

THE PIRATES IN THE EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO.

(For the United Service Journal for Sept.)

The exertions of the King's squadrons, the Company's cruisers, and the army detachments, having in some measure suppressed piracy in the vicinity of the Peninsula we will now turn to the Eastern Archipelago, where it has become a systematic calling, and where many Europeans of both sexes languish at this moment in hopeless captivity. Those waters have been notorious for maritime depredations from our first acquaintance with them; nor have the Malays and Chinese been the only pirates that infested them. So far back as from 1600 to 1614, when the Company attempted to open a trade with China, both from Frando and Tywan, they experienced the determined hostility of the Dutch, who not only opposed them by open measures of competition, but also stirred up the hatred of the Chinese against British subjects, by representing to be English pirates, and as such, under English colours, attacking and capturing the Chinese trading junks, from whom it is certain that they took great riches. Had the records of our first intercourse with the Celestial Empire been as copious as those respecting our earliest voyages to India, some atrocious particulars of these misdeeds would have descended; but it is singular that while the latter have been so full and satisfactory, none of the former have been preserved; and we know little more than what is afforded by some memoranda in the 'Annals of the Company.'

The Ladrões of the islands which stud the southern coasts of China form a very numerous and organised body, with a fleet of (at least) 500 well-manned vessels, of from 10 to 250 tons, the largest carrying twelve guns of various calibre, and the other armed according to their capacity, having, besides the ordnance, abundance of small arms, spears, swords, and boarding knives. They are under strict discipline, and often evince great bravery, to which we have more than once been eye-witness. In 1805, while lying in the Typa, we saw a single Ladrone vessel engage a Portuguese corvette, and three heavy Mandarin junks, for full five hours, when she was sunk, only one of her boats escaping,—an act of fortitude which excited no small admiration in our tars, who criticised the conduct of the corvette in such terms of contempt as sailors love to employ. As to the Chinese men-of-war, they, as usual, displayed many flags and streamers, and an abundance of joss-sticks, and made what an old navigator expressively termed 'most hellish sound' with their gongs; but they contrived also, as usual, to keep their foes at a very respectable distance, and therefore were not much molested. About a week afterwards, a Ladrone fleet of upwards of fifty sail approached the anchorage for the avowed purpose of wreaking vengeance on all the Portuguese and Mandarin vessels at Macao,—an act which we could not permit. The moment that the much-dreaded craft appeared off the point, all the sampans and other boats quitted the creeks and hung round our ship like a swarm of bees, imploring our interference, and vociferously begging Mr. Drummond (now Lord Strathallan,) the supercargo, who was accidentally on board, to second their prayer with the captain. Meanwhile the Ladrões approached, in an orderly line, within range, when we let fly a few of the main-deck guns, to indicate the part we meant to act; on which, acknowledging our compliance by a single well-directed shot, they bore away by signal, leaving us amid the grateful and joyful acclamations of the Chinese and Tartars. The admiral made a merit of this retreat by declaring it was not his wish to quarrel with the English Ladrões—for such is the distinction they give to men-of-war, from their carrying no cargo.

The power and influence of these pirates, though some-times checked, are very great. All vessels are liable to their attacks, except such as have purchased passes of them; and the open towns and villages also have to compound for immunity. If the captured ship happens to have made a fierce resistance, they in general murder some of the crew, and torment the rest with cruel tortures. Europeans and persons of distinction are generally detained for ransom, and are often very harshly treated during the negotiation; but when a Mandarin junk has the misfortune to fall into their hands, the crew are mostly inhumanly butchered, being nailed to the deck, beaten almost to death with twisted rattans, and then cut to pieces.

The fortitude of these men in calamity has excited the admiration of their greatest enemies, though Edmund Spott says, 'this valour is only where there is no remedy.' And most severely did this brute test it, on a miserable wretch who was detected in the act of incendiarism, and refused to discover his accomplices; were it not related by himself, even St. Dominic could give the story no credence. 'Because of his obstinacy,' says the infernal monster, 'and that he had set our house on fire, I caused him to be burnt, by means of sharp irons thrust under the nails of his thumbs, fingers and toes, and the nails to be torn off; and because he never flinched, we thought his hands and feet had been benumbed with tying, wherefore we burnt him in other parts, as the hands, arms, shoulders, and neck, but even this had no effect. We then burnt him quite through the hands, and tore out the flesh and sinews with rasps, causing his shins to be knocked with hot searing-irons. I then caused cold iron screws to be screwed into the bones of his arms, and suddenly snatched out, and to break all the bones of his fingers and toes with pincers. Yet, for all this, he never shed a tear, neither once turned his head aside, nor stirred hand or foot; but when we asked a question, he would put his tongue between his teeth, and strike his chin on his knees to bite it off. After using the utmost extremity of torture in vain, I made him again be laid fast in irons, when the ants, which greatly abound there, got into his wounds and tormented him worse than we had done, as might be seen by his gestures. The king's officers desired me to shoot him to death, which I thought too good a death for such a villain; but as they insisted, we led him out into the fields and made him fast to a stake. The first shot carried away a piece of his arm, bone and all; the next went through his breast near the shoulder, on which he bent down his head and looked at the wound. At the third shot, one of our men used a bullet cut in three pieces, which struck his breast in a triangle, on which he sank as low as the stake would allow. Finally, between our men and the Hollanders, he was shot almost in pieces.'

