

THE LITERARY EXAMINER  
The Examiner (London, England),  
Saturday, February 21, 1846; Issue 1986

## THE LITERARY EXAMINER.

*The Expedition to Borneo of H. M. S. Dido, for the Suppression of Piracy: with Extracts from the Journal of James Brooke, Esq., of Sarawak (now Agent for the British Government in Borneo).* By Captain the Hon. Henry Keppel, R.N. Two vols. Chapman and Hall.

The interest and the importance of this book are extremely great. We do not remember a book that opens up graver matters of consideration; or sets before us more novel incident, more heroic exertion, or more romantic and striking results.

Its groundwork may be briefly stated. At the close of the Chinese war Captain Keppel was ordered to the Malacca Straits, with instructions for the protection of trade and the suppression of piracy. This station included the island of Borneo (the largest island in the world, reckoning Australia as a continent), notorious as the centre of a system of piracy, most atrocious in its character, and of terrible extent. All who are acquainted with the humane exertions of Sir Stamford Raffles, or with what Earl and Crawford have written of the people and the commerce of the Indian Archipelago, will remember the frequent discussion there has been of the policy and practicability of British colonization in those eastern seas, and the uniform failure of every attempt made. But the experience of the Chinese war seems again to have forced attention to a subject too long dropped and disregarded. The want of a harbour of refuge between Singapore and the Chinese sea, was particularly felt; and the expedition of Captain Keppel against the Borneo pirates was, we may hope, the first fortunate step to the adoption of a policy which will receive Government sanction in the establishment of a British settlement on the north-west coast of Borneo.

For the wisdom of such a policy this book suggests strong and powerful arguments. Most of all in the success which has attended the romantic heroism of Mr James Brooke. We hardly know how to describe, that we may best do it justice, the enterprise and devotion of this excellent man. Having served with distinction in the Burmese war, and afterwards, for health and amusement, visited China, the condition of the Islands of the Asiatic Archipelago came under his notice. He was struck with their immense commercial resources, and with the degraded and forlorn condition of the native races. The thought occurred to him that he might complete and extend the views of Sir Stamford Raffles over that distant scene; suppress piracy, extirpate the slave trade, and carry to the Malay people, so long the terror of the European merchant-vessel, the blessings of civilization. Possessed with this idea, he devoted fortune and life to its accomplishment. He came to England, purchased a yacht, with incredible skill and pains disciplined a crew, and, after three years of preparation, sailed in 1838 for Singapore. What followed, up to 1843, is the subject of the first volume of this work. It is made up of extracts from Mr Brooke's own journal, given by him to Captain Keppel when they met at Singapore in the latter year.

Mr Brooke writes as he seems to act; with simple force and strong sincerity. There is no attempt at fine writing, no book-manufacturing, in his journal. It is emphatically the record of a man; and none but an Englishman, we flatter our national pride with thinking, could have written

it. Its exploit is peculiarly English. Mr Brooke belongs to the race whose business it is to found colonies and empires; in whom firmness and dogged perseverance blend with knowledge and enthusiasm; and whom masses of men, with the instinct by whom they should be governed, are easily persuaded to obey. We can give but a few lines to the outline of his romantic career in these eastern seas; but they will suffice, we think, to send the reader with abundant curiosity to Captain Keppel's volumes.

Hearing at Singapore a favourable account of the friendly dispositions of the ruler of Borneo, he abandoned his intention of proceeding to the north-west coast, and went to Sarawak. He found several of the Dyak tribes (supposed to be, as contrasted with the Malays, the aborigines of Borneo) in rebellion against the Rajah, and was induced to take part in the struggle. It lasted several weeks; and it is most amusing to trace its progress through the incidental notices of the "journal." The movements of the "grand army" against the insurgents, the whimsical tactics and doubtful courage displayed on both sides, and his own position in the midst, are sketched with great vivacity and humour. In the end the rebels are defeated; Mr Brooke induces the Rajah (though on abstract grounds he admits he had the worst of the argument) to spare their lives; and is himself straightway invested with the government of the province of Sarawak. An eastern tale is not more interesting than this part of the book. His assumption of the government, the strangely-mingled confidence and awe of the native tribes, his negotiations with the neighbouring chiefs, his patriarchal sittings in his hall of audience, and his gradual but decisive substitution of justice and peace for outrage and anarchy, have no parallel that we know of, excepting in romance.

