

THE
ASIATIC JOURNAL

AND

MONTHLY REGISTER

FOR

BRITISH AND FOREIGN INDIA, CHINA,

AND

AUSTRALASIA.

VOL. VIII.—NEW SERIES.

MAY—AUGUST 1832.



LONDON:
PARBURY, ALLEN, AND CO.,
LEADENHALL STREET.

1832.

THE MERMAID.—AN EASTERN TALE.

“ DID I ever tell you of my adventure with a mermaid ? ”

“ A mermaid !—No, never : I should like mightily to hear it, Captain Quizzle.”

“ It is the most remarkable of all my adventures : I wonder I have not told you of it.”

“ You have so many strange stories : your life must have been an eventful one.—Pray let us have it, Captain.”

“ Well.—I traded for several years in the Eastern Archipelago. The swarms of clusters of islands thereabouts are amazing ; not a tenth part of them are ever visited by human beings, and consequently all the strange things in the animal and even the vegetable creation are to be found there : monsters, as we call them, seem to congregate amidst those delicious spots, because they are there out of the reach of man’s destructive power. You have heard of the Brobdignag butterflower discovered by Sir Stamford Raffles in an island of the Archipelago, at mere sight of which one of his Hindu servants died of fright :—calyx like the dome of St. Paul’s ; pistils like good-sized fir-trees ; pollen in such prodigious quantity that wild-beasts are often smothered in it. Sir Stamford likewise met with the Dugong, or mer-man. He could only get a dead specimen ; I have often seen the animal alive ; I have shaken hands with one, for they are exceedingly gentle creatures. All these things are now pretty notorious. But besides these, unicorns are so plentiful (though they can never be taken alive, as you all know), that their horns are used as walking-sticks by the respectable Malays, and as canes by the schoolmasters. The Malay boys require a vast deal of banging to get their alphabet properly, the letters are so difficult to sound (their mouths often grow awry in the attempt), and the unicorn’s horn saves trouble, one stroke of it raising twenty large blisters. Then they have tooth-picks made of griffins’ claws—but to the mermaid.

“ I had often heard of mermaids in different parts of the Archipelago, but I did not credit the stories told me by the native rascals, who are desperate liars. A grey-headed old man, however, one day, upon my taxing him with deceit upon this point, assured me he had seen one ; and further told me, that if I was desirous of ocular proof, he could direct me to a spot where I should be pretty sure to meet with one of these water-nymphs.

“ I gladly accepted the offer, and he directed me to go alone to one of the little islets on the eastern side of the isle of Billiton (I was then on the island of Banca), where, he said, these ladies often disported themselves of an evening. He cautioned me to be on my guard, and to keep out of their reach, for they were apt to take liberties with gentlemen,—that is, to scratch out their eyes, slice them in half with a sudden twitch of their tail, and so forth.

“ Accordingly, the very next day, I procured a native boat, which could be paddled by one person, armed myself with sword and pistols, and boldly but privily launched my frail bark into the blue deep, to cross the strait of Gaspar.

“When I was equipped, I could not help laughing at the expedition I was setting out upon. However, I could but do as many have done, whom curiosity has prompted to be spectators of the washing of the lions at the Tower, on the first of April;—that is, keep my folly to myself.

“I reached the island indicated by my grey-beard Mentor: it was a sort of quinquangular rock, with a coat of the richest mould, absolutely swarming with birds, glittering with flowers and shrubs of variegated tints, and a magazine of odours. Had it been of a circular form, its circumference might have been about a mile and a half, or two miles. It was evident that human steps were rarely imprinted upon its luxuriant turf.

“Drawing up my light bark on a slope of the isle, I set it on end, and propped it with a paddle, to serve me as a temporary hut, for I was determined to wait some time the issue of the adventure, before I returned and gave the old Malay a horsewhipping, which I was resolved to do, if it appeared that he had fooled me. I remained here two or three days, till I begun to be devoured with *ennui* at this Robinson Crusoe-like life. I was almost continually walking along the margin of the sea, picking up shells, pebbles, weeds, and other things of the kind, but saw nothing of the maids of the deep.

