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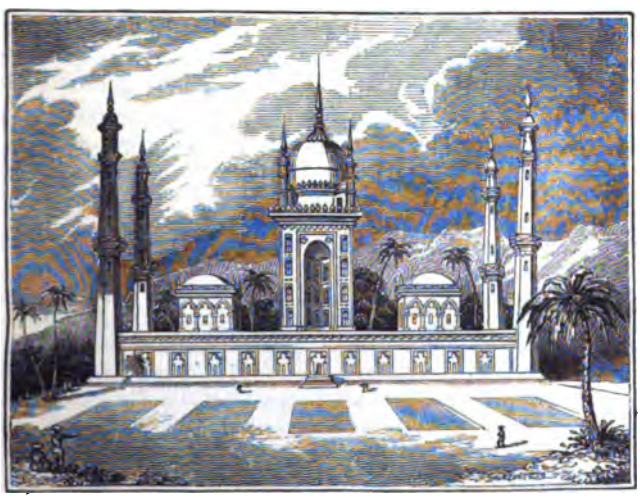

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Letters from the East.

[The following Account of Penang, contained in a Letter from a Visitor to that Settlement, has been placed in our hands for publication, by the Gentleman to whom it was addressed, and contains much that will be no doubt new to many of our Indian readers.]

Pulo Penang, July 30.

You will, perhaps, be surprised at finding me here; but you must know that Prince of Wales' Island is the Eastern Montpelier, to which all unfortunate Bengalees are regularly sent by Dr. Calomel, unless his remedies should render a much shorter journey necessary; I am not here, however, on account of any serious bodily ailment. I have resolutely set the doctor and his imps at defiance, and shall continue to do so as long as I preserve my senses. However, having been almost idle at Calcutta, enjoying a fine dry temperature of about 98° to 107° for two months, and finding the rain coming in good earnest with their usual train of fevers, &c., I thought it would be wise to take the opportunity of escaping from the paradise of frogs and alligators, and gratify my curiosity in seeing the Eastern Islands.

To enable you to travel with me over this far-famed island, you must borrow 'Daniel's Engravings, after Views by Smith,' and, deducting for the perspective and colouring, (no painter's colouring can do any thing like justice to the vivid hues of tropical scenery,) you will have a very fair delineation of some of the most remarkable views in the island. Ascend the Government Hill, and look towards the Malay shore, you will see a country which, to my eyes, resembles Italy, full of the most beautiful mountain scenery, and covered with the most magnificent forests, but which has never been trod by any European, perhaps by any human foot. Strange, that a country known to abound with the richest mineral treasures, which even now are scratched up by the savage inhabitants, should not have tempted European cupidity, or have been explored by the ardent votaries of science, who abound in our regions in this 19th century. It is to be accounted for by a word which is a clue to a great many Indian phenomena—*Monopoly!* the millstone about the neck of the vast population of this immense and beautiful country. But I have no time for such a subject at present,—I must return from the Queda shore to my island. Penang is certainly the head-quarters of Flora: I am perfectly delighted with the variety of beautiful plants I have seen. Oh, for the opportunities I have neglected! What would I now give for a knowledge of botany! On this subject I can get no information from the inhabitants. I have now before me the most lovely fern I ever saw; I wish I could send it, but its colours are already gone; before it was gathered they changed like an opal; and there

are many others almost as elegant. The pine-apple is here a weed; the roads are full of them; and they are bought in the market at a dollar per hundred, each four or five pounds weight. The celebrated mango tree is also abundant here; it is a fruit in which I have been much disappointed, as one generally is with every thing which has been *puffed*. The doorian is another remarkable highly prized fruit, which has so peculiar an odour, that it is at first hardly approachable by strangers. Its rind exhales a perfume analogous to some compound of putrid meat and asafœtida. Amateurs, however, who have conquered their prejudices, extol it highly. Even his Burmese Majesty sends annually to Siam for it, as it does not grow in his dominions.

