

WANDERINGS IN CHINA.

FIRST JOURNEY.

CHAPTER I.

First View of China, and the Impressions produced — Land at Hong-kong — Description of its Harbour — Town of Victoria — Chinese Towns, Stanley and Aberdeen — Description of the Island — Effects of Rains — “ Happy Valley ” noticed — Chinese mode of “ Stopping the Supplies ” — Views from the Tops of Mountains — Climate — Botany of the Island — Few Animals indigenous — Unhealthiness of the Settlement — Character of the Chinese Population — Mixed Character of Foreigners — Remarks on the Settlement as a Place of Trade.

ON the sixth of July, 1843, after a passage of four months from England, I had the first view of the shores of China : and although I had often heard of the bare and unproductive hills of this celebrated country, I certainly was not prepared to find them so barren as they really are. Viewed from the sea, they have everywhere a scorched appearance, with rocks of granite and red clay showing all over their surface : the trees are few, and stunted in their growth, being perfectly useless for anything but fire-wood, the purpose to which they are generally applied in this part of the country. A kind of fir-tree (*Pinus sinensis*) seems to struggle hard for existence, and is found in great quantities all over the

hill sides ; but, what with the barren nature of the soil, and the Chinese practice of lopping off its branches for fuel, it never attains any size, but is merely a stunted bush. Was this, then, the “flowery land,” the land of camellias, azaleas, and roses, of which I had heard so much in England ?

After a few hours’ pleasant sailing amongst the islands, we at last reached the beautiful bay of Hong-kong, and anchored opposite to the new town of Victoria. Hong-kong bay is one of the finest which I have ever seen ; it is eight or ten miles in length, and irregular in breadth ; in some places two, and in others six miles wide, having excellent anchorage all over it, and perfectly free from hidden dangers. It is completely sheltered by the mountains of Hong-kong on the south, and by those of the main land of China on the opposite shore ; land-locked, in fact, on all sides ; so that the shipping can ride out the heaviest gales with perfect safety.

The new town of Victoria is situated on the north side of the island, along the shores of this splendid bay, with the mountain chain rising precipitously and majestically behind it. When viewed from the sea it has a curious and irregular appearance ; but as the plan of the town becomes more developed, and better houses are built, it will really be a very pretty little place. When I left China, at the end of December, 1845, it had made most rapid progress ; new houses, and even new streets, had risen, as if by magic. Some noble government buildings were nearly completed, to be used as barracks for the soldiers ; excellent and substantial houses were erected, or in the course of erection, for the merchants ;

and a large Chinese town had been built to the westward, for the principal part of the Chinese population. A beautiful road, called the Queen's Road, has been formed along the shore for several miles; and this was lined with excellent houses and many very good shops. Many of the Chinese shops are little inferior to those in Canton, and certainly equal to what used to be in Macao. In fact, a very large proportion of the Macao shopkeepers have removed their establishments to Hong-kong; the former place being now useless for the purpose of trade since the English left it. The bazaar or market is also a most excellent one. Here we find all the natural productions of China, which are brought regularly from the main land; such as the fruits and vegetables indigenous to the country; fowls, ducks, teal, quails, and pheasants; meat of all kinds; and in fact every luxury which the natives or foreigners can possibly require. Besides these, English potatoes, green peas, and several other kinds of foreign vegetables, are plentiful at almost all seasons of the year.

The only other Chinese towns on the island of any note besides the new one just noticed are on the south side, and used to be called Little Hong-kong and Chuckchew: their names have been changed lately by the governor, Sir J. Davis, into *Stanley* and *Aberdeen*. They are merely fishing-towns; but the government always keep up a military station at the latter, which renders it of some importance.

