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**ASIATIC JOURNAL**

AND

**MONTHLY REGISTER**

FOR

**British India and its Dependencies :**

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the Great Mogul whom they travelled so far to advertise of the matter.

The reporter proceeded from Bagdat to Aleppo, then a city of prodigious trade, where one Mr. Spike "was very kind and bountiful to them;" and thence to Tripoli, where he took ship and sailed for England. He arrived there in April 1611, and pronounces it "the only paradise, and blessed country of the world."

There is a simplicity and apparent zeal for truth in this traveller's statement, which recommend him to those who may be desirous of comparing ancient with modern accounts of the condition of eastern countries. Though not an illiterate man, he is free from the intolerable pedantry of the age, and contents himself with recording what he saw. His names of places are evidently copied from the mouths of the natives, without any learned effort to adapt the sounds of eastern letters to those of Europe. Many curious remarks are interspersed in his report, which are not the less valuable because they drop from him without any ostentation. His account of the manners which distinguish the different classes of the East is in few words, but tolerably faithful. He mentions in one place the practice of

feeding horses with sugar, which has been introduced here.

I cannot omit extracting his account of the Suttee practice, because I think every fresh testimony upon this subject may throw light upon its original history,

"The Pythagoreans (Hindoos) in former times have been a vile and treacherous kind of people, and had a law, that when the husband died, the wife should be also burnt, which is holden till this day, though not in so strict a manner; for now she may refuse it, but then her head is shaved, and she clad in a black vesture, a garment which among them is reputed most vile and hateful; that the basest slave in the country will not succour nor relieve her, though she should starve.

"Now the cause why this law was first made, was for that the women there were so fickle and inconstant, that upon any slight occasion of dislike or spleen, they would poison their husbands, whereas now the establishing and executing of this law is the cause that moveth the wife to love and cherish her husband, and wisheth not to survive him."

The writer describes a *Suttee* which he saw.

I am, Sir,

Your most humble servant,

DAVUS NON (EDIPUS.

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## SHORT NOTICE CONCERNING THE ISLAND OF PULO NIAS FROM OBSERVATIONS MADE DURING A VISIT TO THE ISLAND, IN 1822.

(From the *Malayan Miscellanies*, Vol. II.)

THE island of Pulo Nias has hitherto been very imperfectly known to Europeans: it is the largest of that chain of islands which skirt the western coast of Sumatra, and is at the same time the most populous and best cultivated. It is about seventy miles in length, stretching from S.E. to N.W. Its surface is for the most part hilly, but not mountainous; it possesses several rivers of considerable size, whose mouths or qualloes afford entrance to native vessels and boats. There are several good harbours, both at the northern and

southern end of the island, and there is anchorage for ships almost all along the eastern coast. The general aspect of the country is highly pleasing; towards the sea, the slopes of the hills are either covered with cocoa-nut-trees or with long grass: but it is not till looking down from their summits upon the country beyond, that its full richness bursts upon the view. From thence the valleys and sides of the hills appear a sheet of cultivation; their summits are crowned with clumps of trees, which mark the sites of the different vil-

lages, and the dark, sombre hue of undisturbed forest is no where to be discovered. The soil is one of peculiar fertility, of great depth in the lower grounds and valleys, and even on the steep declivities of the hills, supporting luxuriant crops of rice, and sweet potatoes.

The population is very considerable with reference to the extent of the island, being estimated considerably to exceed 200,000 souls. They are an active athletic race, about the middle stature, fair as Asiatics, and with much finer features than the Malays. The nose is more prominent, and has somewhat of the Grecian straitness; the expression of the countenance is generally pleasing, and the eye is particularly fine and full. The women are considered the beauties of the Eastern Archipelago, ranking in this respect with the women of Sulo. The observation which has been made that the people of Nias are particularly subject to a leprous scurf, can only be true with reference to Nias slaves abroad, but is in no degree the case with them in their own island, where no instance of such an affection of the skin was observed, and where, on the contrary, they appeared to be remarkably clean and neat in regard to their persons. That they practise habits of personal cleanliness is evident from the pains they take to have large and convenient paths in or near their villages. There are always two, one appropriated to the men, the other to the women, enclosed with high stone walls, and having a stream of water conducted into them, so as to fall over a trough from a considerable height, making an excellent shower bath.

