

*Country*

# RURAL LIFE IN BENGAL;

ILLUSTRATIVE OF

## Anglo-Indian Suburban Life;

MORE PARTICULARLY IN CONNECTION WITH THE PLANTER AND PEASANTRY,  
THE VARIED PRODUCE OF THE SOIL AND SEASONS; WITH COPIOUS DETAILS  
OF THE CULTURE AND MANUFACTURE OF INDIGO.

LETTERS FROM AN ARTIST IN INDIA TO HIS SISTERS IN ENGLAND.

By the Author of

"ANGLO-INDIAN DOMESTIC LIFE,"  
"ROUGH NOTES OF A ROUGH TRIP TO RANGOON,"  
ETC.

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Illustrated with One Hundred and Sixty Six Engravings.

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## PREFACE.

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THE following Letters—with two exceptions—were written about five years ago. Travel and pressing duties long delayed their publication; whilst the desolating insurrection of the past twenty months, spreading its leaden pall over the face of the country—carrying bereavement to countless homes—and banishing nearly every thought but that of the one terrible drama—the all-absorbing romance of reality around, in which every Christian seemed called upon to play some part, however petty or remote, may well be supposed to have extinguished for the time nearly all interest in any subjects less exciting than the alarms—the carnage, and the din of war. But the hydra-spirit of Revolt is now crushed;—“Rebellion is rebuked;”—faint and more faint becomes the sound of strife—hushed by the gentle tones of womanly and royal mercy. Returning Peace, with Spring’s “ethereal mildness,” now resumes her wonted smile,—and like the loosened Dove of old, in search of resting for its feet—alights once more on our deserted plains, to “make fair weather in this blustering land.”

Thus protected and encouraged, and trusting to the liberality of his Queen’s “Amnesty” to include free pardon for *his* offences also, the Author ventures to bring in this petty tribute to Her Courts of Peace.

During the protracted interval which has thus elapsed, however, even the great storm and strife of Mutiny, at which one-half the world has gazed in wonder, was insufficient to keep down smaller disputations nearer home; and hence, upon returning to his task, the Author found that he, too, had wandered into disputable fields. The question touching Indigo—the Planters, and the Ryuts, discussed fully thirty years ago, had been by different parties twice revived,—augmented, and swollen into controversy. For himself, however, the Author finds nothing to lament in this. It has



MELNATH HOUSE.

*Melnotá, January 10th.*

MY DEAR SISTERS,

Ill health has warranted that which inclination and an old standing invitation have long tempted, and I thus find myself once more located at the delightful residence of my kind friend, Mr. J— F—, in one of the handsomest dwellings, and I take it one of the most pleasing and healthy localities in Lower Bengal.

Whilst here, I purpose not to be idle, or unmindful of you, but, in fulfilment of that "good boy" promise I made, never to neglect addressing you when practicable, by our monthly mails, to relieve the dull monotony of our usual Calcutta budget by an endeavour, at least, to entertain you with a description of all I have seen, and may hereafter see, of mofussul, or suburban life, during my trip and sojourn here; more particularly connected with the production of an article which forms one of the principal and most interesting commodities of Bengal—*indigo*, of which I am led to believe two-thirds of our friends in England know little more than this—that it is a blue dye—brought from abroad—employed to colour broadcloth, and by the washerwomen at home, in little balls, wherewith to "blue" their

or barge, towed by a steamer, generally proceeds thither on Friday, and returns to Calcutta on the Tuesday morning. The house, though plain, is large and substantial-looking, and situated at the head of the small but beautiful park that, for probably a mile, skirts the bank of the river.

The park, which embraces a considerable extent of land, with here and there gently undulating ground (a feature in the landscape which from its rarity in the plains of Bengal, adds no small grace thereto in our eyes) is umbrageous with fine forest trees, and enriched by the most rare and beautiful of cultivated garden plants. A portion of the park (all of which is under charge of a European superintending gardener, who has a body of málées or native gardeners under him) is exclusively devoted to experimental botany, and the whole grounds, which are intersected by gracefully meandering paths, both for walking and driving, are not only very tastefully laid out, but kept in the neatest order and cleanliness.



