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LETTERS FROM THE EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO.

[We have pleasure in presenting to our readers a communication, which we hope is the first of a series, from Mr. Wallace, the South American traveller, author of 'Travels on the Amazon.' Mr. Wallace does not seem to have formed any fixed plan for his wanderings in the East, but will proceed at present wherever he is attracted, as an explorer of scenery, an observer of life and manners, and an enthusiastic naturalist.]

Singapore, June 1854.

ANY Encyclopedia or Gazetteer will inform you that the island of Singapore is about twenty-seven miles long and fifteen broad, contains about 65,000 inhabitants, of which more than half are Chinese, was purchased by our Government from a native Rajah, and is now the seat of a great and increasing trade.

I shall therefore leave you to obtain such and any similar information you may require from the abovenamed sources, and confine my present communication to the physical and social peculiarities I have myself been able to observe in the country and the people.

I have been staying for some weeks at a place called Bukit Timo, situated near the centre of the island, and surrounded by such patches of the virgin forest or jungle as the rapid increase of cultivation has suffered to remain. I am residing with a French Roman-catholic missionary, who has been here several years endeavouring to convert the Chinese from paganism. He has now several hundred converts, and has built a pretty church for their accommodation.

The country round us is pretty equally divided between cleared land and jungle, the latter still covering all the hill-tops, while the valleys are occupied with plantations, either of nutmeg, pepper, or Gambier. The only cultivators are the Chinese, many of whom are very wealthy, owning extensive and valuable estates. Little villages of most wretched and filthy hovels are scattered about, in which the shopkeepers and mechanics reside, while the houses of the landed proprietors are only superior in size.

The Chinese (in Singapore at least) are a most amazingly industrious people. It is almost painful to see how they work, and, except when eating, they are never seen idle. Their general dress is only a short pair of breeches, reaching from the hips to half way down the thighs, and thus almost naked they carry heavy loads of Gambier leaves and pepper, or walk along the dusty road to the town of Singapore, a distance of ten or twelve miles, with a hundred-weight of plantains for sale. Seeing them thus naked at work, I have been much struck by their great resemblance to some of the more athletic tribes of South American Indians. The colour of the skin is almost identical; the colour of the hair, the absence of beard, the muscular development of the limbs, are the same: the countenance is but slightly different, and the peculiar mode of squatting down to eat renders the similarity very remarkable.

My friend, the missionary, said to me the other day, "Singapore is a very strange place: I never did see one like it. It belongs to the English, who bought it from the Malays, but now the Chinese have it quite for themselves. They take what ground they like, and make plantations, and then sell them for a great deal of money, and nobody says anything to them. It is really a very strange place." The Chinese, no doubt, think so, and therefore flock here in great abundance, as places where they can have land for nothing, and are perfectly free to come and go, and to do as they please, are not to be found everywhere. The results of this over-liberal policy have been lately evident in the difficulty there was in putting down the recent insurrection. The Chinese have settled in such a miscellaneous manner, in places which can only be reached by paths scarcely known but to themselves, that they are almost out of reach of all law and police, and can commit murders, when so inclined, almost with impunity. This would not have happened had the lands been regularly settled by purchase at even a nominal rate from the Government, and all squatting in the more remote and uncleared tracts prohibited.

The insurrection was a purely national one, confined entirely to the Chinese of two rival provinces, who have such an hereditary hatred for each other, that every two or three years it breaks out in open war to the knife, when the most fearful atrocities are committed, men, women, and children murdered in cold blood, houses burnt, and much property destroyed. They might be left to fight it out by themselves, were it not that all the country districts depend for a supply of rice solely on the town of Singapore. Individuals and small parties are afraid to venture there in times of disturbance, and so hundreds and thousands of armed men pour into the town, and all order is at an end. One morning 600 Chinese passed our house in straggling single file, armed, in the most impromptu manner, with guns, matchlocks, pikes, swords, huge three-pronged fishing-spears, knives, hatchets, and long sharpened stakes of hard wood. They were going to buy rice, they said, but they were stopped on the road by a party of about a dozen Malay police, five of them shot, and the rest turned back. The disturbance lasted a week, and even now men are still occasionally killed, nobody knows why.

