

RECENT TRAVELS.

SIR JOHN MAUNDEVILLE'S description of the islands of the Malay Archipelago was of that unstinted and unhesitating character, which pleases so well in the narrative of the Arabian traveller Sindbad. "The isle of Java is well inhabited," and "the king of that country," who "hath many times overcome the great chan of Cathay in battle, who is the greatest emperor under the firmament," has a very noble and wonderful palace, "with pavements and stairways of gold and silver."

The king of another island "has as many wives as he will," and is the father of above two hundred children, and the owner of forty thousand elephants, and the ruler over coasts invisible for three days in the year, on account of the quantities of fish which frequent them. One of the curiosities of this realm is "a kind of snails, so great that many persons may lodge in their shells as men would do in a little house"; while in an adjacent dominion a population of men and wo-

men with dog's heads offers a remarkable study to the scientist; and not so very far off is another island inhabited by a race of serpent-eaters, so strangely affected by their diet that "they speak naught, but hiss as serpents do."

It is now above five hundred years since Sir John made his run through the Orient, and the Malay Archipelago has changed with the rest of the world. Mr. Wallace,* the latest traveller in that region, says nothing of the wonders recounted by his predecessor, and we may fairly suppose that the dog-headed and serpent-eating natives have disappeared along with the magnificent potentate, who was a trifle mightier than "the greatest emperor under the firmament." Without absolutely denying that these things may once have been, the modern traveller devotes himself mainly to observation of the present life of the Archipelago, and his own adventures during a sojourn of six years among the Malays. He prefaces his whole work with a chapter on the physical geography of the islands, and to his accounts of the five groups into which he divides it he adds chapters on the natural history of each group. The character of the book, therefore, is scientific rather than popular, and it will not, we think, prove very amusing, save to such readers as like to take a great deal of instruction in their entertainment. Mr. Wallace apparently exhausts a very copious diary in the production of his book, and seems almost to have made it a point of conscience not to leave anything out. This would have done for Sir John Maundeville, but in the present age, we must have some regard to the telegraph, the railroad, and the other "ringing grooves of change." We hope we are not quite saying that Mr. Wallace's hook is dull or too big, for we only mean something like this. It is sometimes characterized by diffuseness and exactness, — the most tedious qual-

ities; but it is perfectly sincere in spirit, and it is usually very agreeable in style. Mr. Wallace is a warm admirer of the Dutch colonial system as he has seen it in operation among the Javanese, which is merely an organization of the native despotism under foreign management. The Javanese chiefs are absolute over the people, and the Dutch president of each district is absolute over the chief. The government owns the coffee plantations, which the peasants cultivate, selling the product to the government at a low, fixed price, and dividing the net profits with their chiefs. Under this system, — which is certainly very simple, to say nothing else of it, — Mr. Wallace tells us the natives are acquiring habits of intelligent industry, and are proving their happiness and prosperity by increasing in number. In Menado, one of the Celebes group, where forty years ago the country was a wilderness, and the people murderous savages, the government and the missionaries have co-operated so well that the inhabitants are now "the best clothed, the best housed, the best fed," and the most industrious and peaceable in the Archipelago, living in pretty villages, surrounded by flourishing fields and gardens. Here, however, population fails to afford due evidence of material prosperity, and Mr. Wallace ascribes the fact to the women's habit of working in the fields. In Borneo, where there are rarely more than three or four children in a family, he attributes the same effect to the same causes, — the crushing toils of agriculture, and the neglect of young children carried afield by their mothers; and he would doubtless be puzzled how to account for a like result here, under totally different circumstances. The Dyaks of Borneo still enjoy the government organized for them by Rajah Brooke, and seem as contented and civilized as their cousins under the paternal Dutch despotism; they are rather lazy, but are perfectly honest and truthful. In other islands, as Lombok of the Timor group, where there is a native government quite uninfluenced by European tradi-

* The Malay Archipelago: the Land of the Orang-utan, and the Bird of Paradise. A Narrative of Travel, with Studies of Man and Nature. By Alfred Russel Wallace. New York: Harper and Brothers.

tions, the people have attained a degree of prosperity as great as that of the inhabitants of Java or Menado, whom they rival in industry, and seem to surpass in skill. At Dobbo, a trading town of an island of the Papuan group, the population shows capacity for self-government, or rather a capacity to maintain a social state independent of all law, which astonished Mr. Wallace.

