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AND

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FOR

British India and its Dependencies:

CONTAINING

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Review of New Publications.
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Review of Books.

The Mission to Siam and Hué, the Capital of Cochin China, in the Years 1821-2. From the Journal of the late GEORGE FINLAYSON, Esq., Surgeon and Naturalist to the Mission. With a Memoir of the Author, by SIR THOMAS STAMFORD RAFFLES. London, 1826. 8vo. pp. 427.

We have long expected, with no small degree of anxiety and impatience, a work which would communicate some information relative to the mission despatched by Lord Hastings from Calcutta to the courts of Siam and Cochin China. The failure of the mission, at least its non-attainment of complete success, was no ground for withholding from the public such particulars respecting the countries and the people visited, as must have been collected in the course of nearly a year's travel in parts hitherto very little known to Europeans. Projects like this may fail altogether as to their political ends; yet science must derive important advantages from the attempts:*

> So, though the chemic his great secret miss
> (For neither it in art or nature is),
> Yet things well worth his toil he gains;
> And does his charge and labour pay
> With good unsought experiments by the way.

Such details as could be procured of the proceedings of the mission, chiefly from the Indian newspapers, were embodied in two narratives published in this Journal† shortly after the return of the agent to Calcutta. They appear, from Mr. Finlayson's journal, to be as accurate as, under all circumstances, could be expected; and we shall, therefore, curtail our review of the work before us, especially since we find that we are to be favoured with a publication on the same subject from Mr. Crawfurd himself, the agent of the Governor-General.

Sir Stamford Raffles has prefixed to the work a memoir of Mr. Finlayson, which not only displays the deceased author's talents and excellent qualities in a manner which must gratify his friends, but affords to the world an example that "knowledge and independence are within the reach of all who will labour for them, whatever be their condition or rank in life; and that the best and only solid foundation of prosperity and esteem is a steady adherence to the principle of rectitude."

Mr. George Finlayson was a native of Scotland, and descended from parents in a very humble sphere of life. He became known to Dr. Somerville, by whom he was instructed in surgery, and sent into the army, where he was distinguished for humanity and attention to his duties. By Dr. Somerville's interest he was attached to the medical staff of Ceylon, in which island he remained for some years, devoting all his leisure time to the study of botany and other branches of natural history. He became afterwards assistant-surgeon in the 8th Light Dragoons, in Bengal. On the return of this regiment to Europe, Mr. Finlayson was detained for the purpose of attending the mission to Siam and Cochin China, as medical officer and naturalist. Excessive exposure to the weather, and the severe exertions which his zeal in pursuit of natural

* It is proper to observe that an account of Mr. Crawfurd's geological observations on his voyage has been transmitted by him to the Geological Society. See its Trans., vol. i, 2d Series, part ii, p. 405.

† See vol. xv, p. 367; and vol. xvi, p. 109.

ral history impelled him to make, destroyed his health at an early period of his journey; he lived to reach Bengal, and embark for Europe as the last resource—and died on the passage.

The journal of Mr. Finlayson abounds with observations on the geology, zoology, and botanical treasures of the intermediate places which the mission visited from Calcutta to the river of Siam. At Penang our naturalist was delighted with the rich harvest which the botanist reaps in this very small island. New plants surprise him at every step, in the forests, vallies, and ravines, as well as on the hills. In the harbour of Penang, the bodies which produce the curious phosphorescent appearance in the sea at night, exist in such vast abundance, that a boat might be distinguished at the distance of several miles by the brilliant light emitted from the agitated water. They were gelatinous, about the size of a pin's head, and, when placed upon the hand, moved with great agility for a second or two, when they ceased to be luminous and became motionless.

The description of Singapore is interesting; it contains much curious matter relating to natural history, including an account of a singular species of *alcyonium*, called the *Neptunian goblet*, a natural production interposed between the sponges and the madrepores, in the shape of a cup (often three feet in diameter), with stalk, &c., neatly formed; and some particulars concerning that remarkable animal the dugong.

Mr. Finlayson, though he devotes many pages to the natural history of this settlement, has scarcely a word on its mineralogy. It appears, from a paper of Mr. Jack, communicated to the Geological Society,* that the rocks of this island are secondary; the principal being a red sandstone, whose strata have a very considerable dip to the south or south-east, changing, in some parts, to a breccia or conglomerate, containing large fragments and crystals of quartz. Strata of slaty clay occur; and a small hill near the town is entirely composed of argillaceous ironstone.

