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## LITERATURE.

### HISTORY OF THE BRITISH COLONIES.

By R. Montgomery Martin, F. S. S. vol. II.—*The West Indies*. London: Cochran & Crone.

The West Indians have found a judicious historian, and West Indian interests an able advocate, in Mr. Montgomery Martin; no study, however dry—no labour, however severe, daunted him in his investigations: his statistical facts have been derived from the immense piles of Parliamentary returns and reports, printed at various times, whose extent it would be difficult to calculate, and from various manuscript documents, to which he fortunately obtained access. He has also had the advantage of travelling in the countries he describes: and when he speaks from his own experience, we find in him every mark of a shrewd observer, and faithful narrator. To these merits we must oppose one fault: he displays too much of the feelings characteristic of Irishmen, in his advocacy of opinions; he writes with the warm and passionate zeal of a partizan on every topic, and exhibits no tolerance for the doctrines he opposes. This is a fault; for, though we are perfectly persuaded of the author's candour, such heat may inspire others with a suspicion, that he is more anxious to support his theories than to state facts.

From a book containing so much, and such multifarious information, it is difficult to make an extract that will convey a fair notion of its contents; we shall quote, however, a few passages, combining interest with novelty of information. The common opinion of the unhealthiness of Demerara is thus decisively refuted:—

“Demerara has been cited as one of the strongest instances of a deleterious atmosphere, particularly among our West India Colonies, but when we come to examine facts, it turns out otherwise: the range of mortality even among the *labouring* slave population, is about one in thirty-seven to forty, but in London and France it is equal as regards the *whole* population, rich and poor, and in other countries it is even more: thus, in Naples, one in thirty-four, Wirttemberg, one in thirty-three, Paris, one in thirty-two; Berlin, one in thirty-four; Nice, one in thirty-one, Madrid, one in twenty-nine, Rome, one in twenty-five; Amsterdam, one in twenty-four, Vienna, one in twenty-two and a half.” Thus that which is termed our most unhealthy West India Colony has, even as regards its working population, a greater duration of life than the rich and poor of some of the principal parts of Europe.”

The influence of the moon on animal and vegetable life, is a subject that has recently engaged the attention of naturalists; some of the facts recorded by Mr. Martin deserve to be thoroughly investigated.

“In considering the climate of tropical countries, the influence of the moon seems to be entirely overlooked; and surely, if the tides of the vast ocean are raised from their fathomless bed by lunar power, it is not too much to assert that the tides of the atmosphere are liable to a similar influence. This much is certain, that in the low lands of tropical countries, no attentive observer of nature will fail to witness the power exercised by the moon over the seasons, and also over animal and vegetable nature. As regards the latter, it may be stated that there are certainly thirteen springs and thirteen autumns, in Demerara, in the year; for so many times does the sap of trees ascend to the branches, and descend to the roots. For example, the *wallaba*, (a resinous tree, common in the Demerara woods, somewhat resembling mahogany,) if cut in the dark a few days before the *new moon*, it is one of the most durable woods in the world for house-building, posts, &c.; in that state, attempt to split it, and, with the utmost difficulty, it will be riven in the most jagged unequal manner that can be imagined: cut down another *wallaba* (that grew within a few yards of the former,) at *full moon*, and the tree can be easily split into the finest smooth shingles of any desired thickness, or into staves for making casks: but in this state, applied to house-building purposes, it speedily decays. Again—bambos as thick as a man's arm, are sometimes used for paling, &c.; if cut at the dark moon, they will endure for ten or twelve years: if at full moon, they will be rotten in two or three years: thus it is with most, if not all, the forest trees. Of the effects of the moon on animal life, very many instances could be cited. I have seen in Africa, the newly-littered young perish, in a few hours, at the mother's side, if exposed to the rays of the full moon; fish become rapidly putrid, and meat, if left exposed, incurable or un-preservable by salt:—the mariner, heedlessly sleeping on deck, becoming afflicted with nyctopia or night-blindness, at times the face hideously swollen, if exposed during sleep, to the moon's rays, the maniac's paroxysms renewed with fearful vigour at the full and change, and the cold damp chill of the ague supervening on the ascendant of this apparently mild, yet powerful luminary. Let her influence over this earth be studied, it is more powerful than is generally known.”

A very interesting account given of the

native Indians on the main land, a portion of which we quote.

“The animal perceptions of the native Indians of Guyana are astonishingly acute; and their speed in their native woods, and over the most difficult ground, far outstrips that of Europeans—few of whom can keep pace with them, even for a short distance. No European march could ever come into competition with the astonishingly rapid movements of the Indian regiments in the army of Bolivar. An expedition, composed exclusively of Indians, will go over three times the ground in the same time that can be traversed by European troops; and this superiority of locomotion, renders them more than a match for double their numbers, in their native wilds. They can, moreover, live comfortably where European troops must starve, and they require no commissariat.—With 10 pounds of cassavi bread, an Indian can keep the field for three weeks or a month. His gun will be always in order, and his ammunition dry and serviceable. It is impossible to surprise him; and with a commander who can keep pace with him, and in whom he has confidence, the Indian ranger cannot be equalled by the best troops in the known world, for service in a tropical region; and under the burning sun of the line.”

These men are of the same race as the original inhabitants of the islands—but where now are the latter? They have been extirpated by men who not only called themselves civilized, but laid claims to extraordinary piety; we shall not give vent to the feelings suggested by the juxtaposition of the following orders of the Jamaica council:—

“August 14, 1656. ‘An order signed Edward D'Oxley, for the distribution to the army of 1701 Bibles.’”

“August 26, 1659. ‘Order issued this day unto Mr. Peter Pugh, Treasurer, to pay unto John Hoy, the summe of twenty pounds sterling, out of the impost money, to pay for fiteene doggs, bought by him for the hunting of the negroes.’”

*To be Continued.*

*A Burmese Drawing Room.*—This was the day appointed for the ladies of the Burman grandees to pay their homage to the Queen, to make presents, and “ask pardon” for past transgressions, in the same way as their husbands had before done of his Majesty. We were anxious to see a part at least of the ceremonies of a Burmese drawing-room, and accordingly passed by the palace on our return home. A great number of state equipages, that is to say, of palanquins, were waiting at the gate, and with them the ladies' female attendants, scarcely