A LETTER FROM
CAPTAIN LIGHT
TO
LORD CORNWALLIS
1788
C.E WURTBURG
1938
A LETTER FROM CAPTAIN LIGHT TO LORD CORNWALLIS,
DATED 20th JUNE, 1788.

Communicated by C. E. Wurtzbug.

TO EARL CORNWALLIS, K.G.

MY LORD,

I beg leave to Address your Lordship as Earl Cornwallis, and to offer the following remarks on the general state of Commerce, and Politics, in these Countries, for your Lordship's information.

I have made it my most serious consideration, and after examining it in every point of view, I cannot discover any probable mode of reimbursing the expense of this Settlement, at so very early a period. The Inhabitants have not yet finished their Houses and much labour is yet required, to clean the Lands, and fit them for Cultivation, so as to obtain a profit.

To lay a Duty upon Imports and Exports, however small, will in some measure retard the intention of Government, in rendering this Port a Magazine of Commerce; The charge of collecting will consume the greatest part of the collections, and a spirit of smuggling will be introduced, whose Evils are innumerable.

It is to be considered, likewise, the great risque, and danger the Malays experience in bringing their Goods to this Market, in opposition to the Orders of the Dutch, and the Arbitrary restrictions of their own Princes; The profits and conveniences must overbalance these apparent dangers to give the result in our favour.

If the Captains of Ships find they can buy cheaper, and sell dearer, at the Malay ports, than they can here, and this difference sufficient to make them overlook the trouble and delays attending the change, they will only come here in case of accidents or distress.

The Malays if they find Goods in no greater variety here, than in a Ship, and the profits reduced by Dutys equal to Malacca, will prefer going to a Port where they have no risque, and where, tho' their Profits are small, they are sure of meeting with a great choice of Commodities.

A Country producing no interior resources, but happily situated for the intercourse of Foreigners, to constitute, this, a Port of Commerce, and to force, in a manner, Merchants to send their Commodities here in preference to old accustomed Markets, great allurements must be given, in advance, the freedom of the Port, security of Property, convenient Repositorys, liberty of Traffic, and gentle treatment. These are the first and most obvious means and with time alone will most certainly succeed, but to advance with a greater rapidity than the common course
of contingent event, offer, a sufficient fund of Stock is necessary to enable the residing Merchant, to purchase everything which comes without waiting for a certainty of Sale or Profit, the first essay is attended with loss but the celerity with which News is conveyed soon bring those variety of Articles and Traders which enables the Merchant to exchange at a very small profit, on each, encreasing and extending his Capital, and concerns, and laying a solid foundation for Government to draw resources.

The Person who confines himself to the sale of a single Investment, cannot be reckoned a Merchant, his Ideas are confined to simple objects, and his information gives only a single trait to the investigation of Trade, He knows not where the Articles he takes on board are produced, nor thro' what various changes, and channels, they are brought to him, he makes no enquiry into the state of the Country, and everything not immediately relative to Profit, and Loss, makes no more impression on his Brain, than the Wave which passes under the Vessels Bottom: His acquaintance is with the Merchant and the Interpreter, He looks upon the Inhabitants however high in Rank no better than his Lascars, and treats them with much the same contempt; He either damns the Place as good for nothing or exaggerates, the good qualities, equally distant from truth.

These evils have prevented Government from acquiring that intelligence, necessary, either for applying remedies, or, preventives to the casual decline, of particular branches of Commerce.

To enter into a minute detail of the causes from whence the present difficulties proceed, requires a great length of retrospection and a general knowledge of the former Imports, and Exports, in the several Ports in India, and the various modes of conveying them, if the researches are made within the space of 50 years, records are perhaps in being, from which information may be drawn of the quantity of Bullion, and Merchandize, imported into Indostan from the East, an inspection into our own conduct and that of our neighbours will lead to an information of the causes which has destroyed this valuable trade, and enable Government to adopt some steady Plan for restoring the mutual exchange, of the various productions, of India, and until a Plan is adopted, the Trade will remain in a declining state and the endeavours of private adventurers will be very precarious if not certain loss.

The various Manufacturers of the Western part of India are well known, the qualities except a very few destined for Europe, continue the same.

