

PIRACY.

The Malayan Archipelago has been long noted as the haunt of pirates, so much so that with many persons, a Malay and a pirate are synonymous terms. The nature of this region, being divided into numerous islands, which are distributed over an area of such vast extent, affords secure means on the shores, and lurk in the numerous creeks, protected by mangrove jungle, to waylay and prey on the peaceful trader; and it is well that these marauders, tho' treacherous and rapacious, are, at the same time, inoffensive and unenterprising, as otherwise these seas would be impassable for the general class of traders who frequent them. It is to be remarked that those tribes who follow agriculture or commerce as regular pursuits—such as the native of Java,—portions of Sumatra,—Borneo,—Celebes,—and the Malayan Peninsula, are not addicted to piracy; while the idle and least industrious, who appear to have no other means of subsistence than fishing, are the most notorious for their depredations. Among these latter, are the inhabitants of several islands in our vicinity—the *Carimons*, *Pulo Soojee*, *Timiang*, *Galang*, *Moro*, *Skana*, all which belong to the *Bintang* and *Lingin* groupes—*Pulo Tingih* off the E. coast of the Peninsula, and several petty places on the coast, such as *Johore* and *Kemaman*. Pirates prevail also at the northern entrance of the Malacca straits, frequenting the *Sambhilans*, *Dindings*, *Arroa* and other islands. They are to be found also in the straits, principally about *Salengore* and *Lingie*, and not unfrequently they lurk about *Pulo Pisang* and *Cocob*. There is another class of pirates, distinct from and more enterprising and formidable than Malays, who likewise infest these parts—the *Illanoon* or *Lanun*—a race inhabiting the *Sooloo* groupe, between *Borneo* and the *Philippines*. These extend their predatory excursions as far as the Spice Islands, to the eastward, and the Straits of Malacca to the westward, during the favorable monsoons. They are said to possess establishments, not far hence, one at *Ritti*, near *Indragiri* in Sumatra, and another on an island close to *Lingin*. The Malayan piratical thus are generally from 6 to 8 tons burden, from 50 to 60 feet in length, and eleven to 13 in breadth; they commonly carry one or two small guns, 3 or 4 rantakas or brass swivels, with a crew of 20 to 30 men, who are armed with spears, kris, and often with muskets. They have likewise a fence called *ampelan*, made of thick plank, and placed across the fore part of the boat, behind which they fire their guns, and shelter themselves when attacked. The *Illanoon* pirates have larger boats, manned generally by 40 to 80 men, and carry a proportionate number of guns and arms.

It has been remarked that Malayan pirates are more cruel and sanguinary in their attacks than the *Illanoon*, as they seldom spare the lives of their captives, probably from fear of recognition at a future time in some European port, while the *Illanoon*, more

merciful from interest dispose of theirs as slaves, at native ports.

This system of piracy, it is well known, is upheld and encouraged by most of the Malayan chiefs and rajahs who hold territory on the sea coasts. Far from considering it a crime to be pirates, they practise piracy as a praiseworthy occupation, and furnish the boats and means of offence to their feudal vassals who carry home the prizes, to be shared with their princes; they also shelter the boats of other chiefs. On this subject Sir STAMFORD RAFFLES, in a letter to Lord MINTO, writes: (*Memoirs*, p. 78.)

"Of the prevalence of Piracy on the Malay coast, and its being regarded as an honorable occupation, worthy of being followed by young princes and nobles, I have already had occasion to speak. This is an evil of ancient date and which has struck deep in Malay habits. The old Malay romances, and the fragments of their traditional history, constantly refer to piratical cruises. In addition to the cases which I have already enumerated, it may be proper to add, that the state of the Eastern population and the intolerant spirit of the religion of Islam, have eminently tended to increase the practise. The Arab Sheikhs & Seyyads, whatever doctrines they failed to inculcate, did not neglect the propagation of one,—the merit of plundering and massacring the infidels; an abominable tenet, which has tended more than all the rest of the Alcoran, to the propagation of this robber-religion. Numerous and various are the tribes of the Eastern Isles which have not embraced the religion of Islam to this day, and consequently are reckoned infidels. All the great nations of the continent are in the same predicament as the Siamese, Cochinchinese, and Chinese themselves. Cruises against the infidels were, and are, constantly certain of receiving the approbation of all the Arab teachers settled in the Malay countries. The practise of piracy, however, is now an evil too extensive and formidable to be cured by reasoning and must, at all events, be put down by the strong hand; though precautions against its recurrence may be taken in the system which shall be adopted with regard to the Malay states, by rendering every chieftain answerable for his own territory, and punishing, in an exemplary manner, refractory chiefs."

Much has been written and spoken regarding the best means of suppressing so great an evil as the existence of these pests. Armed boats rigged like Malayan prahus, and steamers have been recommended frequently—but Government have acted no further on these suggestions than stationing, not six armed native boats as it ought to have done, but—*one*, at each of the Straits Settlements—a paltry armament worse than useless, as a public expense is incurred for a thing more likely, when acting singly, to be captured by, than to capture pirates, and which, except when employed as a despatch-boat seldom leaves its mooring in the river for months together. Were there a fleet of 10 or 12 such, to sail in detachments, and act conjointly when required, they would prove of great utility. That a naval armament for the protection of our native trade is indispensably necessary, there can be no doubt—but the British Indian Government pleads *inability* to support such without saddling this Port with duties! A very extraordinary cure, indeed, for piracy, which has been left to the wisdom and dis-

interestedness of our present rulers to devise! We have already shewn what means the Government virtually possesses for the support of a tolerable armament—and we shall now merely advert to one or two points bearing on this subject, which we think worthy of notice.