"I dare say there are now near five hundred people in Dobbo of various races, all met in this remote corner of the East, as they express it, 'to look for their fortune'; to get money any way they can. They are most of them people who have the very worst reputation for honesty, as well as every other form of morality, — Chinese, Bugis, Ceramese, and half-caste Javanese, with a sprinkling of half-wild Papuans from Timor, Babber, and other islands, — yet all goes on as yet very quietly. This motley, ignorant, bloodthirsty, thievish population live here without the shadow of a government, with no police, no courts, and no lawyers; yet they do not cut each other's throats, do not plunder each other day and night, do not fall into the anarchy such a state of things might be supposed to lead to. It is very extraordinary. It puts strange thoughts into one's head about the mountain-load of government under which people exist in Europe, and suggests the idea that we may be over-governed, . . . that, if Dobbo has too little law, England has too much. Here we may behold in its simplest form the genius of commerce at the work of civilization. Trade is the magic that keeps all at peace, and unites these discordant elements into a well-behaved community. All are traders, and all know that peace and order are essential to successful trade, and thus a public opinion is created which puts down all lawlessness."

These are conditions and ideas from which we may draw some hope for the future of such anarchical communities as New York; though as yet the non-execution of law there does not seem attended with the civic prosperity which

distinguishes the absence of law in Dobbo. Mr. Wallace would perhaps explain this difficulty by saying that New York is made up of civilized elements. He is a firm believer, not in the noble, but the happy, savage, and, in closing his last chapter, — an interesting essay on the races of man in the Malay Archipelago, — he declares that we have not advanced *en masse* beyond the savages in morality, while in England, where one tenth of the population are paupers or criminals; where "money fines are retained as a punishment," and "the very first steps to obtain justice are a matter of expense," — in either case a denial of justice to the poor; where a great landholder may legally convert his property into a forest, and thus practically destroy his fellow-creatures, the tenants; where the manufacturing system, commerce, and crowded cities support and renew a mass of human misery and crime *absolutely* greater than ever existed before, — the average lot of man is harder than in a state of barbarism, as well as more immoral. "This is not a result to boast of, or to be satisfied with; and, until there is a more general recognition of this failure of our civilization, — resulting mainly from our neglect to train and develop more thoroughly the sympathetic feelings and moral faculties of our nature, and to allow them a larger share of influence in our legislation, our commerce, and our whole social organization, — we shall never, as regards the whole community, attain to any real or important superiority over the better class of savages."

There is sense in this; but if it is all true, we do not quite see why the Dutch are to be praised for their civilization of the Malays, who would have been so much happier as barbarians.

We have touched upon some points, out of a great many in Mr. Wallace's book, which interest the mere human being uncontaminated by science; and we cheerfully abandon to the learned or sophisticated man a vast amount of information relative to the animals and vegetation of the Archipelago, with the

single remark that the author is a Darwinist, and meets everywhere abundant evidence to sustain the famous Theory. He leaves us uncertain whether to pronounce the Malays greatly wronged by the popular impressions of their *amoking* and *krissing*, and general blood-thirstiness, or to believe that all their wickedness has not yet been found out. But a reasonable inference from what he says would be, that they are a race rather reckless than cruel, rather indifferent than destructive to human life. They are industrious and generally peaceable, taciturn, and somewhat melancholy, with a vein of heroism. It is this which inspires them in desperate turns of affairs to *amok*, and to take the consequence of being certainly killed in their murderous career,—with, however, all the poetical advantages of death on a battle-field. Mr. Wallace did not learn so much of their customs as he might have done, and once took a walk into the country in order to shun the sensation of beholding the fate of two erring lovers, who by the Malay law were to be thrown into the sea together. We are not sure that even a travelling journalist like Mr. Coffin,* who has seen something of the same race, would have reported the incident; but, if he had done so, we feel certain that we should all have read of it with avidity, in pages which suggest the newspaper in more ways than one.

* Our New Way Round the World. By Charles Carleton Coffin. Fully illustrated. Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co.