

**THE
TRAVELLER IN ASIA:**

OR,

A VISIT

TO THE MOST CELEBRATED PARTS OF THE

EAST INDIES AND CHINA.

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE

*MANNERS OF THE INHABITANTS, NATURAL
PRODUCTIONS, AND CURIOSITIES.*

**FOR THE INSTRUCTION AND ENTERTAINMENT OF
YOUNG PERSONS.**

BY

PRISCILLA WAKEFIELD.

WITH A MAP, ON WHICH THE ROUTE IS TRACED.

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at fifty miles' distance, by the human bones that were strewn on the road, and the multitudes of pilgrims, men, women, and children, undeterred by the sight of the remains of those who had trod the same path, crowding to assist at the grand festival of the idol. Many of these deluded fanatics die on the road, from want and fatigue, and are devoured by dogs, jackals, and vultures. The detail of the horrid ceremonies performed there, I leave to Charles, upon whom they made a strong impression; and he has written the following account of them to his sister.

Charles Melville to Adela Melville.

Jaggernaut.

How, my dear Adela, shall I express the horror I felt at beholding the impious worship of the Hindoos in the temple of Jaggernaut, and the miseries attending the festival. I will begin my account by a description of the pagoda, which is an immense circular structure, with the image of an ox, larger than the life, cut out of one entire stone projecting from the centre of the building. It is of so great height as to serve for a mark to ships at sea. As soon as the multitude perceived the first glimpse of the temple, they gave a loud shout, and immediately fell down and worshipped. Surrounded by this infatuated company we entered the town,

which is nearly encompassed by hills of sand, dreary and desolate to the eye, corresponding with the melancholy sound of the continual dashing of the waves against the shore.

The idol Jaggernaut is a mere block of wood or stone, (I could not distinguish which,) having a frightful visage painted black, with a very wide mouth of the colour of blood: his arms are of gold, and his eyes of diamonds. He is covered with a robe of gold tissue, and his bracelets are composed of pearls and rubies. He is accompanied by two other idols, his brother and sister, called Boloram and Shubudra, who are held in equal veneration.

To see rational beings fall prostrate before such senseless stocks, is most affecting to a mind that adores the King of Heaven.

At the commencement of the ceremonies on the great day of the feast, the rushing of the multitude through the gate of the enclosure was terrible; and a great deal of mischief must have happened, had not one of the side-posts given way. On this occasion the idol Jaggernaut, (emphatically called the Moloch of Hindostan,) was brought out of his temple, amidst the acclamations of hundreds of thousands of his worshippers. And now appeared such a scene of iniquity, bloodshed, and indecency, as could please none but a monster like Moloch of old.

When the idol was placed on his throne, a shout

rent the skies. A short interval of silence followed, and all eyes were turned towards the place, whence proceeded a gentle murmur. I looked with the rest, and beheld a moving grove carried by a body of men, who, advancing with hasty step towards the throne, fell down and worshipped, amidst the loud and repeated acclamations of the people. The throne of the idol was now placed on a stupendous car about sixty feet high, attended by a hundred and fifty persons, chiefly priests, who stood upon the car. Attached to this ponderous machine were six very thick cables, by which the people drew it along. Thousands of men, women, and children pulled by each cable, believing it to be an act of piety to move their god. Five elephants preceded the three cars, (for each idol has its own,) carrying flags, and dressed in rich crimson caparisons hung with bells, which, as they moved, sounded musically. When the procession stopped, the idolatrous worship began. A high priest mounted the car, and pronounced stanzas, said to be of a most lascivious tendency, answered, at intervals, by the people. "These songs," said he, "are the delight of the god;" and, in order to please him, they were frequently repeated.

It seems that this deity delights in cruelty as well as indecency. A pilgrim announced that he was ready to offer himself a sacrifice to the idol, and laying himself down on the road before the car, whilst it was in motion, with his face on the ground

and his arms extended, was immediately crushed to death by the weight of the machine. Many other victims presently followed his example, amongst whom I observed several women.

These dreadful offerings succeed each other rapidly, and the same heart-rending ceremonies are repeated for several days together.

We were soon glad to withdraw from a scene of so much horror; but though removed from that spot, we were surrounded by many objects that reminded us that we were still in the valley of death. Some of the plains by the sea were absolutely whitened by the bones of the pilgrims, which remain after the flesh has been devoured by beasts and birds of prey.

