

JOURNEY

TO THE

TEA DISTRICTS OF CHINA.

CHAPTER I.

Arrive at Hong-kong — Excitement on the arrival of the mail — Centipede boats — Bay of Hong-kong by moonlight — Town of Victoria — Its trees and gardens — Mortality amongst the troops — Its cause — A remedy suggested — Sail for Shanghai — Its importance as a place of trade — New English town and shipping — The gardens of the foreign residents.

ON the 14th of August, 1848, the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steam-ship "Braganza," in which I was a passenger, dropped her anchor in the Bay of Hong-kong, at nine o'clock in the evening. In a few seconds our decks were crowded with the inhabitants of the place, all anxious to meet their friends, or to hear the news from home. As I did not intend to go on shore until the following morning, I had sufficient leisure to survey the busy and exciting scene around me.

Amongst the numerous boats which came off to us there were two which presented a most striking appearance. They were very long and narrow, and were each propelled by about fifty oars. They had been built by the English and American merchants

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to convey the news to Canton on the arrival of the mail. The moment these boats received their despatches they started on their journey, and, as they belonged to opposition parties, each did its best to outstrip the other; and, as it was often a matter of considerable importance to get the earliest news, a large sum of money was distributed amongst the crew of the winning boat.

The boatmen made a great noise; Chinamen like, all were talking, all were giving orders, for each had a stake in the winning of the race. At last the papers, letters, or whatever they had to take, were put on board, and off they started across the bay for the mouth of the Canton or "Pearl" river. They ploughed the water like two enormous centipedes, and, although they were going very fast, they were visible for some time in the clear moonlight. I watched them from the deck of the steamer until they were lost in the distance, but even then and for some time afterwards I could hear distinctly the quick splash of the oars and the noise of the boisterous crews. Steam has now invaded the quiet waters of the Pearl river, and these boats are numbered amongst the things that were.

The noise and excitement connected with the arrival of the mail gradually subsided; those of our visitors who had been lucky enough to get hold of a 'Straits Times,' 'Home News,' or 'Times,' returned on shore to peruse it, while others hastened home to communicate to their friends the news they had been able to pick up from the officers or passen-

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CHAP. I. BAY OF HONG-KONG—VICTORIA. 3

gers of the ship. By eleven o'clock at night all was perfectly quiet. Captain Potts and myself had our chairs taken up on deck, and we sat down to breathe the cool air and enjoy the scene by which we were surrounded.

It was a clear moonlight night; such a night as one sees only in the sunny lands of the East. Those who have anchored in the Bay of Hong-kong by moonlight will agree with me that the scene at such a time is one of the grandest and most beautiful which can be imagined. On this evening the landlocked bay was smooth as glass, scarcely a breath of air fanned the water, and as the clear moonbeams played upon its surface it seemed covered with glittering gems. Numerous vessels, from all parts of the world, lay dotted around us, their dark hulls and tall masts looming large in the distance. The view was bounded on all sides by rugged and barren hills, and it required no great stretch of fancy to imagine oneself on a highland lake.

The white town of Victoria was distinctly visible from where we lay, and very pretty it appeared in the moonlight. It is built along the southern shores of the bay, and in some places extends a considerable way up the side of the hill. The background of the picture consisted of a chain of rugged mountains, which are nearly two thousand feet above the level of the sea. Altogether the view was a charming one.

When I went on shore the following morning I found a great change had taken place since 1845; many parts of the town, then bare, were now densely

covered with houses. Our merchant-princes had built themselves houses not inferior to those in the far-famed "City of Palaces;" and the barracks for the troops were equally handsome and expensive, although unfortunately not equally healthy. And, last of all, a pretty English church was rising slowly on the hill side.

An interest in gardening and planting had sprung up which promises to lead to most satisfactory results. When I was formerly in Hong-kong every one complained of the barren appearance of the island, and of the intense heat and glare of the sun. Officers in the army, and others who had been many years in the hotter parts of India, all agreed that there was a fierceness and oppressiveness in the sun's rays here which they had never experienced in any other part of the world. From 1843 to 1845 the mortality was very great; whole regiments were nearly swept away, and many of the Government officers and merchants shared the same fate. Various opinions were expressed regarding the cause which produced these great disasters; some said one thing and some another; almost all seemed to think that imperfect drainage had something to do with it, and a hue and cry was set up to have the island properly drained. But the island is a chain of mountains; there is very little flat ground anywhere upon it, and hence the water which flows from the sides of the hills gushes rapidly down towards the sea. Imperfect drainage, therefore, could have very little to do with its unhealthiness.

