

PIRATES ON THE COAST OF BORNEO.

(From the Singapore Free Press.)

On the 15th ult. we mentioned that the boats of her Majesty's ship Dido, Captain the Hon. H. Keppel, had several times encountered pirates on the coast of Borneo, and that on some of these occasions considerable execution had been done. The Dido has since returned from Borneo, and we learn that her operations were more extensive and systematic than what we then imagined them to have been. We are enabled to give a detailed account of the proceedings adopted by Captain Keppel, which we have no doubt will prove highly interesting.

On the arrival of the Dido off the coast of Borneo in the beginning of May last, the ship's boats were despatched, under Lieutenant Horton, with orders to visit the islands of Marundum and South Natunas, and rejoin the Dido at Sarawak. The party was accompanied by Mr. Brooke, who, from his thorough knowledge of the Malay language, as well as his acquaintance with the appearance of the piratical boats, was a valuable addition to the party.

This party on arriving off Marundum suddenly came on five large prahus with several smaller boats, each prahu rowed with about forty paddles, with from sixty to seventy men, and they were well armed with guns and other firearms. The pirates did not allow the Dido's boats to close, but cutting their boats adrift they made off, firing at the same time, and being followed by the man-of-war's boats, who returned their fire, but through their extraordinary swiftness in rowing they made their escape in the direction of the Natunas. On the following night the Dido's boats arrived off the south coast of Pulo Serhassen, where they anchored, and next day six prahus came towards the boats, beating tom-toms, and making every demonstration for fighting. The British boats (three) formed abreast and advanced, the prahu still coming on cheering and beating their tom-toms, and at the same time the pirates detached three of their smallest boats in shore to take the English boats in flank, and cut off their retreat. Mr. Brooke, observing that they were not the regular piratical craft, and supposing that they might be the inhabitants of the island, held up a white flag of truce on his spy-glass, but they disregarded this, and when they had come within a distance of about 150 yards a smart fire was opened from all the six prahus as well as the shore, which was then returned by a destructive fire of grape and canister and small arms. The pirates on this ceased to advance, but continued firing for some minutes afterwards, when one of the prahus gave in and asked quarter, and the other five, chased by the two cutters, made for the shore, keeping up a fire to the last. The pinnace took possession of the prahu that struck, and the others were likewise taken possession of, which latter all proved to belong to the island, mounting three brass guns each, with a crew of thirty men, well armed with muskets, spears, and creeses. The prahu that first struck was the same size as the others, and was ascertained to belong to a rajah at Rhio, by whom it had been sent to collect tribute. The pirates declared that their attacking the English boats was an accident, as nothing would have induced them to fire on the British flag had they made it out, but that the rising sun was in their eyes, they did not discover their mistake till after they had commenced the action, which they continued in despair of receiving quarter. Ten dead men were found in their boats, four mortally and eleven severely wounded, and several others were carried on shore by their friends before the boats were taken possession of. As their story was plausible, and they had suffered so severely, Lieutenant Horton thought it right to release them with a caution. Their plan of attack had the appearance of having been arranged by some one experienced in such warfare, and they afterwards admitted that they had 200 men concealed in the jungle ready to attack the British had they attempted to land.

On the 17th of May, Mr. Brooke having lent a boat, Lieutenant Hunt with twelve seamen and four marines was despatched in it to cruise off Cape Datu and protect any vessel that might arrive. About three o'clock on the morning of the 21st, while they were at anchor off the Cape, it being very dark, they did not perceive two prahus, who rounded the point within thirty yards of them, and immediately assailed them with shot, and musketry, and a shower of stones, and even after a 10-pounder which was in the boat had been brought to bear, they persisted in the attack until a round of grape swept off the men from the paddles on one side of the nearest prahu, when one of them thought fit to sheer off, and the crew of the other jumped overboard, and were nearly all shot in the water. The other boat succeeded in escaping, having been taken in tow by a third larger prahu. The slaughter amongst the pirates in this case must have been very considerable, but neither in this nor any of the previous fights were any of the Dido's men hurt.

Being aware of the dangerous extent to which piracy was carried on with impunity on the coast of Borneo, and also considering the number of British vessels that must annually pass the island on their way to China, as well as the extensive trade carried on between Borneo and Singapore, Captain Keppel made inquiries with the view of making such an example of some of the worst of the pirates as would have the effect of making them respect the British flag at least. He ascertained that the most formidable came from the Seribas River, situated about fifty miles to the north-east of Sarawak, who were represented as at once the scourge and dread of the coast, acknowledging no superior power, although their settlements formed part of the Sultan of Borneo's territory. They were in three divisions, living up different branches of the same river, and were composed of a mixture of Malays and Dyaks, and united could send to sea a force of 120 war prahus, carrying from forty to one hundred men each. They lived up the river in strongly fortified positions, and although they had been besieged several times by the united forces of the surrounding rajahs, they had never been conquered. Their piracy was represented as being of a much worse and more cruel nature than that of the Saloo or Lanoon pirates, as the latter preserved the lives of their captives and sold them as slaves, while the Seribas pirates never gave quarter, looking only for the heads and plunder, the Dyaks share being the heads, and the Malays getting the plunder. On receiving the information Captain Keppel resolved at once to attack these pirates in their strongholds, and by burning and destroying their forts, war boats, and houses, and laying waste their country, teach them what they might expect should they again attempt to molest a vessel under a British flag. Lieutenant Horton was accordingly directed to fit out the Dido's boats, as well as that borrowed from Mr. Brooke, and a rope was procured to carry a month's provisions for the expedition. All the adjoining chiefs applied to be permitted to send boats to join the force, and as Captain Keppel thought they would be useful in destroying fruit trees and molesting the pirates in the jungle, their request was acceded to. On the morning of the 6th of June Lieutenant Horton entered the Seribas River, with a force of 95 officers and men from the