“One evening, however—just at that glorious period of it when, especially in Eastern climes, a kind of preternatural and enchanted silence reigns around, and when every object appears to emit, as it were, a golden lustre, as if restoring some of the light it had absorbed in the day from the departed luminary,—on turning a sharp curve of the islet, I was startled by a shriek, and perceived, rather indistinctly, two hands raised above the surface of the water, at a short distance from the shore, and momentarily, a woman’s head popped up and down, as if the individual was drowning. In the suddenness of astonishment, I forgot that I was on an uninhabited spot, and, at the moment, felt an almost irresistible impulse to rush into the smooth water and rescue the sinking victim, thinking it a woman. Fortunately, I recovered my recollection in time, and stood still to await the result. The hands gradually sunk tremblingly beneath the surface, the circles disappeared, and all was again still.

“Whilst I stood musing, my eyes rivetted to the spot where I had beheld what I now began to believe might be a phantom of the fancy, a loud, wild, but musical and merry burst of laughter drew my attention to another side, where I saw, as if wading in the shallow water, a tall, slender, but beautifully-proportioned female, of an olive complexion, and with exceedingly long dark hair, which she was gracefully employed in winding about her head and temples. I walked to the edge of the beach opposite to her, and taking my stand, in order to observe her the more narrowly, I was again saluted by a laugh, which, though somewhat louder than we are accustomed to hear from young ladies in drawing-rooms, was quite feminine in its tone, and unaccountably bewitching in its general character: it was neither a titter nor a horse-laugh, but equidistant from both, the voice reminding me of the liquid notes of musical-glasses. Never did I behold more lovely features than I now gazed on with intense and growing interest. The eyes were

unusually large, dark and penetrating; but the aspect of the face altogether was soft and gentle. It was, indeed, a face which, if nature made, the die had been destroyed.

“ I held out my hands; she laughed again and held out hers. This was a trying situation, and I felt such a desire to draw nearer and converse (if I could) with my fair *incognita*,—whose unwillingness, on her part, to approach, evidently seemed to be the result of

—innocence and virgin modesty,

That would be wooed and not unsought be won,—

that I several times was near wetting my feet. But in one of the lady's quick motions, unfortunately—fortunately for me—there appeared, a short distance in her rear, the sharp edge of a large fish-tail, shaped like that of a huge salmon's. This discovery instantly had a wonderfully sedative effect upon me. I dare say the lady-fish saw in my countenance the consequence which her train *entailed* upon me, and perhaps attributed it to its true cause; for with an appearance of arch bashfulness, she turned about, and, casting a leering look at me, soused into the water, and was gone in a twinkling.”

“ Astonishing!—But now really, Captain Quizzle, is this true?”

“ True!—so help——”

“ Well, well; don't swear, don't swear. Pray go on.”

“ Well, thought I, my doubts are now at an end. Here I am,—not asleep, nor out of my senses; and if I have not seen a mermaid, why then, ——”

“ But did she come again?”

“ You shall hear.—It was singular enough, that I dreamed I should see a mermaid the night before, and that made me, at first, suspect that I was really asleep when she really appeared;—for I remember a curious occurrence of a person's dreaming he was awake when he was all the while asleep; and as the story is not long, and as I may forget it, I will tell——”

“ Never mind that; another time will do for that; I want to hear the end of this extraordinary adventure.”

“ You shall have it.—I saw no more of the water-nymph that night, but I was punctual in my attendance the next evening at the same place. I did not wait long before I heard, from the other side of a projecting angle of the rocky islet, an air warbled in such an enchanting strain, that I dared not move from the spot on which I stood, to ascertain whence it came, lest I should lose a note of it. Its effect upon my whole system I can only describe by supposing that some subtle stimulating fluid passed through every nerve from my brain to my toe. You have remarked the restlessness of a cat when a violin is bowed so as to prolong its sweetest tones: this will give you some idea of my *suffering*, for such it was.”

“ Astonishing! This account conforms exactly to the old notions of the mermaid, who was reported to sing like a Siren.”

