

THE
ASIATIC JOURNAL
 AND
MONTHLY REGISTER

FOR
British India and its Dependencies :

CONTAINING

Original Communications.

Memoirs of Eminent Persons.

History, Antiquities, Poetry.

Natural History, Geography.

Review of New Publications.

Debates at the East-India House.

Proceedings of the Colleges of Haileybury
 and Fort William, and the Military
 Seminary at Addiscombe.

India Civil and Military Intelligence, Ap-
 pointments, Promotions, Births, Mar-
 riages, Deaths, &c. &c.

Literary and Philosophical Intelligence.

Missionary and Home Intelligence, Births,
 Marriages, Deaths, &c.

Commercial Intelligence.

Shipping Intelligence, Ship Letter-Mails,
 &c.

Lists of Passengers to and from India.

State of the London and India Markets.

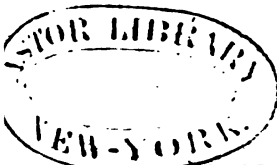
Notices of Sales at the East-India House.

Times appointed for the East-India Com-
 pany's Ships for the Season.

Prices Current of East-India Produce.

India Exchanges and Company's Secu-
 rities.

Daily Prices of Stocks, &c. &c. &c.



VOL. VIII.

FROM JULY TO DECEMBER 1819.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR BLACK, KINGSBURY, PARBURY, & ALLEN,
 BOOKSELLERS TO THE HONOURABLE EAST-INDIA COMPANY,
 LEADENHALL STREET.

1819.

REVIEW OF BOOKS.

On the Trade to China and the Indian Archipelago; with Observations on the Insecurity of the British Interests in that Quarter. By Charles Assey, Esq. late Secretary to the Government of Java. Pp. 72. London, 1819.

THE pamphlet before us treats of a subject comparatively new to a large portion of the British public; but it is a subject highly important, whether viewed in its political or commercial bearings. As it affects the trade of British India with the Archipelago of the East, it embraces interests of great moment. As connected with the trade of Great Britain with China, and the countries eastward of Sumatra and Java, it involves considerations of such magnitude, that to discuss them as fully as their importance demands would far exceed the limits within which we are necessarily obliged to confine ourselves.

Mr. Assey, in a perspicuous introduction, thus states his object.

It is proposed, in the following observations, to take a general view of the commerce of the Indian Archipelago, more especially among the native states who are not under the control of a foreign power; to consider in how far that commerce may be advantageous to this country, both in extending the consumption of our staple manufactures, and in the demand for the produce of those states in the China market; and at the same time to point out the insecurity of the present trade from Great Britain and British India to China, if timely measures of precaution be not taken to meet the progress of the Americans in China, and to guard against the system of exclusive authority which the Netherlands government are endeavouring to establish through the Eastern seas.

The intelligent author then proceeds to observe:

It is not that I expect to offer many new facts relative to the commerce of these countries; but probably a concise explanation of the circumstances already known may place the subject in a

more striking point of view than what it has been supposed to possess; and as questions of the greatest national interest are often underrated or overlooked, merely because the scene of action is distant and not familiar, it becomes the duty of those who from local situation have been more accustomed to give their attention to such matters, to communicate frankly the result of their personal experience. With this view of the subject, I am anxious to point out the probable consequences of leaving a foreign nation to obtain the sole command of the Eastern Seas, and to control the trade and industry of the native population of those islands.

Let us see what has been the usage in times past, when the Dutch were in power.

The concluding part of the quotation touches the pith of the subject. It is shortly, whether we are prepared to yield undisputed sway to a nation which had for its primary object our banishment from the Eastern Islands.

From the earliest times of which there is any record, the foreign trade in the Indian islands was carried on at certain ports or emporia, to which the native traders resorted with the produce of their respective countries, and bartered it for the commodities of Europe and of China. Acheen, Malacca, and Bantam, were chief places of this description, until the Dutch established a paramount authority, and by obtaining an exclusive control in the minor ports, were enabled to force the native trade to Batavia. They wished to render this place the emporium of their Eastern possessions; and when they had subdued any of the neighbouring native states, they uniformly exacted the execution of a treaty which stipulated that the produce and trade of the country should be placed at their disposal, and the local port regulations be made subject to their immediate direction; the consequence of which necessarily was, that they became enabled to change the course of the native trade, (so far as it was not comprehended in their own monopoly), to such ports as best suited their policy and convenience.

That we have no greater reason to believe the future system will be

more liberal, the extract which we shall next give will clearly evince. After specifying some of the principal foreign trade between China and the Archipelago, and advertng to the convention of 1814, doubts are stated whether by the terms of it, it engages us to make the extensive restitutions which the Dutch construe it to embrace.

The present authorities at Batavia have not only re-occupied all the possessions which the Dutch at any time held in Borneo, but have also declared the Netherlands government to be the sovereign of that island, and have it in contemplation to place the whole Archipelago under one general system, which shall secure the monopoly of its commerce in their own hands, and exclude other nations from any direct participation or access.