Besides the causes we have already assigned for the prevalence of piracy, namely, prejudice against infidels and the barbarous uncivilised condition of most of the seafaring Malays, we must add the deep-rooted recollection of the cruelty and oppression practised by early European settlers towards the natives of parts of the Archipelago, the infancy of which still renders their descendants, most of whom are as yet unacquainted with the present character of Europeans, distrustful enemies of all white people. It is pleasing to reflect, on the other hand, that though piracy still prevail to a great extent, many places formerly noted as the resort of pirates have now become trading ports of tolerable repute, the rajahs finding it their best policy to be honest and to discourage piracy. Among these we may enumerate *Tringjanu*, *Calantan*, *Pahang*, *Borneo Proper*, and *Lingin*, governed by their own chiefs—besides those places now directly under the control of either the Dutch or English—such as *Singapore*, *Rhio*, *Palembang*, *Sambas*, *Pontianak*, *Passier*, and *Banjarmassin*, the native chiefs of which were once deeply concerned in piracy. Much of this improvement, may be attributed, fairly, to the establishment of Singapore, as a free Port, where the productions of these places have found a ready market, and the natives in return have been able to supply their common wants and even learned to acquire artificial ones, the introduction of which has ever been known to lead to civilization, and proved a stimulus to industry amongst barbarians. In this light, Commerce becomes a benefactress, and with a benevolent and wise government should be encouraged always and by every means. Whether the imposition of duties in a port so peculiarly situated as Singapore—the only place in these regions to which the natives have ever been encouraged to resort freely, (a privilege they have as freely availed themselves of—) is likely to effect this important aim, we leave to our readers to decide. We should seriously consider before allowing duties to be imposed, *to the certain injury and decrease of our native trade*, whether we are not taking the surest step to increase the evil to be abolished, by strangling the incipient trade of native ports, and compelling those who are but just beginning to see the advantages of being honest and industrious, to revert to their ancient course of barbarous rapine. The Dutch, by their exclusive and oppressive system of trade, have created more pirates, than they have ever been able to put down.

Mr. Crawford in an Essay on Piracy published in one of the earliest numbers of the

Singapore Chronicle, and to which we are indebted for many suggestions in writing this article, very properly says:

"The encouragement of industrious habits in the people will afford the surest means of effecting so great a good—(the suppression of piracy.) This can only be effected, as far as we are concerned, by affording them a ready and free market for their productions. By such means, and which are now fortunately in operation, the most respectable part of their own communities become not less interested than ourselves in suppressing piracy, and are thus made our natural allies. As far as force can be useful, it will be enough to say that the pirates are now in a manner hemmed in by European establishments more active and numerous than ever existed in these seas before, and that no act of piracy ought to be henceforth overlooked, but be followed sooner or later by inevitable punishment from one or other of the European Governments. A heavy contribution might be levied on Native princes harboring notorious pirates and the haunts of some of these vagabonds should be destroyed by way of example. Towards any effective plan of operations it will be necessary that the European Governments act in concert, and have a thorough understanding with each other. Were the pirates, during a moderate period, pertinaciously and systematically harassed on the principle now proposed, industry at the same time rendered beneficial, the profession of a pirate would become hazardous and discreditable, and industry and fair trade become honorable and prevalent in proportion."

The Treaty of 1824, made by England with Holland, engages that both Powers shall "concur effectually in repressing piracy in these seas." Why has this excellent provision never been acted upon? By making common cause with the Dutch against pirates, much good might be effected. With the means at the disposal of the British Indian Government, raised by the revenue of this settlement alone, a steamer and several armed boats could be employed,—conjointly with the *Rhio* boats, which furnish an example of activity,—in cruising about the neighbouring seas, in destroying the known haunts of pirates, and punishing refractory chiefs who may continue to encourage and harbor pirates.

It is high time, in short, that something effective should be done—considering the fearful catalogue of murders and rapine which from time to time has been published here, besides numerous others, the reports of which have barely reached us,—the apathy with which our government has hitherto treated so important a subject is most disgraceful, to individuals as well as to the nation, and it will require much energy to redeem that character for disinterested humanity which the English have so well acquired and deserved elsewhere.

The meteorological observations which we publish below, shew that during the last month, the fall of rain was 20.7 inches. This, we are informed, by the oldest settlers in the colony, is the heaviest rain that has occurred during the time of their residence here, and its long continuance has had the effect of injuring our roads and overflowing a great portion of the lands that have been selected by some enterprising individuals for the purposes of cultivation; but we hope that this circumstance will not prove disheartening, as the inundation was of very short duration and not of a nature that could have much injured any agricultural speculation connected with the European market, and a similar fall of rain is not much to be dreaded when it has only occurred once after an experience of 17 years.