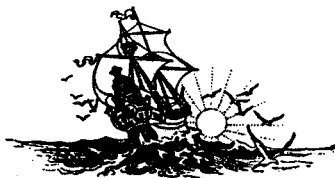


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TRAVELS IN INDIA,
CEYLON AND BORNEO

BASIL HALL

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The Broadway Travellers

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CAPTAIN BASIL HALL

By Raeburn

[front.]

THE BROADWAY TRAVELLERS

EDITED BY SIR E. DENISON ROSS
AND EILEEN POWER

CAPTAIN BASIL HALL

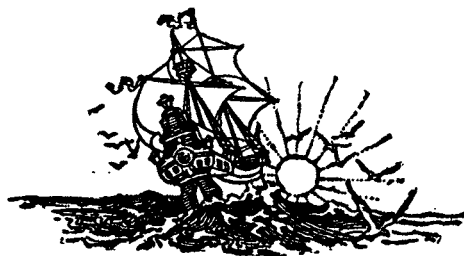
R.N., F.R.S.

TRAVELS IN INDIA
CEYLON AND BORNEO

*Selected and edited with a
Biographical Introduction by*

PROFESSOR H. G. RAWLINSON

Indian Educational Service



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PREFACE

Captain Basil Hall's *Fragments of Voyages and Travels* originally appeared in nine volumes. They are of a most miscellaneous character, dealing with almost every conceivable topic bearing upon life at sea, arranged with little idea of order. As it was impossible to reprint the whole of the work in this series, it was decided to select what appeared to be most entertaining portion,—the author's experiences in India, Ceylon and Borneo. The present work, therefore, comprises chapters I, VI, and VII of Volume II of the Second Series, and Volume II of the Third Series of the *Fragments*.

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CAPTAIN BASIL HALL, R.N., F.R.S.

TRAVELS IN INDIA, CEYLON, AND BORNEO

INTRODUCTION

CAPTAIN BASIL HALL, R.N., the subject of this memoir, was the second son of Sir James Hall, Fourth Baronet of Dunglass, Haddingtonshire, [1761-1832]. The house in which he was born was built on the site of an ancient castle on the Berwick Burn, a stream which witnessed many border skirmishes between English and Scots in the old days. It is a spot pregnant with historic memories. It was the last place in Scotland at which a Scottish king slept, for here James IV passed his last night before crossing the Border to become James I of England. It was the "Ravenswood" of Sir Walter Scott's famous novel, and is described by Robert Burns as one of the most beautiful places he ever saw. Sir James was a remarkable man. Educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, he afterwards went over to Brienne to stay with a relation, William Hamilton of Bangour. He attended classes at the Military School, and here he met Napoleon Buonaparte, also a pupil there, and was "the first Englishman Napoleon ever saw." He held advanced opinions, and in 1791 crossed over to Paris to study the French Revolution, where he came into contact with Robespierre, the Abbé Sieyès, Condorcet, and the famous chemist Lavoisier, with whom he found much in common. Cockburn, in his *Memorials*, speaks of Sir James as being "the most scientific of our country gentlemen," held in great admiration by all deep

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philosophers, and describes his house in George Street as, "distinguished by its hospitality both to science and fashion."

Early in life he turned his attention to geology ; he was the first scientist to test geological hypotheses by practical experiments in the laboratory. From geology he passed on to the study of Gothic architecture, where he anticipated Ruskin by endeavouring to shew that all Gothic architectural forms were derived from simple wattle-buildings, the arch from flexible poles tied together, crockets from sprouting buds on willow-staves and so forth. Basil Hall, when travelling in the Mysore jungles, found an apt illustration of his father's theories in the graceful avenues of overarching bamboos. "It seemed," he said, "as if I were travelling amid the clustered column of some enormous and enchanted Gothic cathedral, compared to which, the Minster of York, or the cathedral at Winchester, would have seemed mere baby-houses."¹ He sat for some years in the House of Commons. Sir James Hall had, by his marriage with Helen, daughter of the Earl of Selkirk, three sons and three daughters. The boys inherited their father's talents. John, the eldest was F.R.S. James, the second, the friend of Sir David Wilkie and Sir Walter Scott, was a well-known painter of portraits and Scottish scenery. Basil, born December 31, 1788, was the most gifted of the trio. He came into the world, he tells us, on a night of violent storm. The tempest, he thinks, got into his blood; "long before I shipped a pair of trousers, I felt that a salt-water destiny was to be mine." He derived little benefit from his education at Edinburgh High School, where the tawse, the Scotch counterpart for the birch, was chiefly relied upon for the inculcation of knowledge. He read, however, a good deal in his own way, though he

¹ See pp. 223-4, *infra*.