Many of these poor wretches perish on the way, and afford food to the vultures, which generally begin the operation of consuming their remains, by tearing out the intestines. On the approach of the dogs, the vultures retire to a little distance, till the body is sufficiently torn for them to assist in consuming it. Sometimes they attack the carcase before the pilgrim is quite dead. I saw a woman in this situation, with a pretty infant lying on her breast; and many other tales could I relate of equal horror, but I will harass your feelings no longer upon so shocking a subject, but try to find a more agreeable theme.

On the the western side of the Circars lies the

kingdom of Orixá, once a very powerful state, but now principally confined to a vast plain, in many parts a mere morass; in others, traversed by chains of hills from north to south, and watered with rivers that branch in irregular directions.

On the mountains that are situated in the back part of this country, an insect is produced that forms the valuable material called gum-lac. Like the bee, it makes cells, but varying in shape, some being pentagons, and others hexagons, which it fixes to the branches of the mimosa tree. The insects are very small. When they first proceed from the cells they have six legs, but are without wings, and are extremely active and lively. The eggs are deposited in the cells, in a deep red liquor: each cell contains about a hundred. The males are winged, and are four or five times the size of the females, which exceed them in number as five thousand to one. Both the eggs and the liquor give a most beautiful red, but the material of which the cells are made is unknown. Lac is brought over to Europe in three forms, either adhering to the sticks, with the cells and insects on them; prepared in the form of cakes; or in small grains called seed-lac, which is the insect advanced into the *pupa* state. It is principally used in dyeing or making sealing-wax.

The trees of the Circars are generally very large and beautiful, some of them well adapted for timber, and others yield wood for dyeing different

colours. Amongst those that are remarkable is the ebony tree. The centre of the large trees only is black and valuable, whilst the outside timber is white and soft, and is often eaten by insects, which leave the black part untouched.

The silk-worm is cultivated in many parts of India, particularly at Junglepore, which is the greatest station for silk in the possession of the India Company. Mr. Middleton has given me the following account of it. It employs above three thousand people, and six hundred furnaces, each attended by a man who spins the silk from the cocoon, and a boy who turns the wheel. The Italian method of spinning and twisting the silk is adopted here, because it is used for articles where silk is mixed with cotton, with which it blends better from its flatness. Silk-worms are of three kinds; the first, and most esteemed, spin annually, and come from Tipera: the second kind is called the Dacey, and is supposed to be native to the soil, and produces eight harvests in the year: the third and worst kind is the China, which also yields eight times a year.

The manufactory is a very large edifice, built in the shape of a gallows. On the ground-floor are the coppers, in which the cocoons are steeped to loosen the silk. The upper part is occupied by warehouses. Many young children are usefully employed in this manufacture, and earn enough to maintain themselves.

As I know you are fond of natural history, I shall describe one or two of the animals that have pleased me most, and begin by the gross-beak, which is rather larger than a sparrow, with a yellow-brown plumage and a thickish beak. This bird is exceedingly common in Hindostan—is surprisingly sensible, faithful, and docile; and so familiar that he is easily taught to perch on the hand of his master. In a state of nature he generally builds his nest on the highest trees, especially on the palmyra, or on the Indian fig, and prefers one which happens to overhang a rivulet. He composes his nest of grass, woven like cloth and shaped like a large bottle, suspending it firmly on the branches, but so as to rock with the wind, and placed with its entrance downwards, to secure it from birds of prey. His nest usually consists of two or three chambers; and it is a popular opinion that he lights them with fire-flies, but it is more probable that he catches those insects only to feed on them. This little bird is taught to fetch any small thing that is pointed out to him. I saw one that was so attentive to the signal of his master, as to catch a ring as it was falling into a deep well, and afterwards bring it to him with great exultation. Mr. Middleton says, that when he was at Benares, he saw several of them that had been trained to pluck the thin plates of gold, worn by the young women of that city, from their foreheads, and carry them in triumph to their lovers, who had employed them on this errand of gal-

lantry*. Its food is grasshoppers and other insects; and the hen lays many beautiful eggs, resembling large pearls. Their note is a mere chirping, but their want of song is amply repaid by their sagacity.

To this specimen of the feathered race I will add an amusing little fellow from the quadrupeds, called the loris, or slow-paced lemur, an animal that inhabits the woods on the Coromandel coast. It is about the size of the common squirrel, and when confined in a cage, resembles him in a perpetual motion from side to side. It has a roundish head, with large, expressive eyes, weak in the day-time, glowing and animated at night, when its hearing also is most acute; as, indeed, are all its other senses, for it sleeps away the live-long day, rolled up like a hedge-hog, and is active during the night. It has four hands, each having five fingers, which it uses dexterously in holding its food, or clinging to the branches of trees.

