

**THE EAST INDIA SKETCH-BOOK:
COMPRISING AN ACCOUNT OF
THE PRESENT STATE OF SOCIETY
IN CALCUTTA, BOMBAY, &C; IN
TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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RICHARD BENTLEY

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THE
EAST INDIA
SKETCH-BOOK:

COMPRISING AN
ACCOUNT OF THE PRESENT STATE OF SOCIETY
IN CALCUTTA, BOMBAY, &c.

The poor exile
Feels, in each action of the varied day,
His doom of banishment. The very air
Cools not his brow as in his native land;
The scene is strange, the food is loathly to him;
The language, nay, the music, jars his ear.
WALTER SCOTT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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INTRODUCTORY.

INDIA, the land of enchantment,—the treasure-house from which imagination culls its brightest images of splendour,—the “golden orient,” glittering in the best brilliance of sun and song,—peopled by the creations of “The Arabian Nights,”—the Chersonese, abounding “in gold and silver, and all manner of precious stones,”—land of promise and hope!

What a vintage seems in the perspective to invite the hand of the reaper! Its fragrance is wafted over hills and oceans, and there *are* reapers also who have gathered and tasted, and found the harvest—dust and ashes!

We have enough of the blessed sunshine to wither away the flowers of life, and palsy the

best energies of the mind,—and we have wherewithal to eat and drink with what appetite we may.

One can almost hear the ebbing of the waves of time as they roll heavily and sultrily away. Yet what a field for the exercise of a laudable curiosity is spread out around us! Strange, wonderful in their unchangeableness, is the race amidst whom we dwell! We wander, as it were, amongst the patriarchs of ancient days;—we travel back three thousand years into the past,—we are contemporaries of the ages that entombed the Pharaohs. The “oxen tread out the corn around us,” and “the camels go to water at the well,” and “two women are grinding corn at the mill;” and familiarity makes us forget that these things were thus when the steward of Abraham first met the fair Rebekah at even-tide, on his journey for the bride of his master’s heir.

Therefore,—the fiend *ennui* glaring horribly from the opposite corner of my little writing-table,—the *cacoethes scribendi* being full on me,—the very silence of the air tempting to

contemplation, and to the delightful wandering of unfettered thought,—to airy projects of some work of fancy that may not be all unworthy of this Augustan æra—; therefore will I also essay to be “one of the Prophets.”

What, then, shall I write? “Ay, there’s the rub!” A series of “Essays on the Statistics, Economy, Political and Moral, of British India, &c.?” Pshaw!—the dear Public never read such things now-a-days; THE COURT have no desire that the secrets of Eastern diplomacy should be revealed, and the few are more deeply initiated than I am. Besides, who writes for the few? A novel—a sketch—a caricature—letters—dramas—why not all?

My hand fell on Milman’s “Belshazzar,” and I read, devoured, and hoped to catch the inspiration. What a pity one forgets so often the effects of a visit to the “*Regia Solis!*” In virtue of this forgetfulness I took courage, and dared the plunge. *There* was the lofty Temple of Bel, with its seven ascending halls, and before *me* lay the vastness of the deep, the