

THE  
**ASIATIC JOURNAL**

AND

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FOR

**British India and its Dependencies :**

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pany's Ships for the Season.  
Prices Current of East-India Produce.  
India Exchanges and Company's Secu-  
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## HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE SETTLEMENT OF SINGAPORE.

THE island of Singapore is situated at the extremity of the peninsula of Malacca, in what is called the Straits of Singapore, through which lies the route of vessels to and from the China seas. The town stands on a point of land near the western part of a bay, and is easily distinguished by a pleasant hill behind it, partly cleared of trees, which abound on the island.

The motives which influenced the Government of India to establish a free port in this quarter, and the circumstances which led to the choice and occupation of this spot for the settlement, are briefly these :

When the peace of 1814 transferred to the Netherlands' Government their Eastern possessions, they acquired a very serious preponderance of power in this quarter. Besides Java and the Moluccas, the Dutch were masters of the best trading stations on Borneo, several settlements on Sumatra, and likewise Malacca, which enabled them to exercise a powerful influence over the petty Malay princes. It was believed, upon pretty sure grounds, that this selfish people contemplated the placing their Eastern possessions under such a system of restraint, as to secure to themselves a monopoly of the commerce in those possessions, and in fact entirely to engross the Malay trade.

The advantages that would attend the occupation of some station in the Straits of Malacca, to obviate this exclusive system of the Dutch, as well as to facilitate the objects of our trade in general, first occurred to the active mind of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles: who no sooner suggested the scheme, than it was immediately concurred in by the Supreme Government of Bengal; and in the latter end of the year 1818, Sir Thomas was selected as the fittest person to carry the project into execution.

Sir Thomas accordingly sailed from Calcutta, vested with discretionary powers as to the selection of an ap-

propriate station for a British Settlement, which might in some degree command the free navigation of the Straits of Malacca; being fettered with no other restrictions than the just ones of not violating the rights of the Netherlands' Government, nor using force or improper influence with the natives.

Some jealousy, it appears, was felt at Penang respecting this scheme, from motives which can easily be imagined; and when the expedition arrived at that place, the hopes entertained of receiving every assistance requisite to the full accomplishment of its object, were disappointed. A decided want of cordial co-operation was perceived, which did not, however, prevent the expedition from proceeding to its destination.

It is disagreeable to observe that the hostility, if we may so term it, between the two settlements of Penang and Singapore, grows every day more decided. A letter we have seen in the Penang Gazette, 10th October 1822, is full of invective against the improper artifices of those who labour to misrepresent "the increasing importance and prosperity" of its rival, and of endeavours to show that the latter has not increased so much as it ought, under the favourable circumstances in which it is placed; and that Penang, on the contrary, has greatly added to the amount of its exports and imports.\*

\* "The value of imports and exports in Penang amounted in 1818-19 to upwards of half a million of dollars more than the preceding year. In 1819-20, in which year Singapore had more trade than it has had since, or fully as much, the value of imports and exports at this island (Penang) was upwards of 300,000 dollars more than in 1818-19; and in 1821-22, the value of merchandise exceeded that of 1817-18, the year preceding the settlement of Singapore, upwards of \$15,000 dollars. I may add, that the present year will bear a comparison with the most favourable one since the formation of this colony. These are satisfactory results, Mr. Editor, and I hope conclusive, that the Singapore writers not only mistake, but misrepresent."—*Extract of Letter referred to.*—On the other hand, a letter in the Calcutta *John Bull* of October 5, 1822, states, that Penang "had suffered much by the produce of Sumatra going to Singapore."

At the period when the expedition sailed, the Dutch claimed sovereignty over Rhio, and the whole of the ancient empire of Johore, as a former dependency of Malacca; and they spoke openly of preventing the Rajah from making any cession of the Carimons to the English. So far had they effected their purpose, as to have formed an establishment at Rhio under a treaty with the chief, the terms of which were not publicly known, but the nature of which must have been extremely limited. No Dutch flag had been actually hoisted either at Lingen, Johore, or Pahang, the other three great divisions of the empire; so that, in truth, the Dutch influence might have been considered as strictly confined to Rhio, which port was governed by a Bugguese Chief, the Rajah Mooda, or Vizier; while the legitimate Sultan of Johore was still a free agent, and under no engagements to the Dutch.