In spite of the doctors, who denounce death against all who penetrate the jungles, I have spent a whole week in rambling about the island and opposite shore,—penetrating them in various directions, and have seen a waterfall, which is yet unknown to fame. I have been hunting the leaf insect and the flying wizard, and examining the many curious trees; amongst which are the gamboge, the bread-fruit, the palm which produces the horse-hair-like ropes, well known for their strength, the Indian-rubber, creeper, &c. &c. But I shall not trouble you with a mere catalogue; and if I were to describe a hundredth part of the objects of nature, I should not soon finish, and must, therefore, stop at the great tree, of which Smith's drawing gives but a poor idea. It is a most magnificent object. The chestnut on Mount Etna is much more bulky, but the height of this is quite unrivalled; the lowest branch sent off from the trunk is 120 feet from the base, and from it hangs a gigantic creeper,—a good sized tree itself; but what is most remarkable, it is of modern growth, and represented by some of the Natives to have been of a moderate size in their own memory. This may give you some notion of the rapidity of vegetation in these climates. This remarkable tree stands a little way up one of the hills, and though most of the trees in its immediate neighbourhood are by no means of small dimensions, it appears to stand like a tremendous giant amongst dwarfs. The figure of it, regarded in any direction, is extremely picturesque and beautiful. It has a straight perpendicular stem rising boldly from the ground, and its branches, at a tremendous height, are distributed with great splendour. This gigantic but beautiful form is relieved by the dense foliage beneath it, and by the opposite mountain, which stands to the left of some exceedingly variegated scenery, composed of sea, islands, distant valleys, and blue hills, that, by the light of four o'clock in a July morning, were perfectly enchanting. On steps, which are made up the hill from a short distance below the base of this tree, from a spot horizontal with about two-thirds of its height, whence it is seen to the best advantage, is the rich landscape I allude to. Inquirers would naturally wish to know something of the species to which this tree

belongs. I can only answer, that the great Dr. Wallich, the celebrated botanist, did not ascertain this point. The leaf is small and ovate, and of a light green tint. I measured the tree round its base with a tape, and found its circumference to be thirty-four feet. Upon being wounded through the bark, which is rather rough at the base, a white milky fluid exudes, which, upon exposure to the air, concocts to a white resinous substance, resembling ammoniacum. The fluid tasted rather sweet, and afterwards left a bitterish flavour in the mouth; it formed a milky solution in rain water.

Smith has a view of Suffolk House, the Governor's residence, which gives you an idea of a mansion far more splendid than the place is found to be; but does no justice to the splendour of the hill and dale scenery about the grounds of this fairy land. So easy is it to improve the appearance of a work of art; so very difficult to attain to a distant resemblance of nature.

The view of Gluga House is sufficiently correct. This was the residence of the late excellent Mr. Brown, the original proprietor of the spice plantations on this island, which are now remarkable as the only things of the kind in British possession, since Bencoolen has been given up to the Dutch. The groves of nutmeg-trees are uncommonly beautiful, and it is certainly interesting to walk through them. The cloves appear to thrive best on the mountains, where the thermometer seldom exceeds 74°. Equal temperature and constant moisture are, it would seem, what they require. Coffee is likewise cultivated, and, it is said, with much success on the hills of this lovely island; and on the estate of Gluga it seems to be an object of experiment. It is a matter of doubt, however, how far the cultivation of coffee and of spices may be found to answer here, as a matter of commercial speculation; one of the most clear-headed and intelligent of the merchants here said, that speculations in plantations were '*wild* and *unprofitable*.' They have hitherto never succeeded, notwithstanding all the flowery predictions of Mr. Canning as to the value of our possessions in these Straits, as sources of wealth from the cultivation of spices. The truth is, that to thrive well, these articles require certain peculiar circumstances of soil and climate; besides which, labour is too expensive here. Besides the high price of labour, another cause for the ill success of spice cultivation is, the insecurity of property on this island: there are about two thousand professed thieves, independent of the Hindoo and other convicts here, and the cloves and nutmegs are not very safe in their neighbourhood. Pepper, which requires less attention, succeeds better: the pepper vine is a pretty creeper, and if the plant were not supported by living trees, a plantation of it would resemble a hop-garden; but even this article is produced at a far cheaper rate on the west coast of Sumatra. Property is in a very depreciated state in this island; houses and lands may be estimated at two-thirds less than their value ten or twelve years ago. Several estates have been