So ends the first volume. The second opens with the personal narrative of Captain Keppel's expedition; of his (so to speak) discovery of Mr Brooke; and of the friendship that sprang up between them. By this remarkable man he found the way prepared for the permanent regeneration of the people he had come temporarily to assist and save; and their instant hearty sympathy is a very striking and pleasing picture. How nobly Captain Keppel did his work the world was told at the time; how modestly, with what manly reserve about himself, with what generous enthusiasm for others, and (no slight addition) with what picturesque skill, he writes the personal narrative of his doings, will here be seen. The duty he had undertaken was admirably and on the whole easily discharged; though not without those noble incidents of danger and daring which English seamen will always make or find. Nor was it common anti-piratical duty. The pirates of Borneo are not an ordinary or a vulgar race; though inveterate and cruel. Their long, unchecked, continuance, had given their pursuit a kind of national character; had purged their calling of its viler reputation; and had given them, as Capt. Keppel remarks, something of the status of the Vikings and heroic pirates of the middle ages. But the snake is now more than scotched, though perhaps not thoroughly killed; and there is at any rate no reason to apprehend future serious disturbance from that quarter, to the schemes of commercial enterprise and national improvement for which these two gallant and enterprising Englishmen have so efficiently prepared the way. With valuable discussion of various points connected with those schemes the remainder of the work is taken up. We have extracts from Mr Brooke's journal to a very recent date; his examination of the Island of Labuan; his appointment as British agent in Borneo; his striking visit with Admiral Cochrane and a British fleet to the capital of the province with whose perpetual government the Sultan has invested him; and, beside several important memoranda by himself on the opening of the Indian Archipelago, a document embodying the opinions of the late Governor of Singapore, Mr Crawford, on the subject of a settlement on the Borneo coast. Mr Crawford recommends the Island of Labuan, lately ceded to the British Government, with regard both to military and commercial advantage; and strongly confirms what is said on that subject by Mr Brooke.

We regret that we must be extremely brief with our extracts; but what we take will illustrate the remarks we have made, and, for the rest, the reader must possess himself of the book if he can.

Captain Keppel thus describes the residence in which he first found Mr Brooke at Sarawak:

"Mr Brooke's then residence, although equally rude in structure with the abodes of the natives, was not without its English comforts of sofas, chairs, and bedsteads. It was larger than any other, but, like them, being built upon piles, we had to mount a ladder to get into it. It was situated on the same side of the river (the right bank), next to, but rather in the rear of, the Rajah's palace, with a clear space of about 150 yards between the back and the edge of the jungle. It was surrounded by palisades and a ditch, forming a protection to sheep, goats, occasionally bullocks, pigeons, cats, poultry, geese, monkeys, dogs, and ducks. The house consisted of but one floor. A large

room in the centre, neatly ornamented with every description of fire-arms, in admirable order and ready for use, served as an audience and mess-room; and the various apartments round it as bed-rooms, most of them comfortably furnished with matted floors, easy chairs, pictures, and books, with much more taste and attention to comfort than bachelors usually display. In one corner of the square formed by the palisades were the kitchen and offices. The Europeans with Mr Brooke consisted of Mr Douglas, formerly in the navy, a clever young surgeon, and a gentleman of the name of Williamson, who, being master of the native language, as well as active and intelligent, made an excellent prime minister. Besides these were two others who came out in the yacht, one an old man-of-war's man, who kept the arms in first-rate condition, and another worthy character who answered to the name of Charlie, and took care of the accounts and charge of everything. These were attended by servants of different nations. The cooking establishment was perfect, and the utmost harmony prevailed. The great feeding time was at sunset, when Mr Brooke took his seat at the head of the table, and all the establishment, as in days of yore, seated themselves according to their respective grades. This hospitable board was open to all the officers of the Dido; and many a jovial evening we spent there. All Mr Brooke's party were characters—all had travelled: and never did a minute flag for want of some entertaining anecdote, good story, or song, to pass away the time. From breakfast until bed-time there was no intermission; and it was while smoking our cigars in the evening that the natives, as well as the Chinese who had become settlers, used to drop in, and, after creeping up, according to their custom, and touching the hand of their European Rajah, retire to the further end of the room and squat down upon their haunches, and remain a couple of hours without uttering a word, and then creep out again. I have seen sixty or seventy of an evening come in and make this sort of salaam. All were armed; as it is reckoned an insult for a Malay to appear before the Rajah without his kris. I could not help remarking the manly independent bearing of the half savage and nearly naked mountain Dyak, compared with the sneaking deportment of the Malay."

Mr Brooke has himself, however, a higher opinion of the Malay than Capt. Keppel. He thinks the popular notion of Malay treachery derived rather from the Rajahs than the people; he rates them much higher than the Dyak (of whom his accounts are most curious and startling) in civilization and intellect; and he speaks favourably of their cheerfulness, hospitality, and general domestic virtues, making only the drawback of a certain love of cunning and intrigue.

Before we quote Mr Brooke's journal, let us give Captain Keppel's picture of the death of one of his pirate chiefs.

"I have already mentioned the slaughter committed by the fire of the pinnace, under Lieutenant Horton, into the largest Malay prahu; and the account given of the scene which presented itself on the deck of the defeated pirate, when taken possession of, affords a striking proof of the character of these fierce rovers, resembling greatly what we read of the Norsemen and Scandinavians of early ages. Among the mortally wounded lay the young commander of the prahu, one of the most noble forms of the human race; his countenance handsome as the hero of oriental romance, and his whole bearing wonderfully impressive and touching. He was shot in front and through the lungs, and his last moments were rapidly approaching. He endeavoured to speak, but the blood gushed from his mouth with the voice he vainly essayed to utter in words. Again and again he tried, but again and again the vital fluid drowned the dying effort. He looked as if he had something of importance which he desired to communicate, and a shade of disappointment and regret passed over his brow when he felt that every essay was unavailing, and that his manly strength and daring spirit were dissolving into the dark night of annihilation. The pitying conquerors raised him gently up, and he was seated in comparative ease, for the welling out of the blood was less distressing; but the end speedily came: he folded his arms heroically across his wounded breast, fixed his eyes upon the British seamen around, and casting one last glance at the ocean—the theatre of his daring exploits, on which he had so often fought and triumphed—expired without a sigh.