INTRODUCTION

spent the term in counting the days until the time would arrive when he would once more find himself "at sunrise in a fishing boat, half a league from the coast, surrounded by congenial spirits, fellows who had no idea of grammar." The joyous excitement of this prospect placed the dull drudgery of syntax in sad contrast. When not spending the night in fishing-boats—often, as he confesses, violently sea-sick!—the boy was roaming about the rock-bound cliffs at Dunglass, dreaming as he gazed on Fast Castle, [the Wolf's Crag of the *Waverley Novels*] and all the panorama of sea and sky and multi-coloured sails of that romantic coast. Not infrequently his dreams were rudely disturbed by scenes of real tragedy : wrecks upon that cruel shore, not yet lighted by the genius of the elder Stevenson, were then terribly frequent.¹ About this time he read Shakespeare, chiefly, he owns, because the *Tempest* and other plays have nautical passages in them such as the one about the shipboy reposing on the high and giddy mast, which were congenial to a "sailor-elect." Young Hall, like others after him, wondered where Shakespeare picked up his seamanship, which he considers wonderfully correct. One day his father introduced the lad as "a future brother seaman," to the great Duncan of Camperdown, and the old veteran won the boy's heart for ever by showing him the flag he captured from *De Winter* on October 11, 1797.

On June 12, 1802, Master Basil realised the ambition of his young life, when he found himself, arrayed in new uniform and dirk, in the cockpit of H.M. frigate *Leander*, fifty guns, flagship of Sir Andrew Mitchell, Commander-in-Chief of the North American Station. There were fourteen midshipmen in all. "We were very merry in this dark hole, where there are only two candles," he writes to his father. The *Leander* sailed for Halifax in July. "A pretty

¹ R. L. Stevenson, *A Family of Engineers*, Chap. III.

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ship of her class, and permanently endeared to the memory of all who sailed on board, especially to those who first went to sea in her," notes Hall who, years after, remembered "every corner about her—every beam—every cabin—every gun."

Life in the Navy in those days was as exciting and eventful as in the Great War a century later, and while cruising in a fog off Bermuda, the *Leander* found herself almost abreast of the *Ville de Milan*, which was making off with the *Cleopatra*, just captured after a smart fight. The *Ville de Milan*, taken utterly by surprise, surrendered without firing a shot! Shortly after this Sir George Berkeley, who succeeded to the command, transferred his flag to the *Leopard* taking Hall with him. In 1803 the *Leopard* returned home, and Hall passed his lieutenant's examination, an amusing farce of which he gives an entertaining account. He was now promoted to the *Endymion*, commander the Hon. Thomas Bladen Capel, "one of the finest, if not the very finest, frigates afloat," and shortly afterwards, proceeded to Corunna with reinforcements for Sir John Moore. At Corunna, to his great delight, Lieutenant Hall obtained permission to land. He was with the troops during the whole of the day's engagement, which he describes very vividly, saw Sir John Moore and Sir David Baird carried off the field, and witnessed the embarkation. Afterwards, he and his brother officers spent their time in administering to the wants of the exhausted soldiers on board, with truly naval hospitality. His future chief, Sir Samuel Hood, was in charge of these operations.

In 1812, Basil Hall was transferred to the East India Station. With his keen interest in everything new, and his unique powers of observation, Hall plunged with avidity into the study of his novel and romantic surroundings. "No buccaneer indeed," he says, "ever sought 'El Dorados in the sky' with more

INTRODUCTION

fervour than I longed to visit those brilliant scenes." He had as a passenger Sir Evan Nepean, the new Governor of Bombay. The voyage, on the old *Volage*, acting as part of the escort to a convoy of East India-men, was a slow one. Leaving in March, they reached Bombay in August. Hall describes the passage and its incidents, the Madeira islands, the Trades, the Cape, Johanna, porpoise-catching and the like, in his usual lively style. On his arrival at Bombay, he was sent on to Trincomalee, where he was transferred, as Fifth Lieutenant, to the *Illustrious*, flagship of Admiral Sir Samuel Hood, a veteran sailor belonging to a famous naval family.