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I have always thought that, although various causes may operate to render Hong-kong unhealthy, yet one of the principal reasons is the absence of trees and of the shade which they afford. In a communication which I had the honour to make to the Government here in 1844 I pointed out this circumstance, and strongly recommended them to preserve the wood then growing upon the island from the Chinese, who were in the habit of cutting it down annually, and at the same time to plant extensively, particularly on the sides of the roads and on the lower hills. I am happy to say that these recommendations have been carried out to a certain extent, although not so fully as I had wished. It is well known that a healthy vegetation, such as shrubs and trees, decomposes the carbonic acid of the atmosphere, and renders it fit for respiration; besides which there is a softness and coolness about trees, particularly in a hot climate, that is always agreeable.

Many of the inhabitants have taken up the matter with great spirit, and have planted all the ground near their houses. Some of them have really beautiful gardens. I may instance those of His Excellency the Governor at "Spring Gardens," of Messrs. Dent and Co. at "Green Bank," and of Messrs. Jardine and Matheson at "East Point." In order to give some idea of a Hong-kong garden I shall attempt to describe Messrs. Dent's, which was then in the possession and under the fostering care of Mr. Braine:—

This garden is situated on the sloping sides of a valley near the bottom of one of the numerous ravines

which are seen on the sides of the Hong-kong hills. It is near the centre of the new town of Victoria, and is one of its greatest ornaments. On one side nothing is seen but rugged mountains and barren hills, but here the eye rests upon a rich and luxuriant vegetation, the beauty of which is greatly enhanced by the contrast.

Every one interested in Chinese plants has heard of the garden of the late Mr. Beale at Macao, a friend of Mr. Reeves, and like him an ardent botanical collector. Nearly the whole of the English residents left Macao and went to Hong-kong when that island was ceded to England, and all the plants in Mr. Beale's garden which could be moved with safety were brought over in 1845 and planted in the garden at "Green Bank."

On entering the garden at its lower side there is a wide chunamed walk leading in a winding manner up the side of the hill, in the direction of the house. On each side of this walk are arranged the trees and shrubs indigenous to the country, as well as many of the fruits, all of which grow most luxuriantly. *Ficus nitida*, the Chinese banyan, grows on the right-hand side, and promises soon to form a beautiful tree. This is one of the most valuable trees for ornamental purposes met with in the south of China. It grows rapidly with but little care, its foliage is of a glossy green colour, and it soon affords an agreeable shade from the fierce rays of the sun, which renders it peculiarly valuable in a place like Hong-kong. The India-rubber tree (*Ficus elastica*) also succeeds well

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in the same part of the garden, but it grows much slower than the species just noticed. On the other side of the main walk I observed several specimens of the Indian “neem” tree (*Melia Azedarach*), which grows with great vigour, but is rather liable to have its branches broken by high winds, owing to the brittle nature of the wood. This defect renders it of less value than it otherwise would be, particularly in a place so liable to high winds and typhoons. This same *Melia* seems to be found all round the world in tropical and temperate latitudes; I believe it exists in South America, and I have seen it in Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt, Aden, Ceylon, the Straits, and in the south and north of China, at least as far north as the 31st degree of north latitude. Amongst other plants worthy of notice in this part of the garden are the Chinese cinnamon, the pretty *Aglaia odorata*, and *Murraya exotica*, both of which are very sweet scented and much cultivated by the Chinese. Two specimens of the cocoa-nut palm imported from the Straits are promising well. Other fruits—such as the loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*), the Chinese gooseberry (*Averrhoa Carambola*), the wangpee (*Cookia punctata*), and the longan and leechee—are all succeeding as well as could be expected, considering the short time they have been planted. The *Pinus sinensis*, which is met with on the sides of every barren hill, both in the south and north of China, and which is generally badly used by the natives, who lop off its under branches for fuel, is here growing as it ought to do. The Chinese have been prevented, not without some

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difficulty, from cutting off the under branches, and the tree now shows itself in its natural beauty. It does not seem to grow large, but in a young state, with its fine green foliage reaching to the ground, it is not unhandsome.