sold of late for a few thousand dollars, upon which planters had expended lacs; so that, in fact, there is no great inducement for Europeans to settle in this island as planters. Romantic and beautiful as it is, I fear I cannot call it healthy, as the European population are continually suffering. Women are said to die here in an undue proportion, as men in Bengal; so that this is as good a place to get rid of wives as that of husbands. However, in the East, it is sometimes a moot point whether the climate or the doctor are most to blame. At Singapore, I hear there have been actually no deaths among those who may be regarded as the European residents of the place; the only doctor there having no patients, save occasional visitors, who come from the calomel shores of some less fortunate part of the East. It is said that, in Bengal, if a man fall from his horse, the surgeon's first course is to give him fifty grains of calomel. In Singapore, the constitution never requires such remedies, for the accident cannot occur, there being, I hear, no horses on the island; the diminutive though beautiful Java pony being a substitute for that noble animal. For the most part, the use of ponies is common, too, at Penang, though horses are now and then to be seen among the military here.

Let us look at the view of the far-famed waterfall: artists can give by their best works no adequate idea of the effects of a tropical atmosphere upon beautiful scenery; and this attempt of Smith's, though a pleasing drawing, conveys a very faint idea of the place. The waterfall does not communicate to the mind any impression of the grand and sublime; it flows from a great height certainly, but it is very narrow, and in some places pours its water in ribbons. It flows either upon very coarse granite of the red kind, or upon red sand-stone rock, masses of which are so arranged as to form a very beautiful variety in the scenery, which is wooded around to a tremendous height. The trees are of various kinds, and some of them very picturesque: there is a boldness of stature about some of them, a length of perpendicular line, and a gracefulness of foliage at top, which compares well with the variety of the thicker set and branching trees, that shoot forth from the side of the hill. The tints of green are very varied, and the lines of growth are enriched by the bold tortuousness of different kinds of hill creepers, which either traverse the rocks or entwine the wood in beautiful arrangements: many of the standards have parasite plants growing upon them, high up, and the contrast afforded by the large *dock-like* leaves, and deeper colour of these, are very striking.

A leaf-built shed, with a bench, has been placed in a convenient situation opposite to this waterfall, and steps are constructed from the bottom of the hill to this spot; an hospitable arrangement, which facilitates the approach of strangers anxious to view this curious and beautiful phenomenon.

Hospitality and kindness have distinguished not only the society

of Penang, but its government, for many years. The convalescent bungalo is a small but convenient and beautifully situated house on a hill; the atmosphere of which, together with its scenery, must be highly exhilarating to the invalids, who come down from the other presidencies of India, to obtain relief from their sufferings from the mildness of mountain temperature in these regions. It belongs to the Government, and is by their indulgence generally occupied by invalid strangers.

Bungalo is a name for a slighter, less lofty, and more temporary erection, than that known as a house; generally, they are hastily run up, are confined to a ground floor, and are constructed of wood and leaves; but, like the English generic term cottage, the word bungalo is often applied to houses of a more prominent structure. The Penang houses are for the most part very commodiously built, and are pretty well suited to a climate in which people may, for the greater portion of the year, sit out in the open air. They are surrounded with verandahs, which vary in depth from twenty to twenty-five feet, the roofs of which slant a good deal, and extend two or three feet beyond the perpendiculars supporting them; thus throwing off the rain, and in the sunny season affording a pleasant screen from the glare. In some houses an arrangement obtains, which the inhabitants of other parts of the East would do well to copy, since it secures shade as well as a current of air: a light Chinese rail surrounds the edge of the platform of the verandah, and eighteen inches beyond this railing, hang either Venetian, or the elegant Chinese, or chick blinds.