Pirates have long reigned lords of the oriental waters, and many a ship was termed 'missing,' and supposed foundered, that had been sacked and destroyed, before their treachery was fully known. Captain Davis, who carried out Sir E. Michelburne to India, in 1604, having anchored at Patani with his two ships, they were both boarded by men whom they had treated 'courteously and with feasting.' A desperate fight ensued, in which Davis fell under many mortal stabs, and the assailants refusing quarter, were all killed, except one man, before possession could be regained. Captain Alexander Hamilton, who was in India from 1688 to 1723, was himself nearly cut off at Banjar Masscen, when four English ships were suddenly attacked by above one hundred proas. The two largest ships, after a hot contest, were principally by getting boarding-nettings, and the smaller were both burnt, with most of the crew. The carnage among the Malays was very great, there being above 1500 killed, besides many wounded and maimed; but the English were also so weakened and dispirited, that they quitted their new settlement.

Such instances are numerous to a melancholy amount; and one which occurred while we were

on that station afforded proof of the undiminished ferocity of the pirates. The Victor, a sloop-of-war of 18 guns and 114 men, being off Java, on the 15 of April, 1807, brought three proas too and as it fell calm, she anchored at about 5 P. M., and brought two of the vessels along side to overhaul them, while the other hung upon the quarter. The prisoners, amounting to about 120, were taken out of those alongside, and a strong guard placed over them; but as the crew of the proa on the quarter refused to come from under hatches, Captain Bell ordered a cannonade and some musketry to be discharged into her, which they returned by throwing spears and firing pistols. A gun was then got out of the stern port to fire on her, the sparks of which most unfortunately communicated to a quantity of gunpowder, which had been carelessly handed out of the other proas, and blew the after-part of the ship up; at which alarming moment the guard over the prisoners dropped their arms, and ran to extinguish the flames. The prisoners instantly seized the arms, and also picked up several spears and knives which had been thrown on board and commenced a bloody conflict. By this time, about 8 P. M., the fire, most providentially, had given way to the extreme exertions of the officers and men, the proas were cut adrift, and the attention of all hands directed to the defence of the ship, which was admirably performed; for, in little more than half an hour, 80 of the enemy lay dead in a most mangled state, the rest were driven over-board. The scene was described to us afterwards by the gallant defenders, as truly distressing and extraordinary, from the united effects of slaughter, fire, and darkness; nor was the ship preserved to his Majesty's service without the loss of her first lieutenant (Blaxton) and five seamen killed outright, her commander, gunner, and 24 men, wounded by the Malays, or dreadfully burnt by the explosion; and most of the wounded died after the Victor's arrival at Pulo Pinang.

Among the tribes of Indian islands, the most noted for their piracies are, of course, the least industrious, and particularly such as are unaccustomed to follow agriculture or trade as regular pursuits: such are the Malays inhabiting the small islands about the eastern extremity of the Straits of Malacca, and those lying between Sumatra and Borneo, down to Bilitin and Karimata, whose religion being, as old Hamilton termed it, 'a sort of scoundrel Mahometism,' offers no restraint to villainy. Still more noted than these are the natives of certain islands situated between Borneo and the Philippines, of whom the most desperate and enterprising are the Sooloes and Illanoons, the former inhabiting the well-known archipelago of the same name, and the latter being one of the numerous nations of Mindanao. The Sooloo pirates chiefly confine their depredations to the Philippine isles, which they have continued to infest, with little interruption, for nearly 100 years, in open defiance of the Spanish authority, and the numerous establishments maintained to check them. The robberies of the Illanoons, on the contrary, are more widely extended, being carried on all the way from their native country to the Spice Islands on one side, and to the Straits of Malacca on the other. A flotilla of gun-vessels, of from 20 to 60 tons each, are constantly kept in a state of equipment at Manila, to act against these rovers; and several forts have been built to control them, of which the principal one is at Sambeangan, or Mindanao itself. These, however, are but slight checks to the enterprise of the Moors, who sometimes land in the night and carry off the natives from under the very walls of the forts. Individuals of the garrisons, venturing any distance from their station, are made prisoners; nor will their captors give them up without a ransom suited to their rank. There is a particular fund from the Order of Mercy, at Manila, which is solely appropriated to aid the private funds of those who are thus unfortunate, and to obtain their release. The monks of this order are generally sent over to the negotiation.