Sir Samuel Hood had had an extraordinary career, typical of the "fighting Hoods", who did so much to make our navy's reputation during the French wars of the 18th century. These included Sir Samuel and his brother, Alexander, who served in Captain Cook's voyage in 1772, and was killed in action 1798; the famous Viscount Samuel Hood, who made his name under Rodney in the West Indies; and his almost equally famous brother, Admiral Alexander Hood, Lord Bridport. A descendant, Rear-Admiral Hood, went down in the *Invincible* at Jutland, *more majorum*, while leading the 3rd Battle Cruiser Squadron into action. *Stirbt ein held.* Sir Samuel had been present at Ushant in 1778; at the actions off Martinique, Cape Henry, St. Kitts, Dominica, and Mona Passage, 1781-2; he had served under Nelson at Santa Cruz and the Nile: captured St. Lucia and Tobago, 1803; lost an arm off Rochefort in 1805; fought at Copenhagen in 1807, and taken part in the operations to embark Sir John Moore's troops at Corunna in 1809. In 1812, he was sent to command the East India Station. In Sir Samuel Hood, Basil Hall found a chief after his own heart. Gifted with an inexhaustible love of adventure, an unbounded curiosity, and a fund

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of humour, the gallant admiral was intent on seeing and trying everything he came across in the course of his travels. "There was ever observable," writes Hall, "a boyish hilarity about this great officer, which made it equally delightful to serve officially under him, and to enjoy his friendly companionship; in either case, we always felt certain of making the most of our opportunities." Whether they were engaged in digging out a white ant's nest, or exploring Ceylon rivers for precious stones, hunting crocodiles on foot, or ascending a Borneo creek to visit a local Sultan, Sir Samuel was always to the fore, nor was Lady Hood ever behind-hand in sharing her husband's adventures. The "Sam Hood school" became proverbial in the Navy. This gallant officer eventually paid the penalty for his love of travel. He died in Madras in 1814, of a violent jungle fever contracted in Seringapatam, probably while sleeping in Tipu Sultan's palace, which was notoriously unhealthy. Even to-day, Seringapatam has a bad reputation for malaria. The complaint was aggravated by exposure to the sun: the Admiral, finding his palanquin bearers not ready, actually walked a stage of the road on foot.¹ On his deathbed he said to Lieutenant Walcott, his faithful follower in many actions, "It will be hard, Walcott to die in this cursed place: but should I go off, let nothing deter you from going home and accounting to the Admiralty for my command of the East India Station." It is characteristic of the "Hood tradition", that Walcott went straight home to fulfil this last behest, though he lost six years' promotion by doing so! Hall's maiden effort in literature was an obituary notice of his beloved chief, which appeared in the *Bombay Courier*.²

The *Illustrious* then went from Trincomalee to Bombay, where Hall spent his time in characteristic

¹ *Fragments*, iii, 1, 3.

² *Ibid.* ii, iii, 177ff., and iii, ii. Chap. ix, *passim*.

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fashion exploring the famous Elephanta Caves. After this they proceeded to Madras.

In the middle of 1813, Hall was sent by Sir Samuel to take over charge of the *Theban* frigate. He was then in Madras, and received permission, if he preferred, to make the journey overland.¹ Hall, thrilled at the prospect of seeing India, accepted the offer with alacrity. He could hardly believe, he tells us, that within a week, he would be sleeping in the palace of Tipu Sahib, or scrambling up the blood-stained breaches of Seringapatam. Travelling by palanquin, a mode of conveyance now happily obsolete, of which he gives us a detailed and highly diverting account, he reached Mysore in the nick of time to witness the great Hindu festival known as the Dussera, which the restored line of Hindu rajahs was celebrating with barbaric splendour. Hall had a unique glimpse into the life of a native state in "the good old days of John Company." The Maharaja received him on a throne of gold, silver, and ivory, the canopy being set with gigantic pearls, and surmounted with a gigantic peacock, apparently composed of diamonds and precious stones of untold value. His Highness was so weighed down with jewels that he could hardly stand, and his enormous golden head-piece gave his head "a slight list to starboard!" though, as one of the party remarked, a man might well go with a crick in his neck for life in return for such ballast! At intervals, attendants popped betel-nut into his mouth, and loaded him with perfumed garlands. One of the great features of the festival was a wild-beast fight, in which a tiger, a buffalo, donkeys with leather bottles full of peas tied to their tails, and a number of savage hounds participated. The indescribable din was augmented by twelve military bands which played simultaneously different tunes, and the unfortunate tiger was only

¹ *Ibid.* iii, ii, p. 148ff.