The whole course of proceedings adopted by that government tends to revive the former system of monopoly and exclusion. They commenced, at the time of the restitution of Java, by refusing to admit the slightest interference, or any community of interests, on the part of the British government, in the possessions ceded or restored to them: it was their earnest endeavour to induce the natives to conclude that Great Britain had no longer any regard or influence in their behalf. They have since annulled the very treaty by which the power of ceding the island of Banca to them was obtained, and have sent the Sultan of Palembang a prisoner to Batavia, as a punishment for his having solicited that protection which he was justly entitled to expect from the British nation; and it appears, by recent accounts, that they have assumed a paramount authority at Banjarmassin, at Sambas, and at Pontiana, and declare the Netherlands government to be the sovereign of Borneo. But one step more is wanting; if, with the same system and views, they establish themselves also on the western side of the China sea; if they obtain the islands of Bintang and Lingin, and of the south-east coast of the Malay peninsula (positions which they are known to have in view), the British merchant will become wholly excluded from direct trade to the Indian islands, and will not have one port between Penang and China to which he can resort, except under the control and direction of a foreign power. The Netherlands government have Batavia on one side, and seek to obtain Rhio* on the other; by the former they already command the Straits of Sunda, by the latter they would acquire

a naval station at the entrance from the Straits of Malacca to the China sea; while the possession of Malacca and Johore, on the southern Malay coast, would complete their command of these straits; and thus the direct route of the British trade to China would have to pass along a line of foreign settlements, while Great Britain would possess no naval station nearer than Ceylon and Penang. The vexatious difficulties to which this state of things would lead, and the eventual insecurity of the British trade, under such circumstances, must be too obvious to require comment.

The local enactments of the Java government lead also to the same system of exclusion. By regulations passed last year, foreign vessels are not permitted to touch at the minor ports in Java; all the cargo must be taken in at the port from which the vessel is cleared out, an import and export duty of twelve per cent. is imposed, while six per cent. is paid on the cargoes of Netherlands ships; and it is also understood that the old system has been revived of requiring all native traders at the ports under the control of the Netherlands government, to take passes from the *resident European authority*; a practice which necessarily tends to force the native trade to such ports as the Java government may prefer, and restricts other nations from a direct participation therein.

The nature of the trade between the Indian Archipelago and China will be found in pages 6, 7, and 8; also of the native trade amongst the islands themselves.

Mr. Assey gives a very intelligent and convincing summary of the advantages which the Islands hold out for the sale of British manufactures, of which a short specimen must suffice.

The Eastern Islands undoubtedly contain a very considerable mart for the sale of British manufactures. Broad cloths are highly prized by the natives, and the demand for them would augment in proportion to the means of purchasing. Some kinds of hardware manufactures would find a ready sale; iron is in demand, particularly the Swedish; and the experience of late years has shewn that cotton cloths, manufactured in this country in imitation of Malay patterns, can be exported and sold below the local sale price of the native manufacture. This single fact is decisive of the importance and extent to which the Eastern trade

* The chief port and harbour is the island of Bintang.

might be carried. That it is a fact may be proved on reference to the results of the last year, when these cotton cloths have found a ready and advantageous sale, while the colonial markets have been otherwise so overstocked with European goods, that they scarcely have repaid the prime cost. In short, the practicability of extending the demand for this species of manufacture is bounded only by the means of access to the native population; and, as a general remark, applicable to almost every branch of European export, it may be observed, that as the inhabitants of the Indian islands are acknowledged to be free from those peculiar habits and prejudices which restrict the use of European luxuries among the Hindoo tribes, there is no reason why an increase of civilization and wealth among them should not lead to an increased demand for the luxuries of civilized society.

Enough has been quoted to shew the nature of the trade and the ascendancy which the Dutch are obtaining throughout the Eastern Seas.

The suggestions of Mr. Assey, both as to the necessity of our fixing upon some island on the southernmost point of the Malayan Peninsula, to meet the commercial efforts of the Dutch, as well as of establishing some political hold and seat of power, are enforced by facts and considerations, highly deserving the attention of the British statesman. This gentleman observes:

In whatever point of view, therefore, the question is considered, it seems essential to interpose for the purpose of preventing the revival of this injurious and pernicious system; injurious as it regards the legitimate pretensions of other nations, and pernicious as it presents a barrier against that improvement of the native population, which, in the present enlightened state of Europe, ought to be a subject of general anxiety.

Whatever may have led to the apparent abandonment of the interests of this country, in the treaties which have been concluded with the government of the Netherlands, for the restoration of possessions formerly held by that nation in the Eastern Seas, it is not now material to discuss.

It is sufficient, we trust, for the error to be seen, to induce every exertion on the part of those who

have the means to apply the remedy ere it is too late.

A glance at the map will at once shew the situation in which we are placed.