Though Rhio was thus so far secured to the Dutch as to give any interference with their claims there an appearance of injustice, or violation of right, yet Johore remained free for examination; but, as it was advisable, before deciding upon any particular spot, to examine the whole of those which were eligible, the expedition proceeded first to the Carimons.

These islands, in a geographical point of view, are admirably situated for giving to a strong naval power the command of the straits; but they are uninhabited, and are covered with primeval forests. The northern part of the larger island is mountainous; but to the southward, for an extent of three-fourths of the whole island, it is low, and apparently swampy. The only harbour is found to the north-east, by the position of the little Carimoon; and although it has sufficient depth of water on one side to enable ships to lie under the protection of batteries, where this advantage is offered the mountains rise abruptly from the sea, and the defences must

necessarily be distant from the principal settlement, which would require to be fixed where level land is to be found. Doubts were entertained as to the salubrity of the place, and, under all circumstances, the Carimons did not present sufficient claims for selection.

The expedition next proceeded to Singapore, where it was understood that the chief authority of Johore had now fixed his residence. This town was founded by the Malays so early as the twelfth century; it was their first station in the Archipelago, and long the rival of Maning-Kabue, in Sumatra. In the neighbourhood of the town there was found to be sufficient cleared land for the immediate accommodation of the troops; the surface of the country was elevated without being mountainous; the harbour unrivalled in those seas as to capacity and security, and in every respect this station appeared to be admirably adapted for the proposed establishment.

Upon inquiry, it was found that there had never been any Dutch Settlement either here or at Old Johore, and that that nation had not even attempted hitherto to exercise an authority or even influence over these ports. Johore Lama had long been deserted, and the chief authority now resided at Singapore, where the Dutch flag had never appeared, and where it would not be received or admitted on any terms.

The Toomongong, who now exercised authority here, held the lands of Singapore, Johore, and of all the islands about the Straits, with the exception of Rhio and Lingen, as his own inheritance, his family having always enjoyed the revenues of them since he held his commission as an independent chief of this division of the empire, from the late Sultan of Johore, Mohammed Shah, whose independence the English had always acknowledged; and since the death of that chief, there had not even existed

a contention for supremacy throughout these dominions.

It having been previously ascertained, by a visit of Major Farquhar to Rhio, that no claims to the exercise of authority over Singapore were set up in that quarter, and the actual governor of the island, whose *legitimacy* (a material point in these ticklish times) was fully established by the fact of his being the twenty-sixth monarch of his line, having solicited the friendship and protection of the British, an arrangement was concluded for establishing a British settlement there, on grounds unobjectionable to any of the parties concerned,\* and the British flag was hoisted with due honours and ceremony.

It cannot be wondered at, when the Netherlands' Government discovered the advantages likely to accrue from this settlement, that its removal became a very important and desirable object to them. It was at first contended that the whole of the eastern stations enumerated before were dependencies of Malacca, and as such belonged to the Dutch; and that, besides, the Rajah of Rhio had absolutely ceded Singapore by treaty to the Dutch nation.

Now a plain and satisfactory answer may be made to the first objection. Rhio, or rather the empire of Johore, was not a dependency of Malacca, when the latter place came into the possession of the British in 1795. On that occasion the military and naval commanders of the expedition demanded of the Dutch authorities at Malacca, whether Rhio, &c. were dependencies. The Dutch governor replied, that all engagements between the chief of Rhio and the governor-general of Batavia had ceased and determined, and they were consequently considered and acknowledged by the British as independent states, and a document to this effect was actually given to the Sultan.

\* It would appear, that a sort of rent was paid for the island in shape of a monthly stipend to the prince.

The second objection may be removed by a reference to what has already been advanced, namely, that the Rajah of Rhio, with whom the Dutch are said to have concluded the treaty, by which a cession of all these other ports are made to them, has really, according to his own confession, and the general understanding of all the Eastern chiefs, no authority beyond his own immediate territory. Singapore was found by the British Expedition in the quiet and undisputed possession of its legitimate sovereign, reigning as much by the suffrage and consent of the subjects over whom he exercised his rule, as by his own right to the throne, occupied as it had been by his ancestors for several generations.