As the main walk approaches the terrace on which the house stands it turns to the right, between two rows of beautiful yellow bamboos. This species of bamboo is a very striking one, and well worthy of some attention in England; the stems are straight, of a fine yellow colour, and beautifully striped with green, as if done by the hand of a first-rate artist. I sent a plant of it to the Horticultural Society in 1844.

At the bottom of the terrace on which the house stands there is a long narrow bamboo avenue, which is called the "Orchid Walk." This always affords a cool retreat, even at mid-day, as the rays of the sun can only partially reach it, and then they are cooled by the dense foliage. Here are cultivated many of the Chinese orchids and other plants which require shade. Amongst them I observed *Phaius grandifolius*, *Cymbidium sinense* and *aloifolium*, *Aerides odoratum*, *Vanda multiflora* and *teretifolia*, *Renanthera coccinea*, *Fernandezia ensifolia*, *Arundina sinensis*, *Habenaria Susannæ*, a species of *Cypripedium*, and *Spathoglottis Fortuni*. There are also some other plants, such as *Chirita sinensis*, the "man-neen-chung" (a dwarf species of *Lycopodium*, highly prized by the Chinese), and various other things which, taken all together, render this shaded "Orchid Walk" a spot of much interest.

Above the "Orchid Walk" is a green sloping bank, on which are growing some fine specimens of bamboos, *Poinciana pulcherrima*, myrtles, *Gardenias*, oleanders (which thrive admirably in China), *Croton variegatum* and *pictum*, *Magnolia fuscata*, *Olea fragrans*, *Dracaena ferrea*, and *Buddlea Lindleyana*. The latter was brought down from Chusan by me in 1844, and is now common in several gardens on the island, where it thrives well, and is almost always in bloom, although the flower-spikes are not so fine as they are in a colder climate. A large collection of plants in pots are arranged on each side of the broad terrace in front of the mansion. These consist of camellias, azaleas, roses, and such plants as are seen in the Fa-tee gardens at Canton; many of the pots are prettily painted in the Chinese style, and placed upon porcelain stands.

When it is remembered that six years before Hong-kong was but a barren island, with only a few huts upon it, inhabited by pirates or poor fishermen, it is surprising that in so short a time a large town should have risen upon the shores of the bay, containing many houses like palaces, and gardens, too, such as this, which enliven and beautify the whole, and add greatly to the recreation, comfort, and health of the inhabitants.

If we except the troops in the new barracks, the inhabitants generally—at least those who use common precaution—are now enjoying as good health as falls to the lot of our countrymen elsewhere in Eastern countries; but the state of the troops has been, until

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very lately, most melancholy and alarming. General D'Aguilar, when commander-in-chief in the colony, predicted the loss, in three years, of a number equal to the strength of one regiment, and his prediction has been almost verified. This sacrifice of human life is fearful to contemplate. The merchant may complain of the dulness of trade in the colony, the political economist may cry out about its expensiveness, but these matters sink into insignificance when compared with such loss of human life.

The question "Why do soldiers suffer more than other men?" naturally presents itself, and I humbly think it is not difficult to answer. They have not the same occupation for the mind as tradesmen, merchants, and others; of excitement they have little or none; day after day the same dull routine of duty has to be got through, and, in addition to this, they are often exposed to the night air. When some of them get an attack of fever, others who look on become nervous and predisposed to disease, and are soon laid up in hospital with their comrades. And add to all these things the effects of the Chinese spirit called "Samshoo," which drives men mad, and, as Captain Massie, of the "Cleopatra," so justly observed in the Supreme Court, "makes bad men of the best in the ship"

If these are the main causes of fever and death amongst the troops, it surely is not difficult to point out a remedy. The editor of the 'China Mail' justly remarks that "the climate was blamed for much that arose from a blind adherence to regulations