

The Gleaner:

AND

NORTHUMBERLAND SCHEDIASMA.

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"Nec araneorum sane texus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignunt nec noster vilior quia ex alienis libamus ut apes."

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THE GLEANER.

FROM CAPTAIN BASIL HALL'S FRAGMENTS OF VOYAGES AND TRAVELS.

DESCRIPTION OF BOMBAY.

BOMBAY, as, perhaps, many people may never have heard before, is an island, and by no means a large one, being only between six or seven miles long by one or two broad. It is not, however, by geographical dimensions that the wealth of nations is determined. The harbour unites every possible desideratum of a great seaport: it is easy of access and egress; affords excellent anchoring ground; is capacious beyond the utmost probable demands of commerce; and, owing to the great rise and fall of the tides, is admirably adapted for docks of every description. The climate is healthy and the ground, being diversified by numerous small ridges and hills, furnishes an endless choice of situations for forts, towns, bazaars, and villages, not to say bungalows or villas, and all sorts of country-houses, and some very splendid retreats from the bustle of business. The roads which intersect this charming island were beautifully Macadamized, as I well remember, long before that great improvement was heard of in England; and, as the soil of the island is made up of that rich kind of mould, resulting from decomposed basalt or lava, the whole surface affords a good sample of the perennial verdure, of tropical scenery, which dazzles the new comer, while its interest seldom if ever, fails to rise still higher upon a more prolonged and intimate acquaintance.

The population of Bombay is about two hundred thousand; and, I think, it may be said, with truth, that we can see nothing in China or Java, or the Philippine Islands, or along the Malay Peninsula, or even in the interior parts of India, any single caste or dress or custom, or form of superstition, or any thing else, belonging peculiarly to eastern manners, which they may not witness at Bombay, in as genuine and, apparently, unsophisticated a condition, as on the spot to which it properly belongs. In twenty minutes' walk through the Bazaar of Bombay, my ear has been struck by the sounds of every language that I have heard in any other part of the world, uttered not in corners and by chance, as it were, but in a tone and manner which implied that the speaker felt quite at home. In the same short space of time, I have counted several dozens of temples, pagodas, joss-houses, and churches, and have beheld the Parsees, the lineal religious descendants of Zoroaster, worshipping fire; the Hindoos, with equal earnestness, bowing their heads to Baal, in the shape of a well-oiled black stone, covered with chaplets of flowers and patches of rice; while, in the next street, the Mahometan ceremonies of the grand Moharem, were in full display; and, in the midst of all, a Portuguese procession bearing an immense cross, and other Roman Catholic emblems as large as life.

I have no language competent to give expression to the feelings produced by the first contemplation of so strange a spectacle. I was straddled, amused, deeply interested, and, sometimes, not a little shocked. The novelty of the scene was scarcely diminished by a further inspection, which may appear a contradiction in terms, but is not so in reality. The multitude of ideas caused by the first view of such an astonishing crowd of new and curious objects, obscures and confuses the observation, in a certain sense, and prevents us from distinguishing one part from another. In like manner, I remember being almost stupified with astonishment, when Sir John Herschel first showed me one of the great nebulae and double stars, or pointed the instrument to the planet which his illustrious father dis-

covered, and made me understand, or tried to make me understand, the revolutions of its satellites. I felt the confusion by which I was distracted gradually subsiding, while the fresh interest of the spectacle, strictly speaking, was greatly increased. And so I found it in India, especially at that most curious of places, Bombay, where, the more I saw of the natives, the more there seemed still to discover that was new. It would be absurd to pretend, that all this pedantic kind of reasoning process took place at the moment, for, in truth, I was too much enchanted to speculate much on the causes of enjoyment. I shall never forget, however, the pleasure with which I heard a native, with a bowl in his hand, apply to a dealer in corn for some of the grain called Sesame. The word, in strictness, is not the Indian word for this seed, though it is used generally in the peninsula of Hindustan, and forms one of the ingredients of curry-powder. Til is the native word for the plant, from which the oil of Sesame is expressed. I need not say how immediately the sound recalled the "Open Sesame!" of the Arabian Nights; and the whole of the surrounding scene being in strict character with that of the tale I felt as if I had been touched by some magic wand, and transported into the highest heaven of eastern invention. As I gazed at all things round me with wonder and delight, I could fix my eye on nothing I had ever seen before. The dresses, in endless variety of flowing robes and twisted turbans, flitted like a vision before me. The Hindoos, of innumerable casts, were there, each distinguished from the other by marks drawn with brilliant colours on his brow. There stood Persian merchants with shawls and other goods from Cashmere, mingled with numerous Arab horse-dealers, chattering familiarly with those good-natured, merry fellows, the long-tailed Chinese, whose most ungraceful Tartar dress and tuft contrast curiously in such a crowd with the tastefully arranged drapery and gorgeous turbans of the Mahometans and Hindoos.