The villages are for the most part situated on the pinnacles of their hills, and always in defensible situations. This practice has no doubt originated in the state of warfare in which they are almost constantly involved. They are divided into numerous independent tribes or clans, between many of which perpetual feuds exist, which have been handed down from generation to generation for an unknown period. These feuds, frequent occasional disputes between neighbouring tribes, and the taking of slaves, oblige them to be constantly on their guard, and they never go any where beyond their own houses unarmed. Their arms consist of a spear, a short sword, and an oblong wooden shield, be-

sides which they generally wear a stiff leathern jacket, which serves as armour, and on particular occasions a helmet of thick leather ornamented with a crest of black ijau hair over the top, and a huge artificial beard and mustachios made of the same material. In this dress they have a strange and formidable appearance; they seem to be expert at the use of their weapons, and display great agility in their warlike evolutions. The ordinary dress of the common people consists merely of a baju or jacket, and a cloth rolled round the waist and carried between the thighs. That of the chiefs and men of rank is more costly, and often elegant; red is their favourite colour, and they wear a profusion of gold ornaments. Thick necklaces, or rather collars of a peculiar pattern, and large earrings are worn; but the most striking and peculiar of their ornaments is a crown of pure gold, of a very original, and at the same time elegant construction, somewhat resembling a high Persian cap with a long peak in front. The women also wear a great number of these ornaments, viz. the same heavy collars; very large ear-rings, by which the lobe of the ear is much distended and pulled down; fillets of various patterns, generally of embossed gold plate round the head, while the hair is gathered into a knot on the top, which is also fastened by a gold plate. A few flowers of the red Syrian rose tastefully stuck into the hair set these off to still greater advantage. Their dress however is very extraordinary, amid such display of barbaric wealth, consisting solely of a piece of cloth rolled tightly round the loins, secured by a broad belt of gold or brass chainwork, and extending downwards to the knees. The whole body above this is left completely naked, displaying their form in all its reality of perfection or imperfection. There is no seclusion of females from the vulgar eye, and on all occasions they come forth to pay their respects to strangers with perfect ease and confidence. The display did not however tend to confirm the observation that "unadorned" is "adorned the most."

The houses are built of wood in a very substantial and commodious manner, and are in general of large size. They are raised upon large mirbau or iron-wood timbers, and the walls are made to lean outwards at the upper part. In the north-

ern part of the island they are generally built detached from each other, the whole wall leans outwards, and the ends are rounded; in the southern districts the houses are built close together in regular streets, narrow in the front, but of great depth, and having only the two end walls, leaning outwards. The entrance is by a trap-door, and a ladder in the centre. The hall or public apartment is spacious, and looks out upon the street. The walls are frequently pannelled, and the floor is often constructed of broad planks of Bakou (a species of *Rhizophora*), which are dark coloured in the centre and white at the sides, the line of separation between the two colours being abrupt. They are nicely fitted to each other, so as to have somewhat the appearance of alternate slabs of different coloured marbles.

On the rafters above are suspended in one line all the porcelain of the family, each plate in its own wicker case, and sometimes amounting to a few hundreds; on another, the jaw bones of the hogs that have been killed on great festivals: the numbers of both these are indicative of the wealth of the owners. Hogs are an important part of the domestic establishment, and are the most general food of the inhabitants. They are not suffered to be in their houses or villages, but large substantial buildings are constructed for them at a little distance, and certain of the slaves are specially appointed to the care of them. They are fed on cocoa-nuts, boiled rice, and sweet potatoe tops.

Rice is the staple export of the country, to the extent of about 12,000 bags a-year: it is grown both in ladangs and in sawahs, but it is remarkable that it is very little used by the people themselves, who chiefly subsist on sweet potatoes and other farinaceous roots, along with pork and poultry. Neither buffaloes, cattle, nor horses are indigenous to the island, though a very few have here and there been imported by Malays, who have settled at some of the northern qualloes. There is a good deal of difference between the people of the northern half of the island and those of the southern. The former have intermixed more with the Malays and Achinese, while the latter jealously exclude all such strangers from settling among them, and are therefore perhaps the more genuine and original of the two.