Besides those who are avowed pirates, a great number of the Malayan princes,—rajahs, pangrangs, depattis, and bujis,—must be considered as accessories to their crimes, since they afford them protection, and contribute to their outfit, and often share in their booty; so that a piratical proa is too commonly more welcome in their harbours than a fair trader. From such countenance the pirates are so numerous, that whole beaches are lined with proas, and none but well-armed vessels dare thread the islets. Among the most desperate and successful of the cruisers is the widely-dreaded Rajah Raga, known as the Prince of Pirates, who, for more than twenty years, 'carried all before him.' His expeditions have invariably been stamped with singular cunning and intelligence, barbarity and recklessness. During his noviciate under an experienced chief, he was frequently exposed to imminent danger by the vigilance of our cruisers: once, when many of his companions were destroyed by a furious shower of grape from his Majesty's sloop Rattlesnake; and again, in January, 1808, when two or three vessels then belonging to his leader were taken and burnt by the Drake frigate, near the Arroas, in the Straits of Malacca. We accidentally fell in with them at this moment, and we well remember seeing the third proa creeping off under the land, but little suspected the destinies she bore, till we heard of Raga's bragging afterwards of this escape. He then became a chief himself, and continued to the latest news from those quarters, the scourge of the sea. He has emissaries every where, and the intelligence which he acquires is of the greatest authenticity. If the object is of moment, he undertakes the execution himself; if otherwise, he detaches a trusty officer.

In 1813, he cut off three English vessels, and killed their captains with his own hand, an achievement of which he delights to boast; as well as that he has personally slain twenty-five out of upwards of forty commanders of European vessels which fell into his clutches. These exploits, together with the seas of blood wantonly shed by his myrmidons, were a set off among the treacherous Malays against his aggressions on the native trade, and few even of those who had themselves lost proas will speak against Raga, whose successes against the Europeans are the admiration of all the young men, and the theme of much of the modern poetry of their beautiful language. The following anecdote of this desperado was given by Mr. Dalton, who resided some time in the Eastern Archipelago, and visited Pergottaha, the present grand focus of piracy:—

Two British sloops of war scoured the coast, one of which, I believe the Elk, Captain Reynolds, was attacked during the night by Raga's proa, who unfortunately was not on board at the time. This particular proa, which Raga personally commanded, and the loss of which he frequently laments, carried eight guns, and was full of his best men. He had himself landed at Pergottaha a few days previously, and sent off the proa with a favourite panglima (or com-

mander), to pick up any small things which might be seen off Point Salatan. An European vessel was faintly descried about three o'clock one morning; the rain fell in torrents,—the time, the weather, were favourable circumstances for a surprise, and the panglima, determined to distinguish himself in the absence of Raja Raga, gave directions to close, fire the guns, and board. It was the more confident of success, as the European vessel was observed to keep away out of her course on approaching her. On getting within about a hundred fathoms of the pirate vessel, as they supposed her to be, they fired their broadside (four guns), gave a loud shout, and with their long oars pulled towards their prey. The sound of a drum beating to quarters no sooner struck the ear of the astonished panglima, than he endeavoured to get away; it was too late—the ports were opened, and a broadside, accompanied by three British cheers, gave sure indication of their fate. The panglima hailed the English Captain, and would fain persuade him that 'it was a mistake.' It was indeed a mistake, and one not to be rectified by any Malayan explanation. The proa was sunk by repeated broadsides, and the commanding officer refusing to pick up any of the people, they were drowned, with the exception of five, who, after floating four days on some spars, were picked up by a Portuguese proa, and told the story to Raja, who swore destruction to every European he should henceforward take. The writer of this conveyed with one of the officers of the sloop of war, and it appears that the proa was early pointed out to the Lieutenant on deck, who, seeing her ahead, and being fearful of running her down, did alter her course a point each time. Two or three of the ship's company were wounded. It would be well if all other vessels followed the example set by the Captain of this sloop, in attempting to destroy the whole, instead of taking prisoners, who, in all probability, will make an amiable board, or, if set at liberty, will certainly return to their former course of life.

