

PIRACY IN THE EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO.

There has been a good deal of exaggeration of late on the subject of piracy in the seas of the Eastern Archipelago; and as these seas are themselves not only much frequented by our traders, but are also on the highway to China, we think some correction of the exaggeration will be useful. This correction we shall give by a few comments on a recent article on this question in the *Edinburgh Review*. We have great reverence for the journal with which are associated the names of David Hume, of Adam Smith, of Jeffrey, of Horner, and of Sydney Smith, and we have great respect for its present most able conductor; yet, like all things mortal, it is liable to nod. Its article on Malayan piracy (in the last number but one) is a case in point, for instead of sound views it gives us dreams, and for knowledge, strange or incoherent words.

The writer of the article would have us to understand, at starting, that until the last two or three years, Europe knew little or nothing of the Eastern Archipelago, although Europe has been connected with it for more than three centuries. This is not correct. It is certainly not so well known as it ought to be; but all of it that is worth knowing is just as well known as Hindustan, better known than the countries between Hindustan and China, and better known than even China itself. By the Reviewer's account there is a gap of 220 years in our knowledge, reckoning from St Francis Xavier to Sir Stamford Raffles, and another of thirty years from Sir Stamford Raffles to Sir James Brooke. Valentyn, who wrote four folios describing the whole Archipelago 120 years ago, is never mentioned; and Dampier, who wrote with a graphic fidelity which no English navigator has ever equalled, is passed over as if he had never written at all.

We have some consolation, however, by an assurance from the Reviewer that of the numerous works, "old and new," which have been written on the subject of the Oriental Archipelago, "by far the most useful" are the two works at the head of his article. These are the journals of two naval officers. We are, no doubt, greatly indebted to these gentlemen for what they have communicated, but we fear out

knowledge of the Archipelago would be of the smallest, were it confined to what they tell, or even pretend to tell us. That they could tell but little was the inevitable result of their position. They saw, and but for a few months, the mere coast of an obscure part of an obscure island. They were without the previous preparation, and they were without language,—the only channel to acquire information. They groped for information in the dark; and it is creditable to their industry how much they collected, considering that it was all the result of sheer groping.

But the writer of the Review, while he lauds a little scratching on the surface in a corner of Borneo, omits all mention of the rich mines of knowledge which have been opened and worked in far more important parts of the Archipelago. The Dutch, backsliders though they be in commercial polity, are far from having proved so in literature and science. During the last thirty years, every branch of natural history has been sedulously and successfully cultivated by them; and the study of native languages and literature, neglected in the olden time, has been zealously prosecuted. Numerous publications have been the result, both in Java and Holland. For some years back, for example, there has been under publication in Holland a work of imperial magnificence, embracing every branch of natural history, including ethnography. At the Hague there is published a periodical work of singular merit on the Colonies, embracing every branch of knowledge connected with them. Both publications are conducted by men practically acquainted, from experience and study, with the questions they write on.

Neither have our countrymen in the East been idle. There is at present under publication in Singapore a work called *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, which has reached its second volume, and a single number of which contains more accurate and authentic information than all the officers of her Majesty's squadron in the Indies could contribute. The practical and accomplished conductor of that work must smile when he finds an Edinburgh Reviewer quoting Adams of Gillingham, and Oliver Van Novit, while his own labours are unknown to the writer.

Of the extent of the information of the lauded publications, we may safely judge by that of the Reviewer who has lauded them. We give a few samples of this. We are informed by him that "Volcanic agency has pushed up the mountains to a prodigious height" in Borneo and Celebes. No evidence of a volcano, active or extinct, has been discovered in either of these two islands. Volcanic influence may, indeed, have made every mountain on the globe; but if that be the case, there was no occasion for particularizing those of Borneo and Celebes. He tells us that Europe has been long familiar with "the ostrich feathers" of New Guinea, which is strange, considering that there are no ostriches in New Guinea, nor in any other island of the Archipelago, nor in any country within 3,000 miles of them. Perhaps he meant the bird of paradise; but the bird of paradise is "a crow," and a crow ought not to be mistaken for an ostrich, any more than a wren for an eagle. "Veined ebony," it would appear, is a staple of the same New Guinea; but it turns out to be only a staple of his own imagination. Black pepper is a staple of Java, but it is not at present produced in that island at all, although it probably may have been in the days of Adams of Gillingham.