The Manufactures of the Eastern part are never exported over the Bay of Bengal, but confined within themselves, but the Produce of these Countrys are in use all over India, China, and Europe: As the Malays have little knowledge of Navigation, and their Vessels constructed for Coasting Voyage, they cannot transport their own productions, Commodiously, beyond

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the straits of Malacca. The Moors and Gentoos transpoted the Manufactures of Indostan to the nearest Malay Ports, and most frequented, each Vessel carried a number of Passengers, who had Manufactured their own Goods, their Profits were considerable, and they returned laden with the productions of the East, these not only supplied the consumption of the Coal, but were conveyed inland, the Dutys added to the Public Revenue, and the Merchat rendered Affluent. It is well known the Merchants of India never carried Specie to purchase any of the Commodity of the East, it was a Barter of one Commodity for another.

The default of this General exchange seems to be one great cause of the present distress, and this cause probably, proceeding, from the great change Europeans have occasioned in endeavouring to monopolize, not only the Revenue, but the Trade of the several Countrys, they are admitted into.

If the Wars between the French and English, well nigh, ruined the Coast of Coromandel, the Dutch who had the sole power in the East, and without Rivals, were not idle. Under pretence of preserving the Spice Trade, a considerable number of Vessels were employed to examine the Prows which sailed from the Celebes, and Borneo, and to prevent the Tin, of Banca, from being smuggled: These Vessels ill paid, and Commanded by the lowest People, became Pirates, and Smugglers, as it suited their conveniency. Their Custom is to order the Naqueda on board, to examine his Pass, which they frequently take from him and then plunder his Vessel, and they sometimes meet with resistance, their Barbarity proceeds so far, as to destroy the whole Crew. This is a matter of fact proved by the Testimony of those who have escaped by swimming to Land. These obstructions to free Navigation were felt by the Dutch themselves. The Buggesses irritated by frequent Plunders took every opportunity of seeking revenge, and massacred the Dutch whenever they could obtain a Superiority. Commerce gradually declined and the Customs of Batavia no longer yielded a Revenue to the General and Edelers, they were barely sufficient to pay the Company's assessment: The several Chiefs were taxed high to make up the deficiency, these again plundered the Country, committed to their care, the People groaning under burdens intolerable made frequent attempts to revolt. The Dutch always informed, before any great body could be collected, either prevented the Storm by bribing some of the Chiefs, to betray others, or seized upon the Rajas before they had time to secure a retreat; Death or Banishment to some distant Country was their punishment.

Several of the Buggessee Princes established themselves in the Straits of Malacca, at Salengore, and Rheo for the conveniency of Selling their own Manufactures and purchasing those of India.

The Dutch looked with extreme envy on the sudden encrease of Trade at Rheo; The Commanders of our Vessels always calling
at Malacca either for refreshment or to meet the Ships going to China, the Dutch obtained a pretty exact account of what they had sold and bought so that they were better acquainted with our interest in this Trade than any of our own Governors. Rheo became an object of Complaint and served as an excuse to their Directors, to cover their own Misdemeanours.

Hence the Letter to all the Malay Princes not to allow any Europeans to Trade in their Ports but to carry the Tin and Pepper to Batavia, this letter was treated with derision, but the destruction of Rheo and Salengore have convinced the Malays that no dependence can be placed on Commercial Friendships, had the Dutch benefited themselves by the destruction of so many Bugessee Princes, and Merchants it would have appeared more rational, but in order to deprive the English of a Trade which they took not the least pains to secure, or continue, the Dutch have equally distressed themselves.

To secure a Monopoly they have recourse to Arms, this has occasioned extraordinary expenses which obliges them to load their Settlements, in Java, with new Imposts and prohibitions, a Temporary relief, which in the end, will encrease their distress by lessning the Cultivation of Rice, and Sugar.

The Productions of the East, and Western, parts of India, so very different, yet so essential that the exchange cannot be obstructed, without manifest injury to both, brings the relative Interest of the Dutch, and English Companys, to so close a connection that the one cannot proceed in a train of error, without Injuring the Welfare of the other.