While the Alceste frigate was unfortunately lodged in the straits of Gaspar, on the 18th of Feb. 1817, the crew escaped to the barren isle of Looe, leaving a Lieutenant and party in the ship to preserve necessities. But in two or three days the pirate proas hove in sight, when the persons on board were compelled to seek safety on Pulo Looe, leaving the wreck to the brutal ruffians, who plundered, and then burnt it to the water's edge. Soon afterwards they invested the island itself, with a force of sixty proas; and as their purposes were very evident, the officers and seamen prepared in a vigorous resistance. The example of Captain Maxwell, in fortifying their position, and participating in every privation, was beyond all praise, and endeared him to his people, so that no few were entertained as to the result of an attack. This state of suspense lasted for sixteen days, absolute want staring them in the face on one hand, and destruction from the savages on the other; when, on the 3rd of March, the officer on the 'look-out tree' announced that he perceived the sail of a ship or brig, at all events larger than those of the Malays. The pirates soon after made the same discovery; and the rapidity of these movements in consequence was such, that they were enabled to retreat without damage. The vessel proved to be the Ternate, a Company's cruiser of 16 guns.

Among the various skirmishes that take place between our cruisers and the pirates, we may mention a very recent one. On the afternoon of the 20th of April, 1834, the Harrier, a sloop-of-war, commanded by Captain Vassal, the son of the regretted hero of Monte Video, anchored at the Arroas, a cluster of islands near the centre of the Straits of Malacca. In the evening two officers, the Second-Lieutenant and Master, proceeded with a small boat and four men to the greater Arroa, at a short distance from the ship, to procure turtle. At about eleven o'clock the boat returned, with one seaman mortally shot, and another wounded in the head. The Master, who saved himself by swimming, reported, that while turning a turtle, they were attacked by a large band of Malays, who had crossed from the large island, and had much difficulty in effecting their retreat to the ship. The Harrier's boats were immediately despatched, to prevent the escape of the piratical proas, and to capture or destroy them in the morning. When daylight appeared, a fire of jinnals from the rocks, and musketry from the jungle, was opened on our boats, which was promptly returned. After some time, and with great difficulty, the seamen and marines made good their landing, and advanced upon the pirates, who stood to receive them, contesting with much obstinacy the post they had taken. At length the chief being shot by one of the marines, as well as others about the same time, they gave way, and fled into the jungle. Three large proas and two boats were destroyed, and a great quantity of arms captured.

The piratical vessels are usually called proas, though the orthography is varied from praw, parrow, and prahu, to the proa, which is most generally adopted. The Sooloo proas are only from six to ten or twelve tons burthen, mounting two small guns with swivels, or rantakas, and a crew of thirty or forty men. The Illanoon proas are much larger, and more formidable, and commonly carry from four to six guns, and a proportional number of swivels, with crews of from forty to one hundred men each, who are well provided with spears, krisses, and as many fire arms as they can procure. The proa of the Celebes, which is sometimes called padukan, is still larger than that of the Illanoons, though it rarely exceeds fifty tons. It is built by doubling the planks together, as coopers do the parts that form the heads of a cask, and soft bark is put between, which swells, and keeps them water-tight. The timbers are then filled to the planks with some heavy bulwark covered with buffalo hide; but they are such absolute bigots to old models and fixtures, that few improvements occur. Thus the bow is lowered, or cut down in a very awkward manner, so as to be often under water, whence a bulkhead is raised a good way abut the stern, to keep off the sea. The vessels of the Moluccas are the korcorras and orembis, or those of the larger and smaller sizes. The korcorra has a high-arched stern and stern, like the points of a half-moon; they are fitted with out-riggers, and are from a small size to about a dozen tons burthen. They are capable of very swift motion, from the number of hands they can employ, and are steered by a couple of kamudis, or broad paddles, in place of a rudder.

The mode of attack with all these pirates is cautious, and, in spite of their desperation, cowardly, for plunder and not reputation is their aim. They lie concealed under the land and in creeks, until they find a fit object and opportunity, such as a vessel aground, or becalmed in the interval between the land and sea breeze. Several of the marauders attack together, and station themselves on the bows and quarters of a ship when she has no longer steerage way, and is incapable of pointing her guns to advantage. The action often continues for hours, doing very little mischief; but when the crew are exhausted with the defence, or have expended their ammunition, the assailants seize this opportunity of boarding in a mass. Such being the general practice, the hazard which square-rigged merchant vessels run among those innumerable channels is obvious; but it is equally clear that armed steam-boats offer an effectual means of prosecuting offensive operations against them; and it is matter of surprise, that the tranquil navigation and abundant fuel of those regions, should not have suggested the idea of thus depriving the sea-banditti of taking advantage of calms and shoal water, and rendering their haunts precarious and insecure.

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We understand that the arms taken on this occasion are presented to that useful and rising institution, the United Service Museum, together with some curious Malay documents which Captain Vassal obtained in his Malay cruises against the rovers. This gallant young officer destroyed the great pirate settlement of Soave, in 1828, by which he rendered an essential service to commercial interests in those seas.