

THE HEAD MONEY OF THE SAMARANG.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY NEWS.

SIR,—I rejoice to perceive that the proceedings of Sir James