“ Exactly. She appeared to me just as the mermaid is represented in old pictures, except that I saw no comb or looking-glass. But to proceed.

“ When the air ceased, I hastened to the quarter whence it proceeded, and there recognized the same charming face and form, and was, moreover, saluted with the same laugh. I resolved to address the sea-lady. I knew the Malay language well, and had a smattering of most of the dialects of the Archipelago; and I thought, if she could speak at all, she was more likely to know some of these than any other human tongue. To my delight as well as surprise, I found she understood and could talk Malay; but she articulated in a very peculiar manner, somewhat like the mode in which persons born deaf and dumb enunciate what they are laboriously taught to utter.

“ And now comes the most extraordinary part of my story.

“ She gave me an account of the sub-aqueous regions, which excited my astonishment: whether true or false will never be determined, for no human visitant could get back again to tell us. She gave me to understand that, at a vast depth in the ocean, there was another atmosphere, on which the water rested, like our atmosphere upon the sea. I imagine this must be the interior world, of which various phenomena on the surface of the earth afford manifest indications. Her description of this interior world was perfectly fascinating: it must be a real paradise. Owing to the density of the atmospheric medium, and the absence of the principle of gravitation or terrestrial attraction, men, and even houses and castles, could float in the air, without being liable to any injury by dashing against one another, or what we call ‘falling down.’ The temperature of the air, she informed me, was invariably the same; perpetual spring, or rather summer, prevailed every where; and, in short, all was pure enjoyment. What surprised me more than any thing else was, that she said there were inhabitants of this upper world there, and amongst the rest an Englishman, — *Orang Ingleez*, as she expressed it.”

“ How did they get there ?”

“ Aye, how did they get there ?—precisely the question I asked her. She replied that it was undoubtedly a matter of difficulty, for the descent was a long one, and a living body must sink very rapidly to avoid suffocation before it reached the nether air; but when there, she said, the lungs soon became habituated to breathe it. She instanced herself, who could breathe both atmospheres, which was not possible, if the lower one required a peculiar set of organs to inhale it. All that was necessary, she said, was to exclude the air as much as possible from the lungs, hold the breath, and if a person was carried down with velocity, there was no danger; and she offered, if I chose to risk the experiment, to be my guide and propeller. And then she renewed her enchanting description of the central paradise, where nothing dies, where pleasure never tires, and novelty is ever new :

Where love is liberty and nature law.

She even expatiated on the delights of the journey itself, the luxurious delirium of the rapid whirl, the sights beheld in the passage, the glittering treasures of the deep, the vegetable wonders of the marine world, and the tribes of curious and harmless beings that sport upon the confines of the two

regions. I have often thought of this conversation when your daughter, Miss Greenfinch, has been playing and singing that pretty air—

Follow me and we will go
Where the rocks of coral grow," &c.

"The Mermaid's song?"

"The same. I had no great stomach to make the trial, however; having a good many unsettled accounts, I did not like to be the means of ruining some honest fellows who were my creditors, and, besides, I did not relish the idea of being reported *felo de se*; so I civilly declined the journey."

"Pray go on: what was the result of the adventure? I am in a fever to hear."

"We grew very good friends. The sea-lady sung me several most captivating songs; one, in particular, was so exquisite, that I thought I should never forget either words or music; but I remember neither. We moved along quite round the island, I walking on the margin of the sea-shore, she gracefully gliding through the liquid mass as if by a mere act of volition, for she seemed to make no exertion, and her tail,—I thought studiously,—was kept out of view: you cannot imagine a more picturesque and beautiful object than she appeared. Where the water was deeper near shore, she sometimes approached closer to me, but apparently always recollected herself suddenly and turned away again: a semblance of bashfulness and maiden-timidity, which gradually divested me of all fear.

"Whilst we thus communed together, my faculties almost entranced with the romantic novelty of the adventure, the charming eyes and features continually beaming upon me, the ravishing pictures the fair apparition drew of her abode and of the heavenly beings by which it was inhabited, the magic of the solitude and silence which reigned around us, upon which her mellow voice broke, as it were, into a thousand musical echoes, the nymph suddenly exclaimed 'hark!'

