

MALACCA AND SINGAPORE.—I paid a passing visit to Malacca, but, finding it neither an interesting nor a profitable field, I made but a short stay in the place. Malacca is a quaint, dreamy, Dutch-looking old town, where one may enjoy good fruit, and the fellowship and hospitality of the descendants of the early Portuguese and Dutch colonists. Should any warm-hearted bachelor wish, he might furnish himself with a pretty and attractive-looking wife from among the daughters of that sunny clime; but let him make no long stay there if indisposed to marry, unless he can defy the witchery of soft dark eyes, of raven tresses, and of sylph-like forms. It is a spot where leisure seems to sit at every man's doorway; drowsy as the placid sea, and idle as the huge palms whose broad leaves nod above the old weather-beaten smug-looking houses. Here nature comes laden at each recurring season with ripe and luscious fruits, dropping them from her lap into the very streets, and bestrewing the by-ways with glorious ananas, on which even the fat listless porkers in their wayside walks will hardly deign to feed. It is withal a place where one might loiter away a life dreamily, pleasantly, and uselessly. These are but passing impressions, and Malacca may yet, after all, develop into something in every way worthy of the Straits which bear its name. Malacca is doubtless interesting from a purely historical point of view, for it was once the seat of a Malayan monarchy, powerful probably in the thirteenth century, when the Cambodian Empire was already on the decline. At a later date, the city became one of the chief commercial centres established by the early Portuguese. Singapore, so far as we know, has no ancient and engrossing history. I gather, from old Chinese and European maps, that the original "Singapura" was a section of territory on the mainland of the Malayan peninsula, and not the island which now bears its name and usurps its place in ancient history. It has risen, as my readers are aware, since its annexation by Sir Stamford Raffles, to a position of great commercial and political importance. Not many years ago it was a mere desolate jungle-clad island, like hundreds of others in the Eastern seas, with a few fisher huts dotted here and there along its coast. But there is no need for me to dwell on the recent history of the place. When I first saw the settlement in 1861 I was startled by the appearance of the European town, and since that time it has been yearly registering its substantial progress in steadily increasing rows of splendid docks, in bridges, in warehouses, and in government edifices. During these few years it has passed through strange vicissitudes of fortune. At one time the harbour and roads were crowded with square-rigged ships, Chinese junks, and Malay prahus. Now, were we to take these as the true indications of the trade of the port, we should at once conclude that its commerce had rapidly declined, for comparatively few sailing craft are to be seen there at any season of the year. But we must bear in mind that within that period the march of progress (though almost imperceptible to those who have dwelt continuously in these distant regions) has been rapid and startling in its results. A submarine cable has brought Singapore within a few hours of London, while the opening of the Suez Canal, and the establishment of new steam navigation companies engaged in the China trade, have to a great extent done away with the fleets of clipper-built ships that formerly carried the produce from China and Singapore, by the long Cape route, to England. In the same way the absence of Chinese junks may be accounted for by increased facilities afforded to native as well as foreign trade, through steam navigation in the China seas. The Chinese, and Japanese too, for that matter, are gradually learning to take the full benefit of the advantages which have thus been brought to their doors. They travel as passengers, and ship their goods by European steamers. This is not all: they are now themselves organising steam navigation companies of their own. The trade of Singapore, save in times of unusual depression, continues steadily to advance, and since the transfer of the Straits Settlements to the Colonial Office their commerce is reported to have increased twenty-five per cent.—*Indo-China and China.* By J. Thomson, F.R.G.S.