These are the chief and only important objections that have been publicly announced in regard to our occupation of Singapore. So bent were the Dutch Government upon dislodging the settlers, that it was expected for some time that our Government at home would yield to the remonstrances of the former, and issue orders for the abandonment of the island: an apprehension which excited no little interest in India, and checked the progress of the Settlement. One of the Dutch governors it appears *threatened* to drive the English away by force. The futility of the Dutch pretensions, however, and the policy and expediency of maintaining such a post as Singapore, became so apparent in England, that our ministers refused to give way. The consequence shortly was, the comparative ruin of Malacca. During the last year it was represented to be quite deserted; not a vessel resorting there except for refreshment, or a few peculs of spices; and the best part of the inhabitants removing to Singapore, notwithstanding the prohibitory capitation tax levied upon those who emigrate.

The hostility of the Dutch to this Settlement arose not merely from the natural jealousy which a rival power

may be expected to feel on such an occasion, and from the effectual check which the establishment of a free port would offer to the revival of that pernicious system of oppression and monopoly they meditated; but from a consciousness, inspired by past experience, of the anxiety of the native inhabitants of all their possessions to withdraw themselves from their authority,\* and to seek the mild and fostering rule of the English. During the revolts in the Moluccas in the year 1817, which nearly ended in the expulsion of the Dutch from those islands, the brave but unfortunate islanders not only fought under an English flag, but constantly declared their intention of placing themselves under the protection of the British.

The rapid progress made by this settlement is truly astonishing, and fully demonstrates the sagacity by which the measure was conceived. In the first two months no less than one hundred and seventy-three vessels are stated to have arrived there. Its central situation with respect to India and China, from the latter of which it is distant only five days' sail; its position in regard to Java, the great islands of Borneo and Sumatra, and the Eastern Archipelago; its physical advantages, being placed on a rich soil, surrounded by fertile tracts of land, that bid fair to become hereafter a vast commercial and agricultural establishment perhaps only inferior to Calcutta, are circumstances which, when duly considered, lessen in some degree our wonder at the influx of trade, especially when combined with the freedom from imposts.

In little more than a twelvemonth after the settlement was formed (which was placed under the direction of Major, now Colonel Farquhar, formerly Resident at Malacca), Sir Thos.

Raffles gave the following statement of its condition, in a letter to the Marquess of Lansdowne, dated April 15, 1820:

"The rapid rise of this important station, Singapore, during the year that it has been in our possession, is perhaps without its parallel. When I hoisted the British flag, the population scarcely amounted to two hundred souls. In three months the number was not less than three thousand; and it now exceeds ten thousand, principally Chinese. No less than a hundred and seventy-three sail of vessels of different descriptions, principally native, arrived and sailed in the course of the first two months, and it has already become a commercial port of importance. I consider myself extremely fortunate in the situation, and in not having had to complain of any one of the almost invariable difficulties attending the establishment of new settlements. The establishment has more than equalled my anticipations; and its effects have been more marked and sudden than I could have contemplated, though not more so than I wished.

"If our object in the Eastern Seas and in China is commerce, and commerce alone, I am not aware of any plan so easy of adoption, or so unobjectionable, as that of making our station *free ports*. In a political point of view, it will have the effect of preventing and deterring other European nations from settling on the neighbouring coasts; for our continental possessions will enable us to do that, without considering it as a loss, which no other nation could do, except at a dead loss, in consequence of the greater distance of their power: this is particularly applicable to the French, Russians, and Americans. We can not only afford to maintain our Eastern stations without levying duties at them, but by doing so we improve the general trade, and consequent prosperity of our continental possessions. No other nation could afford

\* By a communication received at Singapore, 1st October last, from the Dutch Commissioner at Borneo, the trade with Sinkawang is interdicted, on account, it would appear, of the revolt of the whole Chinese population, amounting to 20,000, against the Dutch Government.

to maintain such stations without levying duties.

“In a few years, if the system on which I have commenced is followed up, the whole of the Eastern Archipelago will be clothed from Great Britain; and I see no reason why Ava, Siam, Cochin China, and even a large portion of China, may not follow the example.”