"I heard nothing.

"'I must be gone,' she said.

"Almost involuntarily, I stretched forth my hand. She glided towards me, cautiously and timidly, and extended hers. Our hands joined.—

"Instantly, I felt myself held by a giant's gripe, and dragged forward; the resistance I could offer, though I was a match for most men, was like the effort of a child. Meantime, the dazzling features I had gazed upon with ecstasy darkened into the malignant aspect of a demon.—I was on the verge of destruction—when, unexpectedly, one of my pistols went off in the struggle; upon which this she-devil let me go, and bounced under water, leaving me in a cold sweat, all of a tremor, and my shoulder almost dislocated."

"Good heavens!"

"You may be sure I did not stay much longer on this infernal island. I soon reconverted my hut to its proper purpose, and paddled away with as much vigour as my wounded arm would allow, fancying I saw a large salmon-tail in every curl of the wave. My old friend soon perceived in my

face, on my return, that I no longer distrusted the fidelity of his statement."

"What a very extraordinary adventure, Captain Quizzle! And this is really a fact?"

"A fact?—No."

"No? What is it a fiction you have been telling us all this while?"

"Every word of it."

"Psha!"

THE PERMANENT REVENUE-SETTLEMENT OF BENGAL.

EVIDENCE of James Mill, Esq., before the Select Committee on East-India Affairs, 2d August 1831 :—

What do you suppose to have been the object for which the permanent settlement was introduced?—I believe the permanent settlement was introduced with the best of all possible motives, with a view to the protection of the whole mass of the agricultural population. That appears to me, from the proclamations of Government at the time, and other documents, to have been the object in view. From our want of experience, great abuses had before that time been practised by the different sorts of people whom we employed in the collection of the revenue. The detail of the business was so great, that it frightened Lord Cornwallis and the government of the day, and they conceived that no better method for the protection of the ryots could be invented, than to create a species of landlords, from which they expected much benefit to arise. The ground upon which their reasoning principally went was this, that those zemindars having a permanent interest in the land assigned to them, would feel an interest in the prosperity of the ryots, in the same manner as a landlord in England feels an interest in the prosperity of his tenants. This was expected to produce two good effects; to create a landed aristocracy in the country, and, above all, to afford protection to the ryots from this kind of paternal feeling that was expected to pervade the zemindars. Unhappily that last expectation has been found to be very far from corresponding with the facts; they little understood the nature of the men with whom they were transacting.

To what extent do you believe that the permanent settlement did affect the rights of the ryots?—I believe that, in practice, the effect of it has been most injurious. The most remarkable circumstance, and that by which all the rest seem to have been introduced, was the interpretation put upon the effect of the sales of land, particularly public sales that were made for recovering arrears of revenue. The idea came to be entertained, that the purchasers at those sales were proprietors. They were denominated proprietors; a man that purchased an estate was considered to be the proprietor of that estate; and in consequence of this notion of proprietorship, and the great powers that are annexed to it, in the mind of an Englishman, an idea seems to have been entertained that the purchaser of this estate purchased the rights over it, as completely as a man would purchase rights over an estate, by purchasing it at a public sale in England. Those auction purchasers, as they were called, proceeded to act upon this assumption, to impose new rates upon the ryots, and even to oust them wherever they found it convenient. When applications were made to the courts, and they were not early made, because the people are exceedingly passive, the judges, for the most part, coincided in opinion with these auction purchasers, and decided that their rights included every thing, and that the ryots were in the condition of tenants at will. This has proceeded to a very considerable length; because during the first year of the operation of the permanent settlement, a very great transfer of property took place. It appears also, that the same sort of feeling as to the rights of the ryots, which was thus spread by the interpretation of this act of purchasing, has pervaded also the other properties which had not changed hands, and even those cases of transfer which took place by private bargain; and that generally in Bengal now there is hardly any right recognized as belonging to those inferior holders.