagues, and the portions of his book to which we are now adverting much resemble most of their recent publications. They also have a strong family resemblance to many of the publications respecting Labuan and the Rajah of Sarawak (such as that of Mr Low—*Sarawak, its Inhabitants and Productions*,\* a very clever and interesting book), with which we have recently been inundated. The only novel feature about them is their greater conscientiousness and apparent veracity, in recapitulating the trading capabilities of Borneo and the natural advantages of Labuan. Sir E. Belcher describes these as he found them, without any over-anxiety of laudation; and such of our merchants as contemplate enterprises to that new El Dorado, will do well to consult his pages beforehand.

The visits of the *Samarang* to the Meïa-co-shimahs, Loo-Choo, the Korean Archipelago, and Japan, have more of novelty in them; but they were hasty, and their results are on the whole rather meagre. This appears to have been, in part at least, owing to a peculiarity of temperament. Sir E. Belcher is continually talking about "the usual good luck" of the voyage. This good luck carries him, in the dark, through dangerous and intricate reefs or island groups; and enables him, by instinct and without the aid of the external sense, to hit upon narrow anchorages among thousands of surrounding difficulties. He is constantly breaking out into hymns of praise to the "good luck" which attends his every movement. He relies upon it as implicitly as if he had been born with one caul, and carried half a dozen on every mast-head and yard-arm. And to this somewhat presumptuous confidence do we attribute the scrapes into which he was constantly getting,—from the time he allowed the *Samarang* to heel over and fill with mud and water at Sarawak, when about to begin his surveys, till he got dismasted while nearing the coasts of England on his return. It is loss of time and shortness of stores, incurred by the accidents produced by trusting to his "good luck," that are pleaded in exculpation of various parts of the survey rather perfunctorily performed. We make this remark without any imputation on his character or temper, or the real desire he seems to have shown to discharge his duty efficiently.