"The spectators, though not unused to tragical and sanguinary sights, were unanimous in speaking of the death of the pirate chief as the most affecting spectacle they had ever witnessed. A sculptor might have carved him as an Antinous in the mortal agonies of a Dying Gladiator."

Mr Brooke thus describes one of the singular Dyak customs which, according to Capt. Keppel's bad but pardonable pun, turn their houses into "sculleries." The reader will observe the good Dyak reason against reform, and the odd, but not wholly uncomfortable marriage ceremony.

"Some thirty skulls were hanging from the roof of the apartment; and I was informed that they had many more in their possession; all, however, the heads of enemies, chiefly of the tribe of Sarebus. On inquiring, I was told that it is indispensably necessary a young man should procure a skull before he gets married. On my urging them that the custom would be more honoured in the breach than in the observance, they replied that it was established from time immemorial, and could not be dispensed with. . . . Their wedding ceremony is curious; and, as related, is performed by the bride and bridegroom being brought in procession along the large room, where a brace of fowls is placed over the bridegroom's neck, which he whirls seven times round his head. The fowls are then killed, and their blood sprinkled on the forehead of the pair, which done, they are cooked, and eaten by the new married couple alone, whilst the rest feast and drink during the whole night."

The low civilization of the Dyaks, combined with their rude innocence and (on many points) moral superiority, is strikingly developed.

We must have one scene from the war:

"The grand army was lazy, and did not take the field when they possessed themselves of two eminences, and commenced forts on each. About 11 a.m. we got intelligence that the enemy was collecting on the right bank, as they had been heard by our scouts shouting one to another

to gather together in order to attack the stockades in the course of building. Even with a knowledge of their usual want of caution, I could not believe this, but walked nevertheless to one of the forts, and had scarcely reached it when a universal rebel shout, and a simultaneous beating of the silver-tongued gongs, announced, as I thought, a general action. But though the shouts continued loud and furious from both sides, and a gun or two was discharged in air to refresh their courage, the enemy did not attack, and a heavy shower damped the ardour of the approaching armies and reduced all to inaction. Like the heroes of old, however, the adverse parties spoke to each other: 'We are coming, we are coming,' exclaimed the rebels; 'Lay aside your muskets and fight us with swords.' 'Come on,' was the reply; 'we are building a stockade, and want to fight you.' And so the heroes ceased to talk, but forgot to fight, except that the rebels opened a fire from Balidah from swivels, all of which went over the tops of the trees. Peace, or rather rest, being restored, our party succeeded in entrenching themselves, and thus gained a field which had been obstinately assailed by big words and loud cries. The distance of one fort from Balidah was about eight hundred yards, and manned with sixty Malays; whilst a party of Chinese garrisoned the other. Evening fell upon this innocent warfare."

And one specimen of our English Rajah's diplomacy, and manner of dealing with his new subjects, the native chiefs. It is a very whimsical scene.

"Matari, or 'the Sun,' the Sakarran chief I have already mentioned, arrived with two boats, and paid me several visits. He assured me he wanted to enter into an agreement, to the effect, that neither should injure the other. To this treaty I was obliged to add the stipulation, that he was neither to pirate by sea nor by land, and not to go, under any pretence, into the interior of the country. His shrewdness and cunning were remarkably displayed. He began by inquiring, if a tribe, either Sakarran or Sarebus, pirated on my territory, what I intended to do. My answer was, 'To enter their country and lay it waste.' But he asked me again, 'You will give me, your friend, leave to steal a few heads occasionally?' 'No,' I replied, 'you cannot take a single head; you cannot enter the country; and if you or your countrymen do, I will have a hundred Sakarran heads for every one you take here.' He returned to this request several times: 'just to steal one or two!' as a schoolboy would ask for apples. There is no doubt that the two tribes of Sakarran and Sarebus are greatly addicted to head-hunting, and consider the possession as indispensable. The more a man has, the greater his honour and rank. . . . I asked Matari what was the solemn form of agreement amongst his tribes; and he assured me the most solemn was drinking each other's blood, in which case it was considered they were brothers; but pledging the blood of fowls was another and less solemn form."

In Mr Brooke's remarks on the colonial advantages of Labuan, he has a remark which is worth quoting at this time. "As to corn," he says, "it will unquestionably be found far cheaper to import than to raise it. Rice will be the chief bread-corn, and will come in great abundance and cheapness from Siam and Cochin China. No country within seven hundred miles of Singapore is abundant in corn, and none is grown in the island: yet from the first establishment of the settlement to the present time, corn has been both cheap and abundant; there has been wonderfully little fluctuation, there are always stocks, and for many years a considerable exportation."

The illustrations to the volumes are numerous, and very spirited.