Many of the houses are built of wood, but the best are of stone and brick. Granite is abundant on the island, of a coarse kind and grey colour; it is occasionally used for flights of steps, but, probably, the great expense of working forbids its too common use. There are occasional complaints that the granite is of a decomposing kind. The interior of a European's house is very commodious, and the furniture made either in Calcutta, or by excellent Chinese carpenters on the spot, is of a very superior description. A West India captain coming to this island in command of a small vessel, sat in one of the large rooms, wondering for some time at the sight of a large frame, covered with painted canvass, about eighteen feet in length, which he saw elegantly suspended in the middle of the apartment. Questions, he judged, might be impertinent; at the dinner hour, however, his curiosity was agreeably relieved by the appearance of a cleanly dressed Malay, with a handkerchief curiously tied on his head, who, hooking a cord into the middle of the punkah, reeved it through a pulley in the wall opposite, and taking his station in the corner, caused the great fan to wave backwards and forwards, producing delightful currents of air in the room. The European inhabitants of Penang live for the most part at their country houses. Indeed, those who are said to live in town, have residences

detached, with gardens about them, and withal rural, so that, in fact, they have most of the advantages of the country. The town proper being the capital at Prince of Wales's island, is called George's Town, and consists of one long street on the shore of the harbour, called Bee-street, with a few others branching off to the detached houses. In this part are the godowns or warehouses of the merchants, and some of the Government offices, besides the shops of the Native and other tradespeople. George Town cannot be healthy, situated in the latitude of about 5° 30′. It is built in a swampy spot, and surrounded so completely by thick groves of cocoa trees, backed by lofty hills, that few refreshing breezes can reach it.

Not the least interesting objects of curiosity to a European is the number of Chinese, who are the principal tradesmen and mechanics, and who here pursue their national customs, unimpaired by their contact with their motley neighbours. They form an extraordinary contrast of energy and industry to the idle Malays and Hindoos. They are never idle, rarely vicious, and pursue pleasure with all the avidity of Europeans. On our visit to the waterfall, a large party of them, with their wives and children, were observed seated on the grass; they were dining like so many cockneys at Richmond. The shops of the Chinamen in the town contain but a miserable assortment of coarse articles. Of all nations, the Chinese are, perhaps, the least devoted to feelings of religion, and the least attentive to its outward ceremonies, yet, in a back apartment of each of the shops, is almost invariably seen a large daub of their divinity, Joss,—before which is a table supporting a tall lighted lamp. In their manners, these Chinese tradesmen are most provokingly independent, and often annoy the authorities by the display of this un-Asiatic quality. None of the salaams of India from them; they are not even civil for your custom; and if asked why, would reply, in their own English,—'What for bow? You no want—you no come.' They are certainly philosophers, though complained of by us for their apathy and indifference to every thing but their own interest. Why, indeed, should they come for us? They have no permanent stake in the countries to which they emigrate. They are in some places under peculiar restrictions; in others ill-treated; and in none have they any share in the government under which they live; they, therefore, come as adventurers, and return to China whenever they have acquired a competence. In Europe, they are underrated. In every mechanical art the Chinese display a superiority over all Asiatics, and over many European nations; and they do every thing with so much neatness, perseverance, and order, and in conversation they remark and reason so shrewdly, that their intellectual faculties are certainly of a higher class than that for which they obtain credit; they have many high qualities of mind, which, under beneficial systems of education, might procure for them a very exalted rank among civilized communities.