Hong-kong is one of the largest islands near the mouth of the Canton river. It is about eight miles from east to west, and the widest part of it is not more

than six miles; but it is very irregular, some parts being only three miles in breadth, and the land jutting out here and there, forming a succession of headlands and bays. Imagine, then, an island considerably longer than it is broad, perfectly mountainous, and sloping in a rugged manner to the water's edge, having here and there deep ravines almost at equal distances along the coast, which extend from the tops of the mountains down to the sea, deepening and widening in their course. There are immense blocks of granite in these ravines, whieh have either been bared by the rapid currents of water in its descent during the rains, or which have tumbled into them from the sides of the mountains at some former period of time. The water in these ravines is abundant and exceilent; and hence the poetical name which the Chinese have given our island—*Hong-kong*, or more properly *Heang-keang*, the “*Island of fragrant streams.*” During the wet season—for it rains in torrents then—these little streams swell with the augmentation of fresh water, and rush down from the mountains with a velocity whieh sweeps everything before them. In May, 1845, one of these storms of thunder and rain visited Victoria; and the effects produced by it were perfectly astonishing; houses were undermined, roads made at a great expense only a few months before were swept away; drains were burst open; and many of the bridges and other public works rendered perfectly useless. ‘The Hong-kong Register’ thus notices the storm to whieh I allude:—“The damage was very great, both to the recently-formed roads and to many buildings in the course of erection;

and had the violence of the rain continued an hour or two longer, many houses must have been undermined and destroyed. As it was, much individual inconvenience has been sustained. About 5 o'clock the whole of Queen's Road, from the entrance to the large bazaar to the market-place, was completely flooded, to the depth of from two to four feet. All the streets leading upwards to the hill served as feeders to this lake. In Peel Street particularly the torrent rushed along, bearing everything before it, and the street still resembles a dried-up watercourse, covered with stones and wrecks of buildings. The passages from the Queen's Road to the sea were all full ; the one leading through Chunam's Hong for hours presented the appearance of a rapid river, and many of the houses on each side were only saved from the flood by mud-walls hastily raised. About 6 o'clock the rain moderated, but for some time after the road was quite impassable. A Coolie, attempting to ford the stream rushing down D'Aguilar Street, was borne off his feet, but saved himself by catching hold of the frame of a mat-shed. The drain lately formed could not carry off the water, which committed great devastation, flooding a new house in its vicinity to the depth of nearly three feet, and destroying some new walls. All the open drains in the upper streets have suffered, many are entirely destroyed, leaving scarcely a trace of the street. A stream from a distant watercourse flowed along the road above the bungalow, occupied by the attorney-general, and, descending with great fury upon the roof of one of his out-offices, carried away a great part of it. In many

plaees the Queen's Road has been eovered with soil, sand, &c, to the depth of more than two feet, and nearly all the cross drains are ehoked up. The bridge at the Commissariat has been carried away, and that in the Wang-nai-chung has also disappeared. Several lives were lost by the fall of a house in which some Chinese resided; and it is said the stream at Pokfowlum burst upon a mat hut in which were a number of Coolies employed upon the new road; three saved themselves in a tree, but many more are missing, and are supposed to have been carried out to sea."

There is very little flat ground on the island eapable of being brought under cultivation; indeed the only traet of any extent is the "Wang-nai-ehung," or, as the English eall it, the "Happy Valley," about two miles east from the town; and even that is not more than twenty or thirty acres in extent. There are several other small plots of ground near the bottom of the hills, and some few terraced patches amongst them, but the whole is of very trifling extent. In former times the Chinese used to cultivate crops of rice and vegetables in the Wang-nai-chung Valley, but the place proved to be very unhealthy; and the Government, supposing that the malaria might proceed from the water necessary to bring the crops to maturity, prohibited the natives from cultivating them, and set about draining the land. From this desription it will be seen that our settlement on this island is entirely dependent on the dominions of his Celestial Majesty for supplies, which he, of course, can cut off when he pleases. Shortly after the Governor, Sir John Francis Davis, took the helm of

affairs in China, he, with the advice of the Legislative Council of Hong-kong, passed a law for registering all the inhabitants of the island, English and Chinese, the latter of course being under the rule of Her Britannic Majesty's representative. The Chinese population, ever jealous of foreigners, fancied there was more in this than met the eye, and that it was done for the purpose of *squeezing* them, and they actually rebelled against the decree. A meeting of all the Compradores and other great men took place, and one of the results was, that the "supplies" were stopped. For several days everything stood still, the Coolies would not work, the boats would not bring provisions, in fact, the Chinese were in a fair way of starving the "Legislative Council of Hong-kong" into making better laws; and they succeeded at last in making them alter the celebrated Registration Act into one more agreeable to their feelings.