A very interesting and minute detail of the state of the settlement is given in a letter, dated Nov. 1, 1821, published in a Calcutta paper, from whence the following particulars are extracted:

A large population of various races were comfortably settled upon the island, whose soil furnishes an inexhaustible quantity of every requisite for building, of excellent quality. A well-built town is fast rising along the banks of the inlet which penetrates into the interior. This inlet is about three hundred feet wide towards its mouth; has regular tides, and is capable of admitting vessels of two hundred and fifty tons.

Between the inlet and a parallel rivulet, at the distance of a-quarter of a mile is a square plain, faced with a high sandy beach, free from surf, and terminated on the inner side by a steep hill, of a sufficient elevation to possess a beautiful and commanding view of the surrounding country and the Straits. On the further side of the inlet is, on one hand, a regularly built Chinese town; and on the other, beyond the rivulet, an extensive plain, in front of which the sandy beach stretches into an inner bay, and whence another inlet, resembling a river, encompasses it behind. The nearer part of this plain is marked out for a European town, and intersected by roads at right angles to each other. That more remote is partly occupied by natives; and it is there the Sultan resides.

The interior of the island, which, from a late general survey by the Resident, is found to be several times

larger than was supposed, or is laid down in the charts, consists of undulations of hill and dale, and is adapted to the growth of various and valuable commodities. Plantations of gambier, pepper, and spices are already making their appearance in many parts; cultivation is also extending to the neighbouring islands, which, from a nest and harbour for pirates, may soon be expected to become the abode of industrious and civilized people. An overland communication is meditated between Singapore and the interior of some of those Malay states on the east side of the peninsula, whose ports are shut up during the violence of the north-east monsoon.

The writer declares, that greatly as his expectations were raised by all he had heard respecting this much talked of settlement, they met with no disappointment; and he expresses his astonishment at finding so large a population of Malays, Bugueses, Chinese, &c., industriously employed upon a spot, that for ages past had been covered by impenetrable forests.

The advantages possessed by Singapore are not confined to those we have already enumerated; its facilities and resources are in many other respects admirable. Goods may at all times be shipped and landed; wood may be procured in abundance; the water is excellent; the soil rich and fruitful; the temperature surprisingly cool; and such is the salubrity of the climate, that the inhabitants have been almost totally exempted from sickness of any kind. Whilst that scourge of the human race in the eastern world, the *cholera morbus*, was ravaging most of the surrounding stations, and had approached its immediate neighbourhood, by visiting Malacca on one side, and Lingen on the other, Singapore was scarcely molested by it; a circumstance which, it seems, the natives attributed to the *good luck* of the English. The only drawback is what might be expected from a rapidly increasing settlement,

the dearth of all provisions except fish.

The latest account we have seen is from a gentleman who halted at Singapore on his way to China, who was so charmed with the place, that he intimated his probable design of returning thither from China, instead of proceeding to England; and he had already secured some land at the settlement whereon to plant coffee-trees, &c.

The competition for land is represented to be very great, and the prosperity of the place in every respect most encouraging. Bengal produce was greatly in demand, and likely for a long time to continue so, particularly piece-goods and coarse chintz; and the returns were certain and favourable. Pepper, gold-dust, tin, betelnut, rattans, and even tea, which can be procured there from Europe vessels always cheaper than from China. "In short," adds the writer, "a more fortunate spot was never selected; and when the resources of Siam, Cochinchina and China are considered, it is difficult to calculate the extent to which, through a free intercourse with these vast kingdoms, the commerce of Singapore may rise." Sir Thomas Raffles was expected there to establish his government at the settlement, instead of Bencoolen, if the sanction of the Court of Directors could be obtained for that measure.

We shall conclude this sketch with the following description of the port of Singapore, by Capt. Ross, of the Bombay marine, which accompanies a chart of the harbour and vicinity, from a survey taken February 1819.

"Singapore harbour, situated four miles to the N.N.E. of St. John's Island, in what is commonly called the Singapore Straits, will afford a safe anchorage to ships in all seasons, and being clear of hidden danger, the approach to it is rendered easy by day or night. Its position is also favourable for commanding the navigation of the Straits, the track which the ships pursue being distant about five miles; and

it may be expected from its proximity, to the Malay Islands and China Seas, that in a short time numerous vessels will resort to it for commercial purposes.