GENERAL COOPER'S HOUSE, BARRACKPORE.

Besides its trees, flowers, and delightful walks (for here at early day with something of the charms of solitude around, you can really *enjoy* a walk), the park possesses other objects of attraction.

Near to the eastern entrance, on one side of the main path which encircles the grounds, is a menagerie, containing the usual zoological and ornithological subjects—such as tigers, leopards, bears, kangaroos, and monkeys, and some very beautiful birds of the pheasant tribe. On the opposite side of the path is a circular enclosure, and bamboo and thatch building for a giraffe, where also may be seen a pair of very fine ostriches and a gigantic tortoise.

Continuing the course of the same path to the lower or south end of the

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park, and an enclosure of a more substantial character, strengthened and spiked on the inner side by strong bamboos, will be observed. Here, either reclining their ponderous bodies in the morning sun, or laving their massive hides in the tank which occupies the greater part of the enclosure, are a pair of full-sized Rhinoceroses.

During my stay at Barrackpore it was related that some time previously one of these creatures—the male—had killed an unfortunate sipáhee (native soldier), who, with more animal courage than human reason or prudence, had, upon some occasion of the brute's having by accident broken loose, madly ventured to oppose him. Three sipáhees, walking through the park, suddenly observed the animal, as I have said, at large, roaming the ground.—“*Arree Meye!*” (Oh, brother!) exclaimed one of the elder and more prudent.—“See! here's the Lord Sahib's animal coming.—Run!”—“Run!” (exclaimed the poor young fellow, who paid so sadly for his temerity, and regarding only the imaginary discredit of running away,)—“Never! If he strikes me, I'll strike him!”—He stood still; and in a few minutes his mangled corpse, as you may suppose, was being dragged about the park by the infuriated rhinoceros.\*



RHINOCEROS ENCLOSURE.

Not many yards beyond the rhinoceros enclosure, occupying a corner of the park, amidst a pretty forest of bamboos, is a very picturesque little

\* 1858.—No unapt illustration of one feature in sipáhee character developed in the present rebellion—the fool's sacrifice—the sacrifice of present comfort—future prospects, and of life itself, for want of

building of Gothic architecture. This is known as Lord Auckland's school, it having been built and established by that nobleman, when Governor-general, for the education of Bengalee lads, about one hundred and twenty of whom, all Hindoos, are instructed in English, and in their own language, and contribute a small monthly fee, according to the means, I believe, of their parents, of one roopee, or less, towards the support of the institution. The remainder of the expense is met by a grant from what is called the Darbar Fund.



SERAMPORE.

Pursuing the path round to its termination, leads to the evening drive, cooled on the one side by the river, towards which the bank gently slopes, shaded on the other by umbrageous trees, and enlivened by all the gaiety and gallantry of the cantonment, listening to the delightful strains of the military band, which, upon two evenings of the week, is generally found adding its irresistible attractions to the place.

Precisely opposite to Barrackpore is the one time Danish settlement of Serampore. It is a very pretty, neat, and clean little town, and being built on high ground, and having the further advantage of facing a broad and long reach of the river, bears great repute for salubrity,—more than contesting the palm, it is said, on that score, with its opposite neighbour of Barrackpore.

Serampore was built by the Danes in 1755,—taken by British troops in 1808,—restored after the peace in 1815, and retained by the Danish

ordinary intelligence in things wherewith he should have been more conversant than the rest of his countrymen. The three sphinxes may typify the late Bengal army: the elder and more prudent those men of the 31st, 13th, and 48th regiments, who covered themselves with honour at Sangor and Lucknow; and the infuriated rhinoceros the infuriated British army, against whose adamantine sides the foolish sphinx ran his brainless head, and perished in dishonour.