

SIR JAMES ELPHINSTONE ON THE  
FLOOR OF ST. STEPHEN'S.

LOQUACITY is an unfortunate gift to a man of mediocre intellect and small information; it inspires him with great ambition, and leads him into temptation, which frequently ends in his discomfiture. An individual may have the ability to arrive at sound judgment upon questions which may be brought under his consideration even in the legislature, and able to record his vote wisely and honestly; but it frequently happens that if he attempt to explain the reasons which have actuated him in forming that judgment he makes a sorry exhibition of himself; and the influence of a good vote is often in a measure nullified by a bad argument. Silence is, undoubtedly, the best proof of wisdom in a case like this, and by a prudent man silence would be observed.

According to the *Examiner*, the Tory representative of this borough, Sir James Elphinstone, has been labouring rather too zealously to promote the interests of his constituents by favouring the House of Commons with a luminous disquisition on "The Straits Settlements," which was very creditable to Sir James's talents, and had only one drawback,—certainly an important one,—viz., that his argument was founded on no more solid basis than his own imagination. "The Settlements thus called," says the *Examiner*,

"Of which, Singapore is by far the most important, are three British colonies in the Straits of Malacca, the channel which divides the southern extremity of Asia from the great island of Sumatra. Their yearly trade is of the value of 15,000,000*l.*, and hence, after Calcutta and Bombay, they are by far the most considerable of our Indian emporia. They are at present under the administration of the Governor-General of India in Council, who knows little about them, cares less, and consequently neglects and mismanages them. The inhabitants have therefore petitioned Parliament to have the settlements transferred to the Colonial office, so that they may be administered as other colonies are by the Crown."

In the House of Commons last week Lord Bury,—who, it seems, had before presented a petition to the House from the inhabitants of Singapore,—again brought the subject forward, in a speech "abundant in matter and lucid in manner, and was ably supported by Mr. Horsman." Our contemporary then proceeds to observe that "they were answered by orations which had neither of these qualifications;" and, after pointing out the inadequate knowledge of the Secretary of the Board of Control, he proceeds to comment upon the statements of our own great luminary, in whom our readers, as well as ourselves, must feel deep interest:—

"But the Secretary of the Board of Control, extravagantly ignorant as he proved himself, was far outdone by the next speaker, the honourable member for Portsmouth. He told the House that "as one knowing something of Singapore, he wished to say a few words." He said far too many for his own credit, his "something" turning out to be nothing but a tissue of blunders of the most ludicrous description. The intelligent master of a merchant-ship, viewing Singapore through his spy-glass, as he sailed through its roads, would have given a truer account of the place. The hon. member had, it seems, visited it in the year 1820, when he was on a trading voyage, that is to say, he had visited it the year after the colony was founded, which is eight-and-thirty years ago. He told the House that it had been found quite indispensable to send convicts to the place at its foundation, in order to execute public works. It so happens, for we have been making careful inquiry into the member's gratuitous assertions, that there were no convicts at Singapore for seven years after its foundation, and for six after Sir Jas. Elphinstone fancied he saw them there. "He had never heard," he said, that the convicts "were disagreeable to the settlers," although the settlers now assure Parliament that they consider them what every other colony considers convicts to be, a great public nuisance. The denunciation of the inhabitants goes for nothing with the honourable baronet: he greatly prefers his own experience, derived from an epoch when the convicts were creations of his own imagination. This is followed by a story of the cock-and-bull genus, where an English lady of rather singular taste is represented as stating that for a domestic servant she preferred a convicted felon of Hindustan, possibly the father or uncle of a mutinous Sepoy, to a free inhabitant of Singapore. Then, the credulous Sir James asserted that "the populations which resorted to Singapore, consisted of the most lawless and savage of the Eastern races." The races here alluded to, amount to about one-sixth part of the inhabitants, and are the least litigious, the most docile, and the most easily governed of the whole population. Among the imaginary savage population of Singapore, the honorable baronet finds Saravak Dyaks, the present subjects of Sir James Brooke, of whom there is not one in the island, unless he may have been brought as a curiosity—"as we show an ape." Again, we have Sir J. Elphinstone enumerating among the profligates of Singapore a people of Sumatra, called Syak. There is no such nation in that island, or any one of the 10,000 islands that constitute the Malay Archipelago. There is, however, a river in Sumatra, called Syak, and along its banks is found a Malayan people among the most civilised of that nation, and ever friendly to the English. Finally, we have the same authority informing the House that from the union of the Chinese immigrants with the women of the country "had sprung a race called 'Klings,' a most disorderly people." The people thus denominated and denounced are the inhabitants of Telingana, a Hindu nation of the Coromandel Coast, whom we used in the olden time to call "Gentoo," the most orderly and the most enterprising of all the people of India. They bear no more relation to Chinese than Chinese Mandarines do to Baronets of Nova Scotia. Among Sir J. Elphinstone's "savage inhabitants" were "tigers." On inquiry we find there were none in the island until ten years after his visit; but never mind, he makes these creations of his fancy devour at the rate of a Chinaman a-day, or 365 Celestials per annum. The house laughed, but whether at Sir James or his gossip, it was hard to say."

Let us hope that for the future Sir James will not hazard a speech in the House of Commons upon an imperfect knowledge of his subject.