

J. Edward Hall.
Asiatick Researches:

OR,

TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

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THE

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BY

MR. MACDONALD,

WITH

A SPECIMEN OF GOLD.

THE country of *Limong*, on the Island of *Sumatra*, immediately contiguous to the Presidency of *Fort Marlborough*, and between seventy and eighty miles inland, produces the finest gold and gold-dust on that island. The *Limong* gold merchants repair annually to *Marlborough* for the purchase of *opium*, and such other articles as they may be in want of; in exchange for which they give gold of so pure a nature as to contain little or no alloy. The gold is found sometimes in dust, and often lodged in a very hard stone. It is of a whitish colour, and resembles that in which the veins run in the gold mines of *Tiltit* in *Cbili*. The gold is extracted by beating the compound mass in order to disengage it from the stone, which flies off in splinters, and leaves the gold cleared of it. This is the mode used by a rude people; by which a part of the gold must be lost in the splinters of the stone, which fly off in beating the mass. They are totally ignorant of the advantage of grinding it to a gross powder, mixing it with quicksilver, and separating the earthy and stony particles from those of the gold, by the action of a stream of water on this paste, carrying off the former, and leaving the latter precipitated to the bottom by their greater weight. They are almost entirely ignorant of the principles of assaying and amalgamation, but are extremely expert in separating particles of foreign metals from gold-dust, by a very superior acuteness of vision, no doubt arising from experience, and not a peculiar gift. They have people among them who are gold-cleaners

cleaners by occupation. The gold is found in a species of earth composed of a clayish-red-loam. On digging the earth, it is found to consist of strata (under the loam of the surface, commonly called soil) of irregular-shaped-stones of a mouldering nature, mixed with a red clay, and hard pebbles mixt with a pale red clay, of a more dense consistency than that of the first stratum. The first stratum extends to a depth of three feet and a half, and the second to somewhat less. The consistency under these strata is formed of either hard rock, or of gravel nearly approaching to it. The gold is found mixed with a stone of a hard nature, and capable of sustaining a polish. It is found near the surface, and generally in a soil freest from solid rock.

The merchants, who bring the gold for sale, are not themselves the finders or gatherers of it, but receive it, for merchandise, from the *Malays* inhabiting the interior parts of the country. The native indolence of the *Malay* disposition prevents them from collecting more than is sufficient to supply the few and simple wants of a race of men as yet unenlightened by civilization and science, and ignorant of the full extent of the advantages of the country inhabited by them. We have not, to this hour, explored a country, which, we have reason to suppose, produces more or as much gold as either *Peru* or *Mexico*. This may be attributed partly to the difficulties incident to the undertaking, and partly to a want of curiosity, that, indulged, might have been productive of great national and private advantages. The roads leading to this golden country are almost impervious; affording only a scanty path to a single traveller, where whole nights must be passed in the open air, exposed to the malignant influence of a hostile climate, in a country infested by the most ferocious wild beasts. These are circumstances that have hitherto checked curiosity; but perseverance and contrived precaution will surmount the obstacles they furnish; and such

such discoveries might be made, as would amply compensate for the difficulties leading to them. The gold-merchants who come from the neighbouring and less rich countries, give us such accounts of the facility of procuring gold as border nearly on the marvellous, and would be altogether incredible, if the great quantities of that metal produced by them, did not, in a great measure, evince the certainty of their accounts. I have seen an imperfect chart of a part of the interior country, made by an intelligent native, on the scale of the rate of his walking, and from the respective situations of the sun in regard to his position. It contained a chain of what he called Gold Mines, extending in latitude, nearly, not much less than three degrees. This chart is in the possession of Mr. Miller of the Council of *Fort Marlborough*, who did me the favour of explaining it. After making allowances for the licence of a traveller, some credit may be given to this chart, more especially, as we are well assured that that part of *Sumatra* produces large quantities of fine gold. The result of the whole is, that it would be a very laudable object to explore those rich countries, and to establish the working of gold-mines in them, as it could be done under a certain prospect of advantage. The expence arising from clearing the country, procuring intelligence, making roads, establishing and forming posts of communication, and of employing professional men, would, undoubtedly, be at first very considerable, but the resulting advantages would defray these, and render it a matter of surprise that a measure attended with such obvious utility had not been adopted at an earlier period:

It is more than probable that *Sumatra* must have been the *Ophir* of *Solomon's* time. This conjecture derives no small force from the word *opbir* being really a *Malay* substantive of a compound sense, signifying, *a mountain containing gold*. The natives have no oral or written tradition on the subject, excepting that the island has in former times afforded gold for exportation: whether to the

the eastward or westward, remains an uncertainty. We have certain accounts that the vessels that imported this article were long detained, or did not return in much less than a year. It is therefore probable that they wintered, during the violence of the S. W. monsoon, either at *Ceylon*, or on the north-east coast, and completed their voyages during the moderate part of the other monsoon.

