

XXV. *Letter to Mr. Dacosta, Librarian, &c. to the Royal Society, from Mr. William Martin; containing an Extract of a Letter from his Son at Bengal, on the Heat of the Climate.*

S I R,

Read April 30, ^{1767.} **T**HE candid reception I met with, when I took the liberty of addressing you in November 1764 by my friend John Ellis, Esq; a case somewhat uncommon, emboldens me, at this time, to communicate part of a letter I have lately received from my son, Fleming Martin, Esq; chief engineer at Bengall, dated 1st october 1765; giving an account of the incredible heat attending that climate, with some other observations, &c. If you think it worthy of being communicated to the Royal Society, it will afford me the greatest pleasure; but this I must beg leave to submit to your judgment, and am, with great respect,

Sir, your most obliged

humble servant,

Shadwell, 30 April,
1766.

William Martin.

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Copy of part of a Letter, from Fleming Martin, Esq; chief Engineer at Bengall, dated 1st October, 1763.

IN regard to the intense and uncommon heat in this climate; it has been for some time past almost insufferable.

The thermometer was seldom under 98, and the quicksilver rose at certain times of the day to 104 degrees, by the best adjusted instrument; nay, I have been assured by some gentlemen, that, in the camp 500 miles distant, the thermometer often stood at 120; but such a difference, I imagine, was occasioned by the badness of the instrument.

However it is certain, that nothing could exceed the intense heat we felt day and night, during the month of june. May and july were little inferior at times, but afforded some intermission; otherwise a very great mortality must have attended this settlement, though we were not without instances of fatal effects in the month of june, when some few individuals in found health were suddenly seized, and died in the space of four hours after; but, considering the malignity of the climate, we have not lost many, and I believe the generality of people are not so intemperate as some years past they used to be; though, from what I have seen, the best constitutions in the most moderate persons are a poor match against a fever or other disorders in this country.

I have been as free from sickness, as any other person in the settlement; but I cannot say that I have enjoyed myself in that degree as to be an exception; for no man here is without complaints, and life and
death

death are so suddenly exchanged, that medicines have not time very frequently to operate before the latter prevails. This is generally the case in malignant fevers, which are here termed *pucker fevers*, meaning (in the natives language) strong fevers.

The rains have set in since the 4th of june. We call this the unhealthy season, on account of the salt petre impregnated in the earth, which is exhaled by the sun, when the rain admits of intervals. Great sickness is caused thereby, especially when the rains subside; which generally happens about the middle of october. The air becomes afterwards rather more temperate, and, till april, permits of exercise, to recover the human frame that is relaxed and worn out by the preceding season; for in the hot periods every relief is denied, except rising in the morning, and being on horse back by day break, in order to enjoy an hour, or little more, before the sun is elevated: it becomes too powerfull by six o'clock to withstand its influence; nor can the same be attempted that day again till the sun retires, so that the rest of the twenty-four hours is passed under the most severe trials of heat. In such season it is impossible to sleep under the suffocating heat that renders respiration extremely difficult; hence people get out into the virando's and elsewhere for breath, where the dews prove cooling, but generally mortal to such as venture to sleep in that air. In short, this climate soon exhausts a person's health and strength, though ever so firm in constitution, as is visible in every countenance, after being here twelve months. I have been lately informed by an officer of distinction, who was formerly engineer at this place, that he being sent out to survey

a salt lake in the month of september, he found the sulphureous vapours so stagnated and gross, that he was obliged to get up into the tallest trees he could find, to enjoy the benefit of respiration every now and then ; he added that he constantly had recourse to smoaking tobacco, (except during the hours of sleep), to which and to swallowing large quantities of raw brandy (though naturally averse to strong liquors), he attributed his safety. However, on his return, he was seized with an inveterate fever of the putrid kind, which he miraculously survived, though others, who attended him on the survey, and had lived many years in the climate, were carried off, at the same time, by the like fever.