Some of these groups were fully as much distinguished by their sandals and slippers as by their head-gear; others arrested the attention by the sound of their voices, and many by the peculiarity of their features and complexion. It really signified little which way the eye was turned, for it could rest on nothing, animate or inanimate, that was not strange and full of interest. Most of trees which shaded us, and especially a tall variety of the palm tribe, commonly called the Brab, I had never seen before. It is called by botanists *Borassus flabelliformis*, or Tara Palm; Tara or Tair being the native word for the toddy which is yielded by these trees. It grows, in respect to its stem, like the cocoa-nut, with a glorious set of projecting arms at the top. But these branches, unlike those of the cocoa-nut, do not send out lateral leaves along their whole length like the ostrich feather, which the cocoa-nut leave resembles very much in form. They are smooth and naked to the end, on which is opened out, rather fantastically, a huge circular leaf, marked with divisions like those of a fan, radiating from a centre, each ray or division being sharp-pointed.

But the chief object of attraction, and I may well say of admiration, in this gay scene, was the appearance of the women, who are not only not concealed, but go about freely, and, generally speaking, occupy themselves out of doors in works not requiring much strength but a good deal of dexterity. Of course, this does not include the higher classes, who are kept quite secluded. The females appear to be great water-carriers; and the pots, or chatties, as they are called, which are invariably borne on the head, are of the most elegant forms imaginable. Indeed, when

standing by the side of a Hindoo tank, or reservoir, as I have often done for hours together, I have been reminded of those beautiful Etruscan vases, the discovery of which has given so new a character to modern forms. This practice of carrying all loads on the head is necessarily accompanied by an erect carriage of body, and, accordingly, the most graceful of dancers, even the matchless Bigottini herself, might have

"Snatch'd a grace beyond the reach of art" from observing the most ordinary Hindoo girl, on her return from the tank, with her hand sometimes poised on her head, and sometimes not, so true is the balance, and so certain the bearer's step. The dress of these women consists chiefly of one strip of cloth, many yards in length. This narrow web is wound round the body and limbs with so much propriety, that, while the most scrupulous propriety could find nothing to censure on the score of deficiency in covering, it is arranged with such innate and judicious taste, that even the eye of a sculptor could hardly wish many of its folds removed. The figure of the Hindoos, both male and female, is small and delicate; and, although their features are not always handsome, there is something about their expression which strikes every stranger as singularly pleasing, perhaps from its being indicative of that patience, docility, and contentment which are certainly their chief characteristics. We see, at least in every part of our eastern empire, that, with a little care, coupled with a full understanding of their habits and wishes, and backed by a thorough disinterestedness and genuine public spirit, on the part of their rulers, the above-mentioned qualities of the Hindoos may be turned to the highest account in all the arts of war and many of the arts of peace.

Perhaps not the least curious sight in the bazaar of Bombay are the ornaments worn by the women and children, by which, with the most lavish profusion and the most ill-directed taste, they succeed in disfiguring themselves as much as possible. This might lead us almost to suspect that their taste in the other parts of their dress, like the gracefulness of their carriage, is the result, not of choice or study, but of happy accident. The custom of carrying their water vessels on their head requires an erectness of gait during the performance of that duty, which may become the easiest and most natural at other times. And, probably, some circumstance incident to the climate may, in like manner, direct the fashion in adjusting their drapery.

Most of the women wear nose-rings of great dimensions. I have seen many which hung below the chin; and, certainly, to us this seems a strange ornament. I forget whether or not the Hindoo women cover their fingers with rings, as our ladies do, but their principal fashion seems to consist in loading the wrists and ankles with armlets and bangles, as they are called, of gold and silver. The virgin gold generally used for this purpose is almost always rich and beautiful to the eye. But, I imagine, no art can make a silver ornament any thing but vulgar. Just as we see some persons in England crowd ring upon ring on their fingers till all beauty is lost in the heap, and all taste sacrificed for the mere sake of ostentatious display; so, in India, I have observed women whose legs were covered with huge circles of gold and silver, from the instep nearly to the knee, and their arms similarly hoops round almost to the elbow. The jangle made by these ornaments striking against one another, gives ample warning of a woman's approach; a circumstance which has, probably, led to the notion, that this custom of attaching, as it were, a set of bells to the heels of the ladies, may have been an institution of jealousy, devised by the husbands of those warm latitudes to aid their researches after their gadding spouses. I cannot say how this theory squares with history; but I