

THE COLONY OF SINGAPORE.

The colony of Singapore, about to be transferred from the Indian to the Colonial department of administration, is the first and most successful example in British history of the beneficial effects of freedom of trade. Singapore has an area of about 200 square miles, or is by about one-third larger than the Isle of Wight; but even of this small area but a few square miles are as yet cleared of a forest, the trees of which would for size and frequency do honour to the region of the Amazons. This forest harbours royal tigers, which yearly destroy more human beings than cattle, but only because of the two the human herd is the more numerous. The island lies but eighty miles from the Equator and is hot, yet being well ventilated by monsoons and land and sea winds, it is eminently healthy. Its main advantage consists in its position, for it lies on one of the two great highways through the Malayan Archipelago which connect the Eastern with the Western World, while it has a roadstead and a harbour safe and accessible at every season.

Singapore became a British possession in the month of February 1819, and is consequently as a British colony just forty-five years old. It was ceded to us by a very poor chief, the head of a band of Malay fishermen, not indisposed to piracy when opportunity offered. The grandson of that chieftain is a well-educated man, a proprietor of land, and in the enjoyment of a yearly income of 30,000*l.*, a fact which tells well for the prosperity of the colony and the justice and liberality of those who have administered it. He is probably the wealthiest Malay that ever lived, and he could certainly buy and sell all the Malay princes of the Archipelago.

Singapore has been a free port in the most comprehensive sense from its first establishment, for no duties are levied on ships or cargoes, and this without reference to nationality. The result is striking and exemplary. The population of some 200 beggarly and barbarous fishermen has risen to an industrious community of 100,000. Of these the European inhabitants of all nationalities, but the majority English, do not exceed a few hundreds. About three-fourths of the population are Chinese, a few of them Creoles, but the greater number emigrants from China, including without the last year or two a few females. The bulk of the rest of the inhabitants consists of various nations of the Malay Archipelago and of various nations of Hindu origin, to which may be added some Arabs, Persians, Armenians, and Jews.

And now for the commerce, which has brought together this miscellaneous population. We have before us the returns for the official year 1862-63. The imports amounted in value to 6,461,720*l.*, and the exports to 5,555,573*l.*, the first exceeding those of the previous year by 889,200*l.*, and the last by 594,020*l.* The number of square-rigged vessels which entered was 1,279, of 471,440 tons burthen, and the departures 1,241, of 396,599 tons, but this is exclusive of native craft of many descriptions. Full one-half of this shipping is British, the rest sailing under no fewer than twenty different national flags, of which the most considerable are the American, the Dutch, the French, the Hamburg, the Bremen, and the Siamese. The great majority of the shopkeepers and brokers are Chinese, but among these also are found wealthy merchants and shipowners, with correspondents in London, Liverpool, and Glasgow. Englishmen and foreign Europeans are the chief merchants and bankers. Next to Bombay and Calcutta Singapore is the greatest commercial emporium of British India, and this is the result of freedom and a happy geographical position.

But how fares it with financial matters? Surpassingly well. The revenue, a nett one, amounted in the year quoted to 125,210*l.*, and the expenditure, civil and military, to 105,555*l.*, giving a clear surplus of 19,855*l.* This, however, is not the real state of the account, for the local revenue is charged with the maintenance of all the convicts of British India, amounting in number to some 3,000. This is exactly as if the revenues of the colony of Western Australia were to bear the charge of all the felony sent to it from England. The amount of this charge is 11,900*l.*, and adding it to the surplus already stated, we find the income to exceed the expenditure by better than 30,000*l.* When, therefore, Singapore comes under the direct administration of the Crown, a consummation devoutly desired by the inhabitants, it will be the only colony out of forty that, while conferring great advantages upon the nation, will be no burden on the mother country. The colony, it is almost superfluous to add, has an abundance of skilled artificers, with wet-docks capable of accommodating vessels of large burthen with a cheap supply of good timber for their construction.