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prevented in its terror from leaping among the audience, by the presence of mind of a small boy, who rapped it smartly on the nose. "Just the sort of thing," whispered an aged Mahomedan soldier, regretfully, "that my old master, Haider Ali, would have done when he was young!"¹ The scene was diversified by Oriental boxing and wrestling, the combatants wearing a formidable *cestus*, capable of laying open the opponent's scalp at a blow, stilt dancers who balanced ploughs on their shoulders, and a strange amusement, which consisted in throwing cocoanuts high in the air, so that, falling upon the hard heads of the throwers, they would burst, scattering their milk far and wide. It is not altogether surprising to learn that this monarch was subsequently deposed by Lord Bentinck.

Similar diversions were afforded for Captain Hall's entertainment at the hill-state of Coorg, which he next visited. Here a tiger and a bear were harnessed together. The tiger promptly leapt through the palace window, to the great derangement of the furniture, while the bear, who refused to follow suit, hung down on the other side of the ledge. Presently the Rajah sent for a gun, a proceeding which caused something of a flutter in the court, as his late Highness had been in the habit of practising shooting at unpopular members of his Cabinet on similar occasions. We can without much effort imagine the delight with which Hall, with his keen sense of humour and quick power of observation, enjoyed these extraordinary *tamashas*. From Mysore he went down the ghats to Mangalore, where he caught a ship for Bombay.

In 1814, Hall accompanied Sir Samuel on a prolonged cruise in the *Minden*, touching at Acheen in Sumatra, once the seat of a flourishing English factory going back to Elizabethan days, when the spice trade

¹ After the death of Tipu in 1799, the Hindu dynasty was restored by the British Government.

INTRODUCTION

was an all-important element in the Company's business, Pulo Penang or Prince of Wales' Island, and then going down the straits of Malacca in order to pay a state visit to the Sultan of Pontiana in Borneo, who dwelt in a ramshackle palace at the head of a creek overgrown with creepers and infested with crocodiles.

The *Minden* was a fine 74, one of the many beautiful vessels built on the Bombay slips by the celebrated Parsee master-builder, Jamsetjee Bomanjee, the head of the great ship-building firm of Lowjee Wadia. Next year Hall got command of the *Victor* sloop, also built in Bombay, and took her home.

His visit to England was short. Almost immediately he was ordered to join the *Lyra* sloop, acting as escort to the *Alceste*, which was taking out Lord Amherst as our Ambassador Extraordinary to the Court of Peking. The *Lyra* incidentally carried out some valuable survey work in the Gulf of Pechili, the west coast of Korea, and among the Loochoo, of which little or nothing was then known. Of these attractive islands Hall gives an interesting narrative in his *Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea and the Great Loo Choo Islands*, including a valuable comparative vocabulary of Japanese and Loochoo words which Hall compiled. Canton was reached on November 2nd, and the Chinese forts had to be silenced by gunfire. The Embassy, after some futile negotiations, re-embarked on January 21st. On their return journey, the *Alceste* was wrecked in Gaspar Straits, and Lord Amherst had to make for Batavia in an open boat. Meanwhile, the *Lyra* had gone on to Calcutta with despatches.

On the homeward voyage, St. Helena was reached on August 11th, 1817, and Hall took the opportunity to pay his respects to the Emperor Napoleon, who, as we have seen, had been a classmate of his father's at Brienne over forty years before. The interview was