Over and over again, we are given to understand by the Reviewer that the Oriental Archipelago contains exactly 12,000 islands, neither more nor less, while we are instructed that their population exceeds 40,000,000, which is equal to that of France and Belgium put together. We wonder who counted the islands, and we wonder the more, since the writer himself tells us that "there are numerous islands, perhaps whole groups, of which we scarcely know the names, and certainly neither their longitude nor latitude." Perhaps he includes rocks, but rocks ought to be carefully distinguished from islands, lest we split upon them!

Whatever be the number of the islands of the Archipelago, there are certainly no more than seven of great size. Two of these only are known to be of eminent fertility, or at any time to have contained any considerable portion of the human race. These are Java and Luçon, the largest of the Philippine group. The first is the only populous island of the whole alleged "twelve thousand." A recent census makes its population about ten millions. The population of Luçon, which includes the whole Spanish possessions in the Philippines, is by census only two millions and a half. The two next most populous islands are Sumatra and Celebes, but they are known to be thinly peopled, containing, besides more civilized men, many rude tribes and a considerable sprinkling of cannibals. The greater part of Borneo is inhabited by men whose industry is chiefly exercised in cutting off each other's heads from each other's shoulders, to be treasured up as a legacy to their posterity. The density of population is not likely to be great in a society where this institution is in fashion. New Guinea, perhaps the largest island of the Archipelago, is far worse, being inhabited by a most malevolent race of negro savages, far below any African nation in the scale of civilization. Nothing is known of its population, since no European has ever dared to penetrate ten miles into its jungles. We have never heard any reasonable inquirer make the population of the entire Archipelago to exceed fifteen millions, and the random shot which makes it to exceed forty millions may be put down at as a flagrant exaggeration—exceeding the truth by one and a half-fold!

But the grand subject of exaggeration is the main one of the article,—piracy. There is scarcely an island, the writer would have us to believe, from Sumatra to New Guinea inclusive, that does not send out buccaneers. Notwithstanding

this round assertion, we rather think that no man ever heard, or at least that in the memory of any living being there has not been heard, of a buccaneer from Java,—from the principal island of the Philippines, or from any one of the small populous and civilized islands, such as Madura, Bali, Lombok, Amboyna, Zebu, and others. In five-sixths of the whole population of the Archipelago, in short, piracy is not practised.

The supposed number of the pirates keeps pace in the writer's description with the extent of their localities. The capital of the Sulu islands alone sends forth, according to him, a yearly piratical fleet of from 200 to 300 sail. All the princes of the Eastern coast of Celebes and their subjects are pirates. One Rajah alone—he of Kaili, has a thousand sail, while minor vagabonds have from 150 to 240 a piece. "These," adds the writer, "may be seen at all times, drawn up on the beach, at high-water mark, with their ammunition on board, ready to be launched at a moment's notice." He ought, in fairness, to have excepted the time in which they are roving over distant parts of the Archipelago, and when, of course, they cannot well be at home, high and dry, on the beach!

The monstrous extravagance of these assertions is but too transparent. The larger class of the Sulu proas is described as carrying 140 men, including the rowers. If the average have but one-half this number, the complement of the Sulu fleet comes to the number of 17,500 mariners. The ubiquitous fleet of the Rajah of Kaili must on the same calculation have 70,000 men to navigate and fight it,—a number which probably far exceeds the entire population of his paltry principality.