The account of the Carimon Archipelago, brief as it is, contributes to our stock of information respecting these numerous but almost unknown islands. They differ much in aspect and character: some are merely masses of bare rock, others are several miles in extent; some are flat, others hilly. Wherever the smallest vestige of soil exists, forests of lofty trees are found, the inferior parts of which exhibit a specimen of the phenomena occasionally met with in the vegetable world. The roots and lower parts of the stems form curious winged appendages of great magnitude, serving to support the incumbent mass, and compensating for the want of depth of soil. These tabular compressed appendages are three or four in number. Every chink and crevice in the rocky base is occupied by the root; but a hardy net-work, of a thin cuticle, green underneath, and abounding in the vegetable juices of the tree, extends, commonly in a curved direction, fifteen or twenty feet, the edges being six or eight feet above the ground. In some instances these appendages form walls, resembling fortifications.

Many geographical errors seem to have been rectified by the observations made during the voyage through the various chains of islands in the route of the mission; and we hope that Mr. Crawfurd's work will contain a chart of it.

Not the least interesting portions of Mr. Finlayson's book are those which display to us the characters of the two people which travellers most frequently encounter among the eastern islands—the Chinese and Malays. The former, who

* Trans., vol. i, 2d Series, part i, p. 105.

who emigrate in vast numbers from their native country, notwithstanding the prohibitory laws of the celestial empire, and carry back considerable wealth, acquired from commerce, agriculture, and manufactures of various kinds, are distinguished by industrious and regular habits, and a degree of perfection in some of the mechanical arts equal, if not superior, to European skill. They are the chief agriculturists wherever they settle; they are the principal merchants, where Europeans are not found; and the energy of their physical character discriminates them strongly from most of the other races with whom they associate. At Penang, says Mr. F., all the principal shops, all important and useful employments, and almost all the commerce of the island, are in their hands. Under the patronage of the British Government they soon acquire riches, and in return the Government derives benefit from their industry, and from the commercial speculations in which they engage. This industrious turn is obviously owing, in a great measure, to the encouragement they met with from the Government; for, at Malacca, then under Dutch control, these same people seemed to have forsaken their active habits, "affording a discordant spectacle of reluctant idleness." In his deportment the Chinaman is grave and independent; the poverty displayed in his dwelling, and the negligence of his dress, afford no criteria of his taste and habits, which are liberal, and of ten profuse. His fare is delicate, and even luxurious, though not always very select. The fair exterior of Chinese manners, however, conceals a hollow: they possess no religion, for their mean and cold superstition is undeserving of the name; they are addicted to gross sensuality; their selfishness renders them insensible to the calls of humanity; "they will stipulate for reward," says Mr. Finlayson, "with the wretch who is sinking in the water before they will extend a saving arm;" their pusillanimity renders them contemptible in the eyes of other tribes—the Malays especially:

Inferior to these in the knowledge of all the arts of civilized life, as well as in industry, stature, strength, and general appearance; but their superiors in point of courage and military enterprize, and above all in the possession of an ardent mind and exalted imagination, stand the Malays, a race of people whose origin, still involved in obscurity, would seem to be of no remote date. The most favoured of their tribes have as yet made but little progress in civilization, whilst the majority would appear to be enthusiastically attached to the unrestrained condition of savage life. The Malays constitute the principal maritime population of the Archipelago and neighbouring continent, in the different settlements of which they present themselves to the traveller under very different aspects. They are by nature less adapted to commercial pursuits than the Chinese, or the Chuliahs, or other natives of India, and are therefore easily beaten out of the field by them at the stations frequented by Europeans. They are passionately attached to a sea-faring life, and their principal occupation is that of fishing.

Bold and enterprizing in their maritime excursions, they hold the peaceful arts of civilized life almost in contempt. Negligent, slothful, and listless in their moments of ease, they display, in the hour of danger and of enterprize, the most daring courage and intrepidity. They enjoy neither the good nor ills of life with the calm sobriety and moderation of other men. In action fierce, cruel, and immoderate; their leisure is passed in a sleepy indifference that approaches to the apathy of brute life.

Their character for treachery, though founded in truth, appears to be much exaggerated. This vice would appear to attach more to the state of society in which they are found to exist, than to any inherent propensity towards it in Malays generally. It must be confessed, however, that many of their practices are shocking to humanity. Their laws regarding the right acquired over property and persons falling into their hands at sea, by shipwreck or otherwise, shew them to be possessed of as little of the milk of human kindness as any other description of Asiatics. Pp. 71, 72.