"At the anchorage, ships are sheltered from E.N.E. round to north and west, as far as S. by W. by the south point of Johore, Singapore, and many smaller islands, extending to St. John's, and thence round to the north point of Batang, bearing E.S.E., by the numerous islands forming the south side of Singapore Strait; the bottom, to within a few yards of the shore, is soft mud, and holds well.

"The town of Singapore, on the island of the same name, stands on a point of land near the western part of a bay, between which there is a creek, in which the native vessels anchor close to the town, and it may be found useful to European vessels of easy draught to repair in. On the eastern side of the bay, opposite to the tower, there is a deep inlet lined by mangroves, which would also be a good anchorage for native boats; and about north from the low sandy point of the bay there is a village inhabited by fishermen, a short way to the eastward of which is a passage through the mangroves, leading to a fresh water river.

"Ships that are coming from the eastward, have nothing to apprehend in rounding the small peaked island which is in the east side of St. John's, as the reef does not extend above a cable's length off it; and just without that the depth of water is from twelve to fourteen fathoms.\* Having rounded the peaked island, at half a mile, a north or north by east course will lead to the anchorage, and twelve or fourteen fathoms be the depth; but when at one mile and a half from the island, it will decrease to five or four

\* Capt. Ross has not noticed in his description the extensive shoal, reported by the natives to be a very dangerous one, extending, in his chart, from the N.W. corner of the island, in a S.W. direction, many parts of which are stated to be dry at spring tides.

and three-quarter fathoms at low water, on a flat which is two miles and a half long, and is parallel to the coast: there is no danger whatever on this bank, being soft mud. Continuing the north or north by east course, you will deepen into a channel of twelve or thirteen fathoms, and again shoal rather [quickly to six fathoms on the shore bank, after which the depth decreases gradually to the shore. Large ships will find the best anchorage to be with Peaked Island, about south by west; and the eastern extreme of Singapore Island about north-east by east, in five fathoms at low water, where they will have the tower, bearing N.W. by W., distant one mile and a half. Ships of easy draught can go nearer into three fathoms at low water, with the Peaked Island bearing S.W., and Johore hill on, with the eastern extreme of Singapore Island, where they will be distant about three-quarters of a mile from the tower, and

about half a mile from the eastern low sandy point of the bay.

"The coast to the eastward of the town-bay is one continued sandy beach; and half a mile to the eastern point of the bay, or two miles and a half from the town, there is a point where the depth of water is six or seven fathoms, at three or four hundred yards from the shore; and at six hundred yards a small bank, with about three fathoms at low water; the point offers a favourable position for batteries, to defend ships that may in time of war anchor near to it.

"The tide during the neaps is irregular, at two and three miles off shore, but close in it is otherwise. The rise and fall will be about ten or twelve feet, and it will be high water, at full and change, at 8 h. 30 m. The latitude of the town is about  $1^{\circ} 15\frac{1}{2}' N.$ , and the variation of the needle observed on the low eastern point of the bay is  $2^{\circ} 9' E.$ "

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### EMBASSY TO SIAM.

We find, by more recent accounts of the Embassy to Siam than those which supplied us with the information contained in our last number, that although the result of Dr. Crawford's mission has really been unsuccessful, yet the particulars attending his visit to Siam, and the treatment he experienced there, have been misrepresented in the Calcutta Journal. It appears, moreover, that the mission proceeded, in fact, to Cochin China, and

we are in possession of copious details respecting Dr. Crawford's reception there as well as at Siam, and of the respective countries, which it is our intention to lay before our readers as soon as we can authenticate them, for our confidence in Indian intelligence has, by the circumstance just adverted to, been somewhat shaken. Probably in our next number we shall be able to furnish an article upon this subject.

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## East-India College at Haileybury.

EXAMINATION, May 30, 1823.

ON Friday, the 30th May, a Deputation of the Court of Directors proceeded to the East-India College, for the purpose of receiving the Report of the Result of the General Examination of the Students at the close of the term.

The Deputation, on their arrival at the College, proceeded to the Principal's Lodge, where they were received by him

and all the Professors and the Oriental visitor. Soon afterwards, being joined by several visitors, they proceeded to the Hall, the Students being previously assembled, where the following proceedings took place:

The list of the Students who had obtained prizes and other honourable distinctions was read; also a list of the best Persian writers.