From the tops of the mountains the view is grand and imposing in the extreme; mountain is seen rising above mountain, rugged, barren, and wild—the elevation of the highest being nearly two thousand feet; the sea as far as the eye can reach is studded with islands of the same character as Hong-kong; on one side our beautiful bay lies beneath us, crowded with shipping and boats, and, on the other, the far extending waters of the China sea.

The climate of Hong-kong is far from being agreeable, and has proved very unhealthy, both to Europeans and to the native Chinese. During the months of July and August—the hottest in the year—the maximum heat

shown by my thermometer was 94° Fahr., and the minimum in the same time was 80°. The difference between the heat of day and night is generally about 10 degrees. In winter the thermometer sometimes sinks as low as the freezing point, but this is a rare occurrence. Even in the midst of winter, when the sun shines, it is scarcely possible to walk out without the shelter of an umbrella, and if any one has the hardihood to attempt it he invariably suffers for his folly. The air is so dry that one can scarcely breathe, and there is no shade to break the force of the almost vertical rays of the sun. At other times in winter, the wind blows cold and cutting from the north, and fires are necessary in the houses ; indeed, at all seasons the climate is liable to sudden changes of temperature.

The botany of the island possesses a considerable degree of interest, at least would have done so some years ago, when the plants indigenous to it were less known than they now are. By far the most beautiful plants met with on the low ground are the different species of *Lagerstroemia*. There are two or three varieties, having red, white, and purple flowers, and in the summer months, when they are in bloom, they are quite the hawthorns of China,—surpassing in their gorgeous flowers even that beautiful family. I have generally met with them in a wild state very near the sea-shore. A little higher up we find the beautiful *Ixora coccinea* flowering in profusion in the clefts of the rocks, and its scarlet heads of bloom under the Hong-kong sun are of the most dazzling brightness. The ravines are crowded with ferns and creeping shrubs

of different kinds, not however of much interest to the lover of ornamental flowering plants. Here, however, under the ever-dripping rocks, we find the beautiful *Chirita sinensis*, a plant with elegant foxglove lilac flowers, which I sent to the Horticultural Society soon after I arrived in China, and which is now to be found in many of the gardens of England.

The trees on the island are few, and generally in a stunted condition. The fir (*Pinus sinensis*) is common here, as it is all along the coast of China; *Cunninghamia sinensis* is rare on Hong-kong, although frequently met with on the main land; the tallow-tree is also indigenous, but no use is made of its fruit. Many kinds of the fig tribe are common, and one, the *Ficus nitida*, a kind of banyan, sometimes forms a very ornamental tree. Several species of bamboo seem to grow very well, and in the situations where they are found are strikingly ornamental.

The only trees to the cultivation of which the Chinese pay any attention are the fruit-bearing kinds; and in some places there are very fair orchards containing the Mango, Leechee, Longan, Wangpee, Orange, Citrons, and Pumelows.

Although there are many more species of shrubs and trees indigenous to Hong-kong, yet after all the island has a barren and desolate appearance. The nature of the soil will always be a great barrier in the way of any improvement in this state of things; but even this, to a certain extent at least, may be overcome by the liberality of the Government, or even by the energy and taste of private individuals, and Hong-kong or Victoria may become in

a few years very different from what it now is. We have only to look at what has been done as an earnest of what may follow. Trees lately planted are already growing beautifully in the grounds of Messrs. Dents, the Honourable Major Caine, Messrs. Jardine, and Messrs. Matheson, and at Mr. Stewart's a considerable way up the hill.

The island is not rich in indigenous animals. I have frequently seen wild goats feeding in the most inaccessible parts of the rocky crags; there are also deer and foxes, but these are extremely rare. The only animals of the feathered tribe one meets with are, two or three species of kingfishers, some small singing birds and a few wood-pigeons where there are any trees or bushes to shelter them. The main land is much better stocked with birds. From thence the natives bring to the market large quantities of pheasants, partridges, quail, ducks, teal, and sometimes woodcocks and snipes. These birds are seldom seen wild amongst the mountain of Hong-kong, and, when they are, they have only accidentally strayed from the main land. Luckily for the poor Chinese, their waters are much more productive than the land, and an inconceivable variety of fish is daily brought to the markets, and forms, with rice, the staple article of their food.