The body of this creature is covered with a thick fur, a defence bestowed by its benevolent Creator against the cold, of which it is extremely susceptible. I saw one at Madras that was kept tame in a cage. He was of a gentle disposition, except in the cold season, when, if disturbed, he became fierce and indignant. On first awaking he licked and dressed his coat like a cat, then satisfied his hunger with

* Sir William Jones.

some of the sweet fruits of this country, such as plantains and mangoes; but his favourite food was grasshoppers, of which he was immoderately fond. When a grasshopper or any insect alighted within its reach, he would fix his eyes, glowing with uncommon fire, on his prey; and, having drawn himself back to spring on it with greater force, he seized the victim with both his fore-paws, but held it in one of them while he devoured it.

Having told you these particulars, I shall bring this long epistle to a conclusion; and, with love to all my friends in England, am your affectionate brother,

CHARLES MELVILLE.

In pursuing our journey from Jaggernaut, we found it necessary to exchange our palanquins for a boat, in order to pass through the tract called the Sunderbund, which is a collection of flat islands, divided by a labyrinth of canals, covered with trees, composing a forest of very large extent. These passages afford a most grand and curious spectacle, and form a navigation of more than two hundred miles, varying in width, and presenting many beautiful views. The water is salt; and the woods are the haunt of wild beasts, particularly the tiger, which is here of uncommon size, and is often destructive to the poor wood-cutters and salt-makers,

who resort here in the dry season, to procure a scanty livelihood at the risk of their lives. These ferocious animals are so bold, that they often swim to the boats that lie at anchor in the midst of the river. Their strength is so great, that they will sometimes go full speed, whilst carrying away a buffalo which had been seized out of the pasture.

The one-horned rhinoceros is very common in these islands. It loves forests and swampy places, for the sake of wallowing in the mud, and frequently inhabits the same forests as the tiger.

The apprehension of such formidable assailants deterred me from examining the interior of these forests, which would, doubtless, yield a rich harvest to the naturalist. I must therefore content myself with saying, that most of the birds indigenous to Bengal are to be found here. I had a more favourable opportunity of making my observations on the different species of water-fowl, which, during the parching heats of the inland districts, repair to this moist situation.

The great heron is often five feet high. It is a bird of a disagreeable aspect: the craw is red and naked, passing over the shoulders, and hangs pendulously in front; but it is of great use in clearing the country of snakes, noxious reptiles, &c. &c. When the jackal and the vulture have cleared a carcase of the flesh, the great heron will swallow the bones. He is very courageous, and believed

by the Indians to be invulnerable, from an opinion that the species is animated by the souls of the bramins.

Besides a variety of geese, cranes, gulls, &c. the rose-coloured flamingo and the white-headed ibis frequent these shores: the pink feathers in the tail of the latter, are used by the ladies as ornaments for their heads.

It is a remarkable fact, that in this hot climate there are many accidental instances of white animals. It is recorded of the emperor Jehangir, that in his menagerie he had an antelope, a crow, a hawk, a partridge, a quail, and a peacock, of that colour. I do not mean that this circumstance is peculiar to the Sunderbund, but it occurs occasionally in different parts of the torrid zone. It seems extraordinary that this circumstance, (which prevails in cold countries, and serves as a defence to the animal from its enemies, by assuming the colour of the snow that covers the ground,) should occur here, where none ever falls.

Amongst the numerous insects that sport in these shades, are multitudes of the fire-fly, which, in the evening, illuminate the bushes, and produce a fine effect.

The streams that pervade the Sunderbund abound with fish, one species of which is remarkable, no less for its beauty than for its flavour. It is called the mango-fish, probably from its brilliant orange-colour, which resembles that of a ripe mango. It is about

nine inches long, and is furnished with seven stiff, thick bristles, growing near the gills, and gradually lengthening to the outermost, which is sixteen inches long. They visit the Ganges in June, for the purpose of depositing their spawn, and afterwards return to the sea.

Our voyage terminated at Calcutta, where I was no less disappointed than poor Charles, at finding that Mr. Melville had been sent from Agra, to form a commercial treaty with the sovereign of Nepaul, a country that lies between Thibet, China, and Bengal, and has seldom been visited by Europeans. My young friend was some days before he could reconcile himself to his uncle's absence, though my promise to remain at Calcutta till Mr. Melville's return, afforded him some consolation. Accordingly, I have taken him into my own house; and his amiable qualities have so endeared him to me, that I begin to love him as a son, and I know not how I shall relinquish him.

The last dispatches from Agra brought me the following letter, which, from the novelty and information it contains, will, I think, supply you with an hour's amusement.