When excited the Chinese are very bloodthirsty and cruel, but they are great cowards, and a hundred to one seems about the proper proportion for an equal fight between them and Europeans or Malays. A Chinese village is a strange sight. A row of hovels like ruinous pigstyes, with a receptacle for every description of filth, a cesspool in fact before the front door: pigs, whose excessive fatness we vainly seek to imitate in England, roaming about everywhere, with ducks and fowls in profusion; vegetables, fruit, strange compounds of every description for sale, among which piles of rancid, or, to speak more plainly, stinking fish, force themselves most disagreeably on the attention: half naked long-tailed Chinamen (but no women), some eating rice and the fish just mentioned; others, pea-soup strongly sweetened with coarse brown sugar—for they sweeten almost everything but their tea—many gambling, seated on mats in the verandahs, a few smoking opium, and the rest gazing, with the ludicrous expression peculiar to them, at the white intruders, and you have a Chinese village in Singapore.

This strange people seem destined to play a great part some day in the world. They are an intruding race, and wherever they settle, the less energetic Malays soon clear out. Even on the peninsula of Malacca there are many places colonized by the Chinese, from which the native inhabitants have retreated, not liking the vicinity of such a go-ahead people.

Singapore is entirely dependent for its supplies of provisions on the neighbouring island. Neither rice, coffee, nor sugar, are grown here: meat and vegetables are brought from Malacca, and other places. Fruits are scarce, and not very good. The oranges are scarcely eatable, the plantains not much better, and the famed mangosteen, though very delicious, is a rarity. There is not, therefore, much to render it a desirable residence, and I shall soon leave it, probably for Borneo, when I have had a few more weeks' entomologizing, the insects being the only class of animals abundant and interesting.

A. R. W.

TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

AMONG works of general finterest announced for publication are the following, by Messrs. Longman and Co.:—'Memoirs of Sir Robert Strange, the Engraver, illustrating his Artistic Life, and of his Brother-in-law, Andrew Lauriseden, author of the 'Antiquities of Rome,'' by James Dennistown, Esq. 'Traditions and Superstitions of the New Zealanders, with Illustrations of their Manners and Customs,' by Edward Shortland, M.A., author of 'The Southern Districts of New Zealand.' 'A Diary in Turkish and Greek Waters,' by the Right Hon. the Earl of Carlisle. 'Gleanings from Piccadilly to Peru,' by J. W. Oldmixon, Commander R.N. Mr. Murray announces, in the series of British Classics, an edition of 'Johnson's Lives of the Poets, with Notes by Peter Cunningham, F.S.A.;' the 'Works of Addison,' edited by the Rev. Whitworth Elwin; and the 'Works of Dryden and Swift,' based on Sir W. Scott's edition. Among miscellaneous works publishing by the same house are—'Historical Memorials of Canterbury,' the 'Landing of St. Augustin,' 'The Murder of Becket,' 'The Black Prince,' by the Rev. A. P. Stanley; 'The Origin and Progress of the Inventions of James Watt, illustrated by his Correspondence with his Friends,' edited by J. P. Muirhead, Esq., M.A.; 'A Thousand Leagues among the Snowy Andes, including Visits to the modern El Dorados of Chili, Bolivia, and Peru, and the Sources of the Amazon and Plata,' by J. A. Lloyd, F.R.S., H.M. Chargé d'Affaires to Bolivia. Mr. Bentley announces 'Letters of Henrietta Maria, including her private Correspondence with Charles I., chiefly from inedited sources in the Public Archives in France and England,' by Mrs. Green, author of 'Lives of the Princesses of England.' Mr. Newby announces, in three volumes octavo, the 'Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington,' and a 'Memoir of Count D'Orsay,' edited by Dr. Madden, Author of 'Shrines and Sepulchres of the Old and New World.' Dr. Madden is likely to make the most of his materials, so far as quantity is concerned; how far in other respects we shall see when the work appears.

At the Royal Polytechnic Institution a course of Popular Lectures on Science has been commenced on Monday evenings, specially intended for working men and their families, admission being by payment of sixpence each, provided a ticket is produced signed by the foreman or superintendent of the works to which they may belong. The inaugural lecture was delivered to a crowded audience, on Monday evening, by the Rev. A. Bath Power, M.A., Principal of the Diocesan Schools, Norwich, On the Advantages of a Knowledge of Science, illustrated by experiments. The lecture next Monday is to be by Mr. Pepper, the resident director of the Institution, On the Chemistry of the Non-Metallic Elements. Professor Baden Powell lectures, on August 28th, On the Physical Causes of the Precession of the Equinoxes. Dr. Bachhoffner, Dr. Carpenter, Dr. Scoffern, and other experienced and able public teachers, take part in the course. We have great pleasure in noticing this effort, on so effective a plan, to diffuse popular instruction. In London the interest taken by the working-classes in the lecture department of mechanics' institutions has almost wholly declined, but with the superior advantages of an establishment like the Polytechnic, and with the assistance of lecturers of such high standing as