

OUR STRAITS SETTLEMENT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY NEWS.

SIR,—As a resident in the Straits, I observe with much interest a report of a motion for papers on the subject of the Straits settlement and the comments on the leading London journals thereon. Any one who has ever given the least attention to that part of the world must have been struck with the importance of the British possessions there, whether we regard them as a midway station between India and China for our fleets, and as the key of the China seas, or as the only foothold on the borders of that vast archipelago, rich beyond all comparison in valuable commodities, which we seem so carefully to have handed over to the Dutch, and which they as carefully and wisely preserve.

Singapore, so notable an exception to the generally slothful and unamiable Malay character, although so unjustly maligned by Sir J. Elphinstone, is the only great entrepot for the produce of that overflowing region; as Penang, though of less importance, is of the produce of Sumatra and the Malayan coast, besides its own spices and sugar. One would imagine that a nation so jealous of the pestilential swamp of Grey Town, of the barren rock of Perim, and of the famous and useful Isle of Serpents, would be careful of a place receiving millions in value of cargoes yearly, and of a rich island with a calm harbour and salubrious hill climate. Let us see in what way our carefulness is exercised. We knock down the fortifications in Malacca and delay many years the building any at Singapore; we crowd Penang and Singapore with convicts and leave the latter place, with all its shipping and stores on land, exposed and unprotected, at the mercy of the roving frigates of an enemy, as in the late Russian war. Turning from what has been left undone to what has been done, we find the same disposition to underrate the value and neglect the interest of these colonies.

The general government is a triple one, subdivided into home, Indian, and local, and resulting in a dead lock; the superior nullifying or neglecting anything of use emanating from the inferior as being of small importance and value to India Proper; the inferior dawdling at times, obstinate to a fault at other times, and personally laying itself under obligations to private individuals on whose claims and interests it may have to pronounce. It may be supposed at home that the days when a governor could bestow nearly all the minor posts of government on persons who would unite themselves to his family, the said family being of a kind formerly so frequent in India, and wearing

“The shadowed livery of the burning sun,”

have passed away; and it will scarcely be believed that magistrates are chosen from the mates of the government steamer; yet in the Straits these practices are not yet out of date. All this reacts upon society, and upon the general character of the inhabitants; among all classes there is a torpor and selfish indifference to public interests, if not to public decency; among the better constituted minds discontent and contempt.

The quasi-native population is composed principally of Chinese and Klings (from the Madras coast); the former for the most part have come as working coolies, and many have amassed great wealth in trade. They have increased and strengthened under neglect on the one hand, and truckling to them for the sake of commercial interests on the other, until they have reached a state little less turbulent and dangerous than that of the convicts. Lately, in Penang, a few injudicious and hasty attempts were made to curb them; the result was a general strike of the shopkeepers, and all the re-sidents were without supplies for three days.

Then the government of course drew back, dropping the hot potato in a highly dignified manner, and the Chinaman throws crackers under your horses' feet as before, and laughs in your face.

Further, from the want of proper supervision and legislation suited to changing circumstances, the Klings and Chinese have everything their own way, and the most exorbitant prices (and frequent refusals to labour even at their own prices) are the results, acting most injuriously upon large interests there, and on commerce in general through the shipping charges.

One London journal asks, “are there no European merchants in Singapore, no independent settlers in Penang?” I answer, yes, both; and most respectable men, too, and from these “ten righteous” I have hope.

The present governor is said to be about to retire. Let him retire. Relieve the Straits of the absurd intermediate government from Calcutta. They are as distinct in character as they are geographically distinct from our Indian possessions. Remove, gradually if you please, the huge incubus of convicts; give them a governor of high moral qualities and discerning intellect, allowing them at the same time freedom of action; and they will repay the benefit: their present condition is the combined result of an effete and complicated rule, and neglect of public interests through that too great eagerness for self, which is common on the part of the more influential English residents and merchants.—I am, &c.,

Straits of Malacca, June 10.

CENSOR.