The present desultory, and Piratical, mode the English carry on a small Trade with the East, for the sake of remittances, is neither profitable, nor honorable, the mode taken by the Dutch to preserve this Trade, is still less so, as it is accompanied with act of Barbarity, disgraceful, to humanity, it is scarce probable that Men actuated as the Batavia Governor is by a Spirit of envy, and Revenge, will ever admit the interest of their rivals as necessary to their own, it must be an assembly of clear dispassionate Men, only who can work a Restoration to the Commerce of India.

The English have great possessions in India, to maintain which they have been, and are still, at very great Military Expence; Their Power and Resources enable them to support the present evils with more dignity, than their Neighbours, but their great debts, and annual Remittances, for Europe, require the assistance of Foreign Aids, without which the wisest regulations joined to industry, the Public Spirit, will hardly keep them from sinking.

There is not I believe any instance of the Merchants in Calcutta, having gained any profit by prosecuting the trade by remittance to China, from the first Commencement, and at the Time Rheo was in great repute, it was the Miseries of Madras that enabled a few to repair their losses, and return to Europe with
Fortunes. Rheo however well situated for a connection with the East, under a Malay Government, was an unprofitable Market for the Europeans, for this reason, the Merchants seldom met each other, the bargain was made thro' the King: In the hands of the Dutch it will be a barrier to the China Seas and Eastern Trade, and an object of terror to the Malays, and a melancholy, memento, to the British Traders, that the Port might once have been their.

It is probable the present reestablishment of Government in Holland, may occasion a new Treaty of alliance with Great Britain, and as both Nations have great Commercial interests to secure in India, the Basis of this treaty to insure its stability ought to be mutually advantageous.

The Dutch claim the sole privilege of vending Spices, and to the exportation and imports, in the several Ports in the Island of Java and the Ports of Pallambay, Macasser, Banjer, Masseen, Pontiano.

Should the English agree to their free, and undisturbed possessions, on the Spice Islands, and Celebes, and forbid their subjects to navigate to any Port in the East but such as shall be expressly nominated in the treaty the Dutch ought in return for so much condescension, to evacuate Rheo, Mompava, Succadanea, and all other Places taken since the year 1798, they should admit a free Navigation to the Buggesses and Malays prohibiting only the Sale of Spices, this and the giving up Negapatam to the Dutch would put the two Companies on the same footing they were in the year 1760.

The People of Holland are ignorant of their great Obligations to the English, in forbearing to assist or countenance their Enemies at a time when their Settlements were so eakly guarded that the smallest exertion on our part would have occasioned their destruction, it is acknowledged by themselves that had so small a Force as two Hundred Men joined the Malays at Rheo. Malacca would have been lost, and Batavia in the greatest danger, all their Allies would have deserted them, and they must have fallen a sacrifice before assistance could arrive from Europe. The Malays are no less astonished than the Dutch at our tamely submitting every Port of Commerce to be taken and shut up from all communication.

If the Dutch agree to abandon Rheo, they will not easily consent to the English possessing it, but wish it to be kept in a state of indigence and unfrequented, it was the English Traders who brought Rheo into repute, they had then no certain place to frequent, but wandered from Place to Place in search of purchasers, and meeting the Malays in uninhabited Places like Thieves gathered together to divide their Spoil. The Malay Chief equally disposed to trade or Plunder, performed either, as circumstances permitted, this is precisely the case at present and must continue so, as long as the Dutch obstruct the Navigation and the English refuse to make any alliances however advantageously offered to them.

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The evacuation of Rheo by the Dutch, and the restoring the liberty of navigation to the Buggesses, and Malays, will fully answer every purpose towards bringing a share in this extensive commerce to the English and Natives of India. The Port of Penang is conveniently situated and more agreeable to the Buggesses, for these reasons, they will be free of those restrictions which the two Kings of Rheo laid on them, they will meet not only the Opium and Manufactures of Bengal, but those of Coromandel, they will sell their own Manufactures to the Malays, and dispose of their Gold which is an Article of great moment, to the Chooliars.