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arranged, through the good offices of Dr. O'Meara, the Emperor's surgeon, and General Bertrand, after many tantalising delays, the latter acting as interpreter. Hall describes his sensations, on hearing the footstep of one who a short time ago had ruled the world, as comparable to those raised in his breast by approaching for the first time the Niagara Falls.¹ The Emperor received him courteously, and recalled many little details of his father's career at Brienne. On Hall expressing surprise at his recollection of these bygone incidents, Napoleon replied: "It is not in the least extraordinary, because he was the first Englishman I ever saw, and I have recollected your father on that account ever since." The conversation drifted on to the Edinburgh Royal Society, of which Sir James was President, Hall's adventures among the Loochoo Islands, and kindred topics. "Was Sir James one of the Edinburgh Reviewers?" was one of Napoleon's queries: and he was much amused at Basil Hall's reply that he was not, but that his books had often come under their clutches! The interview lasted twenty-five minutes. Hall was struck with the fallen hero's tranquillity of bearing. "Were it not for an occasional lighting-up of the eyes, and a sort of determined, commanding glance—which pierced, as it were, into one's most hidden thoughts, I should have been disposed to describe his look as being placid or gentle, and at all times lively, never stern."²

Hall reached England in October, 1817, and soon after was posted to the rank of Captain. During his absence, he had the rare honour of being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. After a holiday of two years, spent mostly in Continental travel, he was

¹ *Travels in America*, iii. 181.

² *Account of a Voyage of Discovery to the West Coast of Corea*, 3rd edn., 1840. Chap. vii. *The First Englishman Napoleon ever saw*, by Lady Hall, in the *Nineteenth Century*, Oct. 1927.

INTRODUCTION

posted to the *Conway*, a 26 gun frigate on the South American Station. His experiences are narrated in *Extracts from a Journal written on the coasts of Chile, Peru and Mexico, in the years 1820-1821-1822*, which had a great vogue in its day. In 1825, having married Margaret, daughter of Sir John Hunter, Consul-General of Spain, he retired. In 1829, after spending a holiday in North America, with his wife, he wrote a book entitled *Travels in North America in the years 1827 and 1828*, which was very widely read and discussed, and translated into French. This work caused a sort of "moral earthquake" in the United States, especially when it was followed and confirmed in 1832, by Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. American bookshelves banned it. Many persons even believed that both books really proceeded from the same pen: "Either Captain Basil Hall was Mrs. Trollope in breeches, or Mrs. Trollope was Captain Basil Hall in petticoats."¹ *Domestic Manners*, declared the sapient writer of the preface to the American edition, with its coarse delineations and indelicate allusions, and its "bug and spitting stories", was obviously the work of "some conceited, ignorant Jack Tar, breaking his fore-castle jests, with a quid of tobacco in his mouth, and his canvas hat knowingly adjusted on one side of his head." It may be thought that there is a certain feline touch in Frances Trollope, but it can scarcely be said of Basil Hall's *Travels in North America*. The book is written in Hall's usual good-natured, breezy, conscientious, observant manner. His object is obviously, to

nothing extenuate,
Nor ought set down in malice.

¹ See *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, Chap. 31 *passim*. But Hall found a stout defender in Mark Twain, who declared the book contained "not one exaggerated statement," [appendix to *Life on the Mississippi*.]

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He thinks that, as America was always boasting of her right of freedom of speech, she was logically bound to extend the same privilege to visitors to her shores. When asked to state the chief difference between America and England, he replies candidly, "The want of Loyalty."¹ But nothing but unqualified approbation would satisfy his critics. They cited, as examples of Hall's "shocking moral coarseness", his story how, owing to lack of bells in America, he once had to wander half-dressed and half-shaved, all over a hotel, at the imminent risk of stumbling into a lady's chamber, in search of water to fill his jug, or his seemingly harmless remark that in the whole of America, he never once came across a flirtation! Hall was very hurt at the reception given to his book. He refused to read American criticisms of it: he had lively recollections of the kindness which he had received in New York as a midshipman on the North American Station, and was at a loss to understand the commotion he had excited. "In all my travels," he says, "both among heathens and among Christians, I have never encountered any people by whom I found it nearly so difficult to make myself understood as by the Americans."

In 1831, Hall had the privilege of laying before the First Lord of the Admiralty the recommendation that Sir Walter Scott, as a last chance of recovering his health, should go for a cruise in the Mediterranean. Largely owing to Hall's exertions, the *Barham* frigate was placed at Sir Walter's disposal. Sir Walter was a friend of the family—James Hall had painted his portrait—and, before sailing, the great writer added a long note in his own hand to the manuscript of the *Antiquary*, of which Basil Hall was the possessor. In 1831, Hall published his most popular work, his famous *Fragments of Voyages and Travels*, 3 series, each

¹ *Travels in America*, Vol. III., Chap. xvii. Hall's defence of the old unreformed House of Commons makes amusing reading.