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Marriage by *jujur* is universal, and the amount is very high, varying according to the rank of the parties from 60 or 70 to 500 dollars, and is for the most part paid in gold. It is remarkable that in all countries where the custom of *jujur* strictly prevails, that female honour is carefully guarded, and that great purity of morals is observed. It is easily accounted for, from its being so much the interest of parents to preserve the virtue of their children; and, however contrary to our notions this purchase of wives may be, and whatever other inconveniences may attend the custom, it cannot be greatly condemned, where it has been productive of the effect of raising the female character. These people have never adopted the Mussulman idea of preserving the chastity of their women by immuring them in harems, and degrading them to the condition of slaves; they have trusted to the strictness of education, and to moral restraints early inculcated, and in the effect of these they have not been deceived. The laws of Nias in regard to adultery are very severe, the punishment being capital. Adultery, murder and robbery entail sentence of death upon the offender, and, in certain cases, slavery upon his family. Sometimes remission of the sentence can be obtained by the payment of a *bangun* of 24 *pahas* of gold, or 120 dollars. The number of wives which a man may have is only limited by his means: but few except the chiefs have more than one. When a *Rajah* has several wives, the succession to his rank and property is not by order of priority, but descends to the children of that wife for whom the highest *jujur* was paid. This no doubt proceeds upon the presumption that the amount of the *jujur* is proportioned to the rank of the lady, and that thus the succession is secured to the highest family in point of birth and rank.

The mode of burial in the southern division of the island is peculiar; the body is not committed to the earth, but is enclosed in a wooden shell or coffin, which is elevated on four posts, and then given to enjoy the free winds of heaven. Flowering shrubs and creepers are generally planted beneath, which soon climb up and cover the coffin with foliage. These cemeteries are at some little distance from the villages, and when not quite recent, have nothing unpleasant or disgusting in their appear-

ance; on the contrary, there is something almost poetic in the idea of placing the remains of their friends, as it were, beyond the reach of the worm, suspended in air amid verdure and flowers; and if they might be supposed to have had further a moral object in view, what could be more forcible than to see the very sepulchres hastening to decay, amid the wild luxuriance and un fading freshness of the shrubs they had supported.

The limits of the present paper do not admit of a more extended account of the very peculiar customs and usages of this singularly interesting people; the following account, however, of the slave trade, as extracted from the Report of the Commissioners who lately proceeded to the island, is too important to be omitted.

“ All the evils arising from the imperfection of their civil institutions have been aggravated and increased by the odious traffic in slaves; and as this subject is one of peculiar interest, we have been particular in obtaining the most minute information concerning its extent, causes and origin.

“ The greatest number of slaves has hitherto been exported from Semambawa and Tello Dallam; those from the northern ports have been much fewer. It is by no means easy to get an exact account of their numbers, some endeavouring to extenuate and diminish it, and others equally desirous of magnifying it, according as they wished to give us a favourable impression of their conduct, or a high idea of their wealth, and the very nature of the trade in some measure precludes exactness. From a comparison, however, of these different accounts, checked by an estimate of the number of vessels resorting thither and the value of their imports, we are satisfied that the annual number exported has not fallen short of fifteen hundred. According to some accounts, more than this have been carried from Semambawa alone, but we think the above estimate will be found nearer the truth. They are purchased chiefly by Achinese and Chinese vessels, the latter of whom carry them to Padang and Batavia.

“ The circumstances that attend the traffic are no less revolting to humanity than those which marked it on the coasts of Africa. The unhappy victims, torn by violence from their friends and country,

are delivered, pinioned hand and foot, to the dealers in human flesh; they are kept bound during the whole course of the voyage, a precaution which is considered necessary to the safety of the crew. Instances have occurred where the captives have seized a moment of liberty to snatch up the first weapon within their reach, stab all whom they encountered, and conclude the scene by leaping overboard, and voluntarily seeking a watery death. In their own country the Nias people rarely make use of rice as food, and are almost unacquainted with the use of salt. The sudden change of diet to which they are subjected on board ship, added to the confinement and dejection of mind, prove fatal to many; of a cargo of thirty slaves, twenty have been known to perish before the conclusion of the voyage; and on a moderate calculation it may be estimated, that of the total number purchased one-fourth never reach their destination, but fall victims to the various causes above-mentioned.