The Buggesses come from Wadjoo a Country on the South side of the Island Celebes, they are totally free and independent of the Dutch, their Prows are from 15 to 25 Tons and carry 40 to 50 Men, the greatest part of whom are Freighters, their Cargo consists of Cloth, Gold, Dollars, and some few knives and Creeses, with ornament much esteemed by the Malays. Each Prow's value at a medium is 20,000 Sp. Ds. Seventy Sail of these Prows used to visit the Straits of Malacca returning home with Cargoes of Opium and Piece Goods to the amount of 1 Million and half of Dollars. The Tin and Pepper and produce of Borneo were brought by the Soyads who navigated in Vessels of 150 to 200 Tons.

This Trade diffused itself all over India extending from Surat to Bengal.

The Chinese had a share, they imported annually to the amount of 2,50,000 Dollars, and returned with double the value in Tin, Pepper, Rattans and a variety of Gruff Articles unknown to Europeans.

Inclusive of these was the Trade of Acheen, and a number of small countries on the Coast of Sumatra and Malay.

From Java was imported Rice, Sugar, Arrack, Tobacco, Salt, Sago, Brass Artillery, Clothes and Batta Handkerchiefs in about 4000 Tons of Shipping, value of their Cargoes about 2,50,000 Dls. The Moors of India purchased their Vessels from Java.

The Trade from the Coast of Coromandel to the Straits employed upwards of 40 Sail of Vessels, their Imports to the Straits is valued at 5 Lac of Pagodas and their returns were more than 1/3 in Gold.

Siam imported Annually between 3 and 4 Lacs of Rupees in Piece Goods, 2/3 of which were from Surat and 1/3 from Massulipatam.

The great number of People Ships and Prows employed in this Trade, enabled the Rajas to obtain a considerable Revenue without immoderate exactions and prohibitions. Provisions of all kinds were so very plentiful, that, to speak of it now, the difference would appear incredible.

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The Rajas deprived of their Revenue which consisted in profits upon particular Articles of Commerce Dutys and Presents, are constrained to procure a necessary maintenance to seek it in loans, fines and a Monopoly of the produce of the Country, this introduces disaffection, complaint, jealousys, and Broils and Piracies.

If the Countrys of Tanjore and Arcot suffer no diminution of Revenue, or no inconvenience is felt from the want of this Trade, or the importation of Gold, then is the Sale of Opium and Remittances to China the only object to be considered.

The present consumption of Opium is in China 2,500, Batavia and the Eastern Islands 2,000, Peninsula of Malay and Island Sumatra 1,750. The demand for this Article among the Malays continues nearly the same, the several prohibitions and restrictions still remaining. But among the Chinese it increases with astonishing rapidity, the venality of the Mandareens invalidating the laws of the Empire, making the importation as easy to the Subject as if it were a licensed article, the Price only will vary according as Circumstances and seperate Interests operate.

If the Dutch will not consent to such a Treaty with the English as will allow the latter a Trade with the Malays excluding the Spices, there appears no other remedy but that of making alliances with such Princes as are still independent, and giving their Merchants a safe Convoy to our Port, without either of these steps a Settlement, wherever it is formed will have but a very precarious supply of Trade and cannot be supposed capable of affording the necessary charges of its' support.

Under the present difficulties, the Island Penang, can only be considered as a safe and secure Harbour for Ships in distress where they may refit and be supplied with refreshments, and a Place of refuge to such of the Natives as are drove from their Homes, it is convenient for Merchants to send out small advantures to the few Places that remain undestroyed by the Dutch, and as a convenient Mart of exchange for the Country Ships to transfer their Cargoes on board Vessels bound to China.

The present Plan adopted by the Government of Batavia to become the only purchasers of all the productions of the East, and the restricting all other Europeans from trading to any other Ports than Batavia and Malacca, may either proceed from a supposition that they have an inherent right to this exclusive priviledge, and that the Countrys East of the Bay of Bengal are without distinction, their Property, or that they conceive the other Powers too weak to give them any disturbance; The Dutch Company are no doubt informed that this is the only means by which their Credit and Affluence can be restored, they will too soon be convinced of the fallacy of these hopes, and will find expenses instead of Profits and an increase of Enemys that will oblige them to augment their Military Establishment to defend deserted...
Settlements. Were the Offenders the only sufferers it would be impertinent in me to have given your Lordship so much trouble but as in all great errors of Government the innocent suffer with the Guilty so the distress occasioned by this extraordinary attempt will not be felt by the Dutch and Malays alone it will pervade all the Trading Ports of India.