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in 3 volumes, 12mo, 1831-3. These nine little volumes once so well-known, are now comparatively rare and almost forgotten. The fortunate book-lover who picks them up on a bookstall or a library shelf will soon be rewarded for his pains. They are, indeed, a lasting joy to the reader. Written "chiefly for young persons", they are also intended, the writer tells us, "to engage the attention of those who, from having entered the Service in less stirring times, may find it more difficult to gain experience for themselves." Few books ever penned give a more graphic and entertaining picture of the Royal Navy a century ago. Those of us who have been brought up on Smollett and Marryat have heard too much and have dwelt, perhaps too exclusively, on its rough and brutal side. Hall shews us the reverse of the picture. True, he believes that, in view of the character of the material enlisted, and the necessity of an iron discipline where the life of the crew often depended upon the instantaneous carrying out of an order, corporal punishment was essential, though only applied in extreme cases and after patient and exhaustive investigation. That such a view was deliberately held by a humane and enlightened man like Hall is a very significant fact indeed.¹ Hall himself gives us many instances where the wonderful discipline of a man-of-war saved numbers of lives, when death seemed almost certain. A "slack ship", he says, was a danger to herself and her consorts, and a constant source of discomfort to all aboard her. Naval life, where a large number of persons are forced to live in close proximity, without contact with the outer world, sometimes for many months together, in cramped quarters and under trying conditions, is unique in its way. Of the wonderful *esprit de corps* of the Navy, where a man got

¹ Cf. what he says on the subject in *Travels in America*, Vol. III. Chap. v.

CAPTAIN BASIL HALL

to love his ship as a Public School boy loves his school, he speaks in feeling terms. "This character indeed," says Hall, "gives the Navy of England its peculiar character, and mainly contributes to its success. We do truly make the ship our home: we have no other thoughts of professional duty or happiness but what are connected with the vessel in which we swim: we take a pride in her very looks, as we might in those of a daughter and bring up her crew to honourable deeds, as we should wish to instruct our sons."

And of the lighter and more humorous side of the life, the pranks of the middies,—the story, for instance of dressing up the pigs in mourning when the Captain ordered Shakings, the cockpit mongrel, to be thrown overboard, or of the filing of the teeth of Jacko, the ship's monkey, or of Jean, the pet sow, who followed the crew like a dog, and was accorded a naval funeral—what inimitable descriptions we glean from Hall's pages! His volumes are full of nautical information for landsmen, charmingly served up. We learn all about bells and knots, toeing the line and casting the lead, how a great gun is served and aimed, how a man of war is put into commission or paid off. The whole panorama of life in our wooden walls in the Trafalgar period is displayed before our eyes. Hall was an indefatigable traveller and a keen and humorous observer. Wherever he went, he tried to learn all he could. In India, he works hard at Hindustani. In Eastern waters he takes up Malay and Japanese. His description of Hindu mythology, as illustrated by the Elephanta Caves, could hardly be bettered to-day: and for one who was not a professed Orientalist, it is simply wonderful. In the Loo Choo Islands, he made valuable notes of the flora, fauna, and geology, and compiled the first vocabulary of the language. His descriptions of India and Ceylon, the Elephanta Caves, the jungles, the Rajahs' courts, and all the panorama of

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Eastern life, have the same vivid, illuminating human touch, which makes them hard to put down. He is the ideal travel-writer. He never wearies his readers: he makes them not merely read him, but love him.

Fragments of Voyages and Travels is Hall's best and most abiding work. After it, he did little of note. In 1836 he published his historical romance, partly founded on fact, *Schless Hainfield*, or *A Winter in Lower Styria*, and in the following year, *Spain and the Seat of War in Spain*. *Patchwork* [1841] a collection of sketches and tales, which shews signs of failing powers, was the last product of a prolific pen and fertile brain, for shortly afterwards, Captain Basil Hall was seized with brain fever from which he was only released by death, at Haslar Hospital, Portsmouth, September 11th., 1844.¹

¹ For the above biography, the writer is deeply indebted to Captain Basil Hall, R.N., [retired], the author's grandson, who has supplied numerous facts from unpublished family papers and records.