



MISCELLANEOUS.

ENGLAND'S PENAL-COLONY IN THE
ANDAMAN ISLANDS.

OTTO E EHLERS, who visited the islands in 1891, contributes to *Westermann's Monats-Hefte*, Braunschweig, Germany, an interesting description of the English penal-colony and of the aboriginal inhabitants. We translate the following from his paper:

The Andaman Islands are situated in the Bay of Bengal in 9 to 11 degrees N Latitude, and 92 to 93 degrees E. Longitude. The penal-settlement is in South Andaman, and, at the time of my visit, contained 12,197 exiles who had been banished from British India for various serious offenses. Eight thousand and seventy-five were murderers, 44 poisoners, 1,841 robbers, 502 burglars, with a remnant sentenced for numerous offenses, hard to classify.

The scenery of Port Blair is charming. It is indeed a land "where every prospect pleases." A visit to the colony requires the special permission of the Chief Commissioner. The visitor

enjoying the fullest personal freedom and engaged in all sorts of occupations, as clerks, boatmen, gardeners, overseers, night-watchmen in the houses of the Europeans, and God knows what all. Even the local band, although dressed in uniform, was composed wholly of convicts. All the domestic servants from the chief butler to the sweeper are almost without exception, drawn from the ranks of murderers. When I learned that the chief cook of the officers mess was a professional poisoner, it struck me that his selection for the post was a somewhat rash proceeding, but he was a splendid cook, and this had been allowed to outweigh all minor considerations.

The convicts are all incorrigibles and under sentence for life. They receive regular wages for their services, and after fourteen years' good behavior are allowed to take up waste land, or pursue any other occupation and lead the lives of freemen except in so far that they are under police supervision. These "self-supporters," as they are called, are allowed to marry female convicts, or if they were married before sentence, their wives are permitted to rejoin them. Excellent provision is made for the education of the children of these unions. Of the 2,800 of these freemen in



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is landed on Ross Island, at the entrance of the harbor. This island is barely a mile in circumference, is fringed with coco-palms, while the center of the island, which rises about 200 feet, is sprinkled with bungalows in gardens and green trees embowered, the summit being occupied by the residence of the Chief Commissioner and the castellated barracks of a little company of 140 British infantry. In an enclosure lower down are the wooden barracks occupied by 300 men of a Madras infantry regiment. The island is covered with a rich and diversified vegetation—coconut palms, mangoes, casuarinas, acacias, etc., while across the blue waters the enraptured eye rests on an emerald isle rising some 1,200 feet above the sea.

I must say that the penal-colony is something very different from what I had pictured it. I looked for the clank of chains, desperate-looking characters, anxiously watched by soldiers with fixed bayonets, and overseers with cats-o'-nine-tails at hand, and instead I found the convicts on Ross Island well and cheerful, en-

joying the fullest personal freedom and engaged in all sorts of occupations, as clerks, boatmen, gardeners, overseers, night-watchmen in the houses of the Europeans, and God knows what all. Even the local band, although dressed in uniform, was composed wholly of convicts. All the domestic servants from the chief butler to the sweeper are almost without exception, drawn from the ranks of murderers. When I learned that the chief cook of the officers mess was a professional poisoner, it struck me that his selection for the post was a somewhat rash proceeding, but he was a splendid cook, and this had been allowed to outweigh all minor considerations.

No less interesting than the convicts of Port Blair are the native settlers, the Andamanese. Whether they are an indigenous people or a degraded African stock, I will not pretend to determine, but the type resembles the African. I made the acquaintance of those in the southern islands only, the *bojig ngiji*. They are a well-formed, muscular little people, ranging from 4 feet 4 inches to 5 feet high, with woolly hair, coal-black skin, and often pleasant countenances. They live in secluded spots in the woods, in huts consisting of four upright posts, with a steep-sloping roof of leaves behind. They neither cultivate the land nor keep cattle,