Dido, followed by about 300 natives, with orders to carry into execution the plan Captain Keppel had proposed.— The three settlements of the pirates were at Paddie, Pakoo, and Rembas. Of these Paddie was the principal and furthest off, being situated upwards of 100 miles from the mouth of the river; the other two were nearly the same distance up different branches of the Seribas; the first branch, leading to Rembas, turned off the left about 40 miles from the entrance, and the second, to Pakoo, about 20 miles further up on the same side. One difficulty which the boats had to guard against after passing Boling was a bore, which was said to roll in with a terrific rush with the first of the flood tide, and to avoid which it was necessary to anchor the boats at particular spots and await its arrival, so that it was the afternoon of the 11th before they appeared before the forts at Paadie, which they found situated on an elevated tongue of land formed by the river branching off to the right and left.

Just within point blank range of the first fort (which commenced firing on our boats the moment they were in sight) was a strong barrier of large trees drawn across the river, which detained them for a little under the fire of the enemy, during which time we had three men wounded without being able to bring the pinnace's gun to bear. The barrier was, however, cut through, and a party landing from the lighter boats, the three forts were quickly carried, and our native followers arriving soon after the village was pillaged, and by eight o'clock the whole country for a mile round was one continued blaze. No prisoners were taken, and the killed and wounded were immediately carried off by their friends. The news of the approach of the British force having reached them several days before, they were enabled to remove all their valuables, together with their women and children. The next morning was employed in cutting down all the cocoa nut and fruit trees, and burning and destroying war boats, grain, &c.

In the afternoon Lieutenant Horton, leaving a strong guard, proceeded 12 miles up the left hand branch of the river towards the Dyak village of Lyai, the Malay part of the population living at Paddie. After dark the Dyaks came down in great force, assailing the expedition on all sides from the banks with spears, stones, and occasional musketry, and delaying their progress by cutting down large trees across the river, which here grew very narrow and shallow. The night being both dark and rainy, they anchored about midnight, opposite a best spot at the head of the river close to the outskirts of the village, and having landed the marines as a rear guard, the party took up a defensive position until morning. During the night they were repeatedly attacked by the Dyaks; who came down in large force under shelter of the jungle, when they would burst suddenly out, uttering their war yells, within pistol shot of the boats, and assail them with stones and spears; but they fortunately did little or no harm to the invading force, while they must have lost numbers from the deadly fire of musketry, as well as grape shot, that was poured upon them. One marine only of the Dido's party was badly wounded by a musket shot; but it was their last hope, our boats then being close to the village containing their goods, wives, and children.

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At daylight they came down with a flag of truce, offering to come into any terms, which was accepted, the severe lesson they had received being taken into consideration. The chiefs then came down and agreed to abstain for ever from piracy; but, although they were the principals of the Seribas pirates, still they were forced to admit that they had not sufficient control over the other tribes to become responsible for their good behaviour, so that Lieutenant Horton visited both the settlements of Pakoo and Rembas, inflicting on them the severe lesson which he had bestowed on the pirates at Paddie. Although both these places were larger and equally as well fortified as Paddie, they were so panic-struck by the news that had reached them, that they made no attempt at defence, but suffered considerably more from the English followers, who had been greatly reinforced by 900 Dyaks from the River Singar, and the consequence was, that many more lives were lost on the part of the natives.

Never had any race of people less excuse for piracy, as it is impossible to imagine a richer or more beautiful country, or one more gifted by nature. The houses were full of grain, the whole country studded with cottages and fruit trees, all of which were destroyed, and their poultry, goats, and bullocks carried off, and upwards of 40 war boats burnt. One new boat measured 92 feet in length. Many iron guns were taken and a few brass lelas, but there must have been many hid, which our people were unable to find. Four prisoners were taken at Rembas, who are to be held as hostages until the chiefs have fulfilled their promise of meeting the Sultan of Borneo at Sarawak, and there entering into a solemn compact, after their own fashion, to abstain from piracy, a business the superintendence of which Mr. Brooke has kindly undertaken.

It appears from the evidence adduced by Captain Keppel before the Court of Judicature on the Admiralty side since he arrived here, with the view of enabling the officers and men belonging to the Dido, who were engaged with the pirates, to claim head money under the act 6 George IV. c. 49, that on the 22d of May 23 pirates were killed, and the aggregate number of the crews of the two vessels which attacked the Dido's boats on that occasion could not have been less than 67, and for these the Dido's officers and men are entitled to receive 20% for each head of the killed, and 5% for each of the others, so that they will receive altogether 795%.