But we have from the Reviewer another account of the piratical proas, which makes their size not to exceed eight or ten tons,—which makes them, in fact, no better than so many herring boats. These could not accommodate above fifteen men a-piece, and so the 70,000 of the redoubtable Rajah of Kaili drops down to 15,000: this is a number which assuredly far exceeds the whole able-bodied male population of the principality.

A most romantic and Arcadian picture is drawn of the domestic life of the pirates,—of Malay pirates in repose, of ephemeral innocents. Instead of inhabiting, as might naturally be supposed, the sea coasts and the mouths of rivers, it seems that these fastidious rovers select the most romantic valleys of the interior for their dwellings. The Reviewer assures us that after ascending a newly-discovered river, and passing through broad plains and picturesque valleys, "you come suddenly on a sweet little village consisting of hundreds" (not so very little after all) "of neat and graceful houses, erected on wooden pillars, with the lightest materials, and surrounded by gardens as trim and well ordered as any in China." You enter one house which exhibits "some proofs of the civilisation of Western Asia characterised by the fierce fanaticism of the Arabian Peninsula, while next door, perhaps, you perceive long strings of human heads depending in festoons, or gathered up in nets ready to be exhibited at the orgies of some Pagan festival. Nevertheless, at the proper season of the year, forth from this agreeable home, this little tropical paradise, issues a ruthless band of buccaneers."

For infidelity, here is a sketch which equals Pinto's account of the treasures of Mastaban. It is wonderful that it did not occur to the writer that he was huddling together the attributes of two different states of society which could not co-exist. A taste for neat and graceful houses and trim well-ordered gardens after the Chinese fashion would quickly abolish piracy, while rampant piracy would prevent the taste from springing up. In all the populous and more civilised parts of the Archipelago, piracy has long ago been swept away by honest industry. The Koran in one house, and a festoon of pickled heads at the next door, is just as incompatible an association as buccaneering and Chinese gardens. The alleged Mahomedan fanaticism, every one knows, would not submit to the abomination of the neighbourhood of the pickled heads for an hour.

Then, we have a most whimsical comparison, meant for a parallel, between "the Northern Sea Kings and the Malay Buccaneers;" that is, between men of two opposite and distinct races, inhabiting opposite climates,—between giants and pigmies,—between the men who overcame the waves and tempests of the German Ocean, and men who always sail with a fair wind in a region that knows no storms,—between the men who conquered Britain, and those who plunder fishermen and small craft!

The pirates of the Archipelago are a nuisance, but they are not formidable, as we know by the results. They have never captured a vessel, however small, with an European or American crew, or even with a considerable part of the crew European. They have never captured a regular Chinese junk; the achievement is above the might of the combined fleet. A traveller referred to by the Reviewer, who resided at Sulu for six months, and saw the grand fleet come in with its prizes, tells us that they amounted to twenty-one from the Philippines, seven from the Straits of Malacca, and one from Celebes, all small native craft. The solitary European prisoner was an accidental Dutchman!

The remedies proposed by the Reviewer for the extirpation of piracy are even more extravagant than his account of the piracy itself. All the strongholds of piracy are to be destroyed or suppressed, or, as more familiarly than gracefully he phrases it, "wasps' nests must be taken." For the "wasps' nests" are to be substituted, "throughout all the principal tracts of commerce," British settlements. If according to this scheme a score of such settlements were established (and they would not be enough to fulfil his project),

each settlement would cost at least 20,000*l.*, and the national disbursement for the suppression of a piracy that has never captured a single British ship with an English crew, would be 400,000*l.* per annum. The folly of this surpasses that of the African blockade! Supposing, however, that Lord Palmerston and the House of Commons, losing their heads, adopt the scheme, where are the settlements to be established? The Spaniards claim without dispute all that is east of Borneo and north of the Equator. The Dutch claim more than all that is south of the Equator, and we allow their claim. In the remaining principal tracts of commerce we have already five British settlements—quite enough. The Reviewer says he avoids "indicating more particularly the sites of such settlements," which is perhaps the discreetest thing he has said throughout his whole article.