From the northern point of Sumatra, (Acheen) to Java; from thence to Bali, Lombok, Sumbaya, Flores, Flai, Lombok, Ombay, and Timor; a chain of islands is formed, which completely commands the access to the Chinese sea; and the only channels are the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and the unfrequented straits between the islands south of Java, all of which must be commanded by the power which shall possess such an ascendancy as the Dutch enjoy at the present moment in that quarter. With the exception of Penang, we possess no port (for Fort Marlbro cannot be deemed a station,) which can either give shelter to ships, or enable this country to enter into any thing like a competition with the Dutch. We do not feel ourselves competent to give any decided opinion, as to the expediency of adopting the suggestions of Mr. Assey; at the same time, we have no hesitation in saying, that they will merit the attention of the authorities who have the power to give effect to them.

It may be said, politically speaking, that we have no reason to anticipate any misunderstanding with the Dutch, likely to end in hostilities. We hope not. At the same time it must be asked, whether it is prudent to leave to any thing like a contingency, a trade from which the state derives little short of four millions per annum, independently of sacrificing at the present so many fair sources of great commercial advantages, in favor of a people, who, but for our exertion, would have been erased as a nation from the face of Europe.

With the exception of Ceylon, we have, as Mr. Assey observes, no port in which one ship can ride with safety, and in the event of a rupture we have literally no resort, with the

exception of Penang, which is comparatively useless as a harbour, for a place for refreshment, or for repairing our ships.

The possibility of participating in the trade to Japan, is a theme for inquiry, which is comprehended in the author's general subject. Our temporary possession of Java conducted us to Japan, in the years 1813, 1814, and 1815. After relating how the mission sent by the British government at Java, for the purpose of taking possession of the Dutch factory there, was induced, by the representations of the chief of that factory, to acquiesce in his proposal, to carry the commercial adventure sent to Nangazack through the Japan custom-house according to former usage, Mr. Assey gives the following brief and luminous account of the trade with Japan.

The Dutch trade from Batavia to Japan is regulated by specific agreement as to its extent and description. The export cargo from Batavia consists of sugar, woollens, piece goods, and small quantities of glass ware, spices, and ornamental fancy articles; in return for which, copper, camphor, silks, and lacquered ware, are received from the Japanese. The price of the merchandize is settled before the annual adventure commences; only a small sum of money is allowed to be brought to Japan, and no part of the cargo is paid for in specie, the Japanese laws prohibiting the exportation of the precious metals under any form; the whole trade therefore consists in barter, and the profit depends on the subsequent sale of the homeward-bound cargo. At the close of one year's consignment the quantity and assortment of the following year's cargo is determined, and a list is sent to Batavia for the guidance of the authorities accordingly.

It has been the opinion of many of the best informed persons, however, that these restrictions on the quantity of cargo are very much owing to the mismanagement or intrigues of the officers of the factory, whose interest it is that the trade should not be so extensive as to interfere with their own privilege, or require more than one chief officer to conduct it; and the commissioner who went to Nangazack in the year 1814 expressly declares, that, in his opinion, the present state of the trade is no criterion for judging of the extent to which it might be carried. He says, "The climate, the habits of the people, and their freedom

from any prejudices that would obstruct the operation of these natural causes, would open a vent for numerous articles of European comfort and luxury. The consumption of woollens and hardware might be rendered almost unlimited;—they are fond of the finer specimens of the glass manufacture, and the returns from Japan, which have hitherto been limited to their copper and camphor, some lacquered ware, a small quantity of silks, and a few other things of trifling importance, may be extended to a long list. Specimens of teas, pitch, borax, iron, cinnabar, lined oil, whale oil, and other articles which may be obtained, have been brought to Java by this opportunity."

The same gentleman has also observed, that so far as his local knowledge enabled him to form a judgment, the real difficulties of introducing the British flag to Japan, inasmuch as they depend on the character and political institution of the Japanese, are much less than they have been represented to be. He was of opinion, that the ill success of the attempts hitherto made has been chiefly owing to the misrepresentations which it has been the policy of the Dutch government to keep up, in order to secure their own commercial monopoly; and that the failure of the Russian embassy in 1804, as well as the offence taken at the entrance of the British frigate into the harbour of Nangazack in the year 1808, may be in a great measure attributed to the effects of his policy.

We consider the country at large indebted to Mr. Assey for bringing the matter forward in so concise a shape, at the same time combining so much important information. We trust it will be attentively considered by those who are best calculated to give effect to the remedies suggested. We understand the intelligent author to be a servant of the Hon. East India Company, and we think his talents might be most beneficially called into action, in the prosecution of any plan which should have for its object, by a fair and honorable adjustment, the establishment of our claim to a full participation in the trade with the Eastern Islands, unfettered by any narrow regulations; and to acquire the possession of some island in the Archipelago, which should serve as an entrepôt for our commerce to and from the continent of India, with the intermediate islands, and with China.