“ On the scenes of violence that take place in the country itself in the search for victims it will be needless to dwell: they can be better imagined than described. We shall merely relate one well-authenticated instance, as given by an eye-witness. A plan had been laid to attack a single insulated house inhabited by a man, his wife and children, and to seize the whole family. At the appointed time the house was surrounded; but the man no sooner discovered his situation, understood the purpose, and saw that there was no escape, than he locked himself up into the inner apartment, drew his kris, killed first his wife and children, and then plunged it into his own breast, preferring death to a life of slavery.

“ With a view to ascertain the best means of effecting the suppression of this nefarious commerce, we have been minute in our inquiries into the causes and origin of slavery on Pulo Nias, and the mode in which slaves are procured. Slavery is recognized by their laws and customs; it is the punishment ordained for certain crimes, and it is permitted as the ultimate resource in cases of debt. These customs have no doubt been much increased in severity by the temptation of an external demand, and are often employed on very slight pretences: but they are quite inadequate to account for the great numbers

actually exported. We have abundant proof that the greater number are made slaves by open and actual violence. The Rajahs had little hesitation in admitting the fact, but said that the system originated with foreigners, and that the source of the evil was without. In fact, the temptation

of exorbitant gain, and the persuasion of the dealers who resort to the port, proves too much for their self-denial, and induces the more unprincipled among them to have recourse to every means of fraud, stratagem or violence, to procure victims to their avarice."

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## EMBASSY TO SIAM.

THE termination of Dr. Crawford's mission to the Court of Siam, which seems to have experienced the common fate attending all preceding attempts to open a friendly intercourse with the states situated on this portion of the eastern continent, offers us a fit occasion to lay before our readers all the particulars which have transpired respecting it. A few statements may be found in several parts of our journal, during the last six months, which we shall incorporate with such other information as we have been able to procure. It is probable that no official or authenticated account of the mission will appear before the Public.

In the historical narrative of the East-India Company's endeavours to extend their trade in the East, compiled chiefly from their own official records, which was published some time since in this work, a sketch was given (vol. xiii. pp. 11, 12) of the commencement and extent of our traffic with the kingdom of Siam. The predominant power of the Dutch, the intrigues of the French, with the singular occurrence of an Italian, or, as it now appears, a Greek Christian,\* obtaining the rank of prime minister in Siam, and becoming the creature of the last-mentioned nation; but more especially the subsequent destructions which prevailed in the kingdom, put almost a total stop to our connexions with the Siamese, since the commencement of the last century.

The restless disposition of both the

Burmhan and Siamese governments furnishes perpetual sources of difference between these neighbouring states. The former, which, having absorbed the kingdom of Pegu, has become extremely powerful, is upon the watch to extend its boundaries, and must of necessity be an object of great jealousy to the latter, whose naval superiority affords it no small means of annoyance. Our settlement of Penang, adjoining the territories of both these rival states, has, as might be foreseen, in some degree involved us in their disputes; and it was doubtless as much in expectation of such an event, as to repeat the oft-tried experiment of a diplomatic measure for removing the known repugnance of these people to the establishment of a recognized channel of commercial intercourse, that the embassy we are about to speak of was dispatched to Siam.

About the period of Dr. Crawford's mission, the Siamese, who were in arms against the Burmhans, attacked a petty prince, the Rajah or King of Quedah, a place from whence supplies of rice are obtained at Penang. This chief, too feeble to make effectual resistance, fled, and sought protection from the British at Penang, which was not only afforded him, but, if the accounts may be trusted, a small force was sent by us against the King of Siam, upon the ground of some aggression said to be committed by him, and a Siamese ship was seized. It is certain that, in consequence of events in this quarter, several vessels were taken up by the Government at Calcutta, for conveyance of troops to Penang and Singa-

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\* See a curious account of the expulsion of the French from Siam in 1688, in our Journal, vol. xiii, p. 459.