I have the Honor to be with the greatest Respect

My Lord

Your Lordship's most faithful Servant

(Signed). FRANCIS LIGHT.

PRINCE OF WALES'S ISLAND,

June 20th, 1788.
A Brief Account of the several countries surrounding Prince of Wales's Island with their production.

Recd. from Captain Leight.

Enclosed in Lord Cornwallis's letter to Mr. Dundas, dated 7th January, 1789.

Communicated by C. E. Wurtzburg.

A Brief report of the Several Countries, with their Productions, surrounding Prince of Wales's Island.

SIAM.

Governed by momentary Laws under the despotic Will of two Tyrants the King and his Brother: its principal commerce is with China. At War with Ava. Present demand of Surat and Coast Piece Goods from 60 to 80,000 Drs. Annually.

CHANTEBOON

a Sea Port of Siam bordering on Cambodia formerly traded with China, the Produce now sent to Bancock. Produces Rice, Pepper, Super Ivory, Gamboze Agala, Redwood, Ebony Timber, Rattans, Dammer, Oil, Wax. Cherong—now reduced to little consequence—Plundered by Pia Jac in '66.

CHIA

Province West of Siam—produces Cotton, Dyes, Birdsnest, Salt Fish Dryed, Shrimps—Manufactures Silk and Cotton Clothes—Plundered and destroyed by the Burmers 1787.

SANGORA

A Sea Port of Pattany now subject to him inhabited chiefly by Chinese—exports the produce of the Peninsula of Malacca to China serves as a carrying place from the Straits of Malacca overland.

PATTANY

Destroyed by the Siamese—the Inhabitants dispersed—Produce—Elephants, Cattle, Ivory, Wax, Gold, Slaves, Honey. Manufactures Silk and Gold Cloths, Trade with Queda, Tringano and Sangora.

LIGORE

a Sea Port—a Kingdom belonging to Siam taken and Plundered by Pia Jac, last by the Burmers principal trade with the Chinese and Zueda—Produce—Gold, Tin, Elephants, Rice, Ivory, Wax, now in Ruins.

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Malay Port,—chief trade with China produces pepper, Gold and some Tin. Yearly Exports 30,000 Sp. Ds.

PAHANG Malay Port—produces Gold belongs to the King of Jahore unfrequented.

JAHORE Destroyed by the Dutch—produces Sago—wholly unfrequented.

RHEO a Port on the Island Bintang belongs to Jahore, taken by the Dutch, retaken by the Malays, and deserted, now Fortifying by the Dutch, produces nothing but Gutta Gamba, not even Provision. This Port was of little consequence until the year 70 when Raja Soyad and Raja Hadejec made it the Rendezvous of the Buggess Prows, it then became the general mart for the Junks and ships bound to China.

ANDIAGERY a River on the East Side of Sumatra frequented by Malays only produces Gold.

SIAK a Large River opposite Malacca produces Gold, Wax, Sago, Masts and Timber—a Place of considerable Trade in alliance with Malacca.

BATTUBAR a Malay Port much frequented by Thieves produces Rattans, Wax, and pepper.

LANGKATT a small Port in Sumatra unknown to Europeans—produces Pepper, Tin, Rice, and a Pale Gold favorably situated for an inland Trade.

ACHEE PEDIR The Coast from Diamond Point to Acheen the most valuable of all the coast of Sumatra from its high state of cultivation and number of Inhabitants—produces Gold, pepper, Rice, Beetle-nut, Wax, Brimstone Benjamin, Oil, Sapan and Salar Woods, Dammer, Cattle. Exports from 4 to 500,000 Sp. Ds. in pepper and Beetle-nut—at present engaged in War with their King.

ACHEEN a large Bay, the Residence of the King, and Port of Exchange—receives the Produce of the East and West Coast Principal Trade with Najow and Porto Novo—this part produces very few articles for exportation, but is exceedingly Populous remarkably fertile and well cultivated—The whole Trade is in the hands of the Kings Merchants.