When I say that the contrast between these people and the Malays and Hindoos is striking, I have no wish to depreciate the intellectual character of those tribes. The Malay is a shrewd and active-minded being, and it is only under the influence of those deteriorating circumstances, which, by the avarice and love of irresponsible power of a monopolizing Company, are allowed to bear down upon him, that his habits are developed into sloth and idleness; that the half-tamed, active, and savage pirate is transformed into a lazy smoker of narcotic herbs and extracts. The Malay never enjoyed the advantages of civilization in any degree, until he was reduced, through *fear*, the worst of motives, to become the servant of the European; and time must be allowed him to exhibit the kindly capabilities of his nature, and the useful powers with which he is endowed. That variety of the human species to which he belongs had, before their intercourse with Europeans, advanced in their political institutions, and in their social manners, to a stage analogous to that described by Tacitus as belonging to the German nations. Their barbarous customs were very similar to those displayed by our own ancestors; and it ought to be our duty, in ameliorating their condition, not to crush too hastily the institutions to which many noble qualities of disposition are indebted. The Malay character must undergo a great modification from the tribes of emigrants which have beset his territory. The Chinese and the European settlers are begetting a mixed race, which, in the present days of benevolence and philanthropy, ought to meet with attention in regard to education. Of the Chinese mixed breed, I know nothing; he may be a cooly, or he may turn out a good member of society, by becoming some handicraft; but the illegitimate of a European, unless his father remove him early to obtain the advantages of a good education, will learn to acquire mistaken feelings of pride, which ruin him for the formation of the gentleman. There are individuals among them who have been blessed in Europe with good training, who now exhibit, by their manners, those high-toned feelings, which are the best prerogative of civilized man; and who evince, by their pursuit, the possession of intellects and tastes that would reflect honour upon persons of any clime or quarter of the world. You have heard in England much of the mixed rate between the European and Hindoo. They are not to be confounded with the beings I have just alluded to.

As the Malay and Chinaman differ from each other in a great variety of respects; as the one has been submitted to one kind and set of institutions, from which his character has been formed;—the other has been the slave of a perfectly different school, from the circumstances of which his habitudes have been built up. The organization of each, too, is peculiar to himself and to his tribe; and so it is with each variety of the human species in the East, as in all other parts of the world. The child of a European by a China woman is an animal of a different breed from that produced by the conjunction of European and Malay; and the mixed breed

between European and Hindoo is again a *tentimus quid* of very different properties in either of the other creatures; but he does not come to be considered in the island of Penang. Hindoo is a word which embraces a vast number of varieties of the man animal; and few who have not, like Bishop Heber, traversed the continent of India with eyes of minute observation, are competent to describe them, or the changes which are produced in their progeny by a mixture of widely different breeds. Here, in Penang, may occasionally be observed individuals from various parts of Hindoostan, and each offering peculiarities strikingly illustrative of these remarks. The Choolia, a native of one part of the Coromandel coast, is the Hindoo most ordinarily met with here. He is a stout, strong, squat, muscular fellow, lively and active; but his energies fall short of the Chinaman's. He is, again, quite a different animal from the Lahore man, or the Rajpoot, from the northern and western extremities of the British empire in India—a tall athletic man of a beautifully handsome symmetry, broad-chested, erect, and of a proud and intelligent physiognomy.

These are again widely different from the Natives of the alluvial soil of Bengal, and especially near Calcutta; who, in the general drawings of their figure, their beautiful limbs, delicate joints, smooth skins, effeminate countenances and expression of feature, in their actions of walking, stepping, taking hold of any thing, pulling, in short, in all they do, are so very analogous to women, that they are men only from sex: while Nature seems, in the female figures of the same tribes, to have observed the same general rules in placing them in a more delicate situation; to have made, as it were, in their case, a descent in her general plan. They are like beautiful female children of a developed form,—I mean in what respects anatomy of outline and expression. There is nothing seen in England like this female. Nature has given her a symmetry which is the perfection of beauty, lovely proportions, with the most exquisite graces of manner; but she is a specimen only of the female of one part of India. You can easily imagine that her son, by a European father, would, as to physiognomy, be a creature differing widely in his general properties from the son of a Malay woman, whose symmetries were not so perfect, but yet whose intellects are a grade or two higher in the scale of human intelligence.

Not with the curses of Monopoly, and an irresponsible and tyrannical Government, but with the blessings of free intercourse, good education, and a liberal government, the Natives of all these regions are capable of a very high degree of civilization; and, under a proper system, I should have sanguine hopes of ameliorating, by free Colonization, not only the morals of the Eastern world, but of tending, by a free admixture of breeds, to a great improvement in the physical health and beauty of the tribes inhabiting our European regions, —circumstances that would overthrow the philosophy of exclusive systems.