There are numerous fine quarries of granite along the coast, from which the stone has been obtained for the new town of Victoria. Much of the granite in different parts of the island is in a state of decay, and some ingenuous persons have fancied that to this may be ascribed the prevalence of that malignant disease called the

“Hong-kong fever,” which has baffled medical skill, and carried hundreds to the tomb.

The autumnal months, August, September, and October, are most unhealthy. In 1843, when I first visited the island, it was in a lamentable condition. A place called the “West Point,” where some barracks stood, and which was to all appearance as healthy as any other, proved fatal to the greater part of a detachment of our troops quartered there. The mortality was such that Lord Saltoun, then commander-in-chief, was obliged to remove the wretched remnant, and ordered the barracks to be pulled down. The “Wang-nai-chung,” that “*happy Valley*” already noticed, was another most unhealthy spot. One of my fellow-passengers, Mr. Dyer, and his partner, who came out with high hopes of succeeding in business under the new regulations, went to live in this place, where, in a few days, they were seized with fever, and in a few more they had both gone to “that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns.” In other parts of the island, which were at that time considered more healthy, fever prevailed to a great extent. Among those who were carried off, and whose death caused the greatest regret, were Major Pottinger, and the Honourable J. R. Morrison, Chinese interpreter, son of the celebrated Dr. Morrison. The former had been only out for a few days, and was on the point of returning home with despatches for the Government. Many other instances might be mentioned; but these are sufficient to show the deplorable condition of our new settlement at this time; and so malignant and fatal was this dis-

ease, that few who were seized ever recovered. The only advice the doctors gave was at once to leave the island and fly to Macao.

The south side of Hong-kong was at this time considered much more healthy than the north, where the new town of Victoria was being built. The prevailing opinion amongst the inhabitants then was that the town ought to have been placed on the south side, which had the advantage of being exposed to the refreshing breeze of the south-west monsoon, from which the north was in a great measure shut out by the range of mountains. This theory, however, was soon disproved, for latterly the troops stationed at Aberdeen, on the south side, have suffered more than those in Victoria.

The native population in Victoria consist of shopkeepers, tradesmen, servants, boat-people, and Coolies, and altogether form a most motley group. Unfortunately there is no inducement for the respectable Chinese merchant to take up his quarters there, and until that takes place we shall always have the worst set of people in the country. The town swarms with thieves and robbers, who are only kept under by the strong armed police lately established. Previous to this, scarcely a dark night passed without some one having his house broken into by an armed band, and all that was valuable being carried off or destroyed. These audacious rascals did not except the Governor even, for one night Government House was robbed ; and another time they actually stole the arms of the sentries. These armed bands, sometimes a hundred strong, disappeared, as they came, in a most marvellous manner, and no one seemed to

know whence they came or whither they went. Such attacks are fortunately now of rare occurrence. In all my wanderings on the island, and also on the main land hereabouts, I found the inhabitants harmless and civil. I have visited their glens and their mountains, their villages and small towns, and from all the intercourse I have had with them I am bound to give them this character. But perhaps the secret of all was, that I had nothing for them to take, for I was always most careful not to have anything valuable about me, and my clothes, after scrambling amongst the rocks and brushwood, were not very tempting even to a Chinaman.

Since the island of Hong-kong has been ceded to England, the foreign population in it has been much changed. In former days there were only a few mercantile establishments, all known to each other, and generally most upright and honourable men. Now people from all countries, from England to Sydney, flock to the Celestial country, and form a very motley group.

Viewed as a place of trade, I fear Hong-kong will be a failure. The great export and import trade of Southern China must necessarily be carried on at Canton, as heretofore, there being, at present at least, no inducement to bring that trade to Hong-kong. It will, nevertheless, be a place of great importance to many of the merchants, more particularly to those engaged in the opium trade ; and will, in fact, be the head-quarters of all houses who have business on the coast, from the facilities of gaining early information regarding the state of the English and Indian markets, now that steam communication has been established between this country and the

south of China. Moreover, with all its faults, its importance may yet be acknowledged in the event of another war. Our countrymen cannot have so entirely forgotten the kind of protection which used to be afforded them by the Portuguese at Macao as to make them wish to be put in the same circumstances again ; and it is of no little importance to know that their lives and property are safe under the British flag, which has

. . . . “braved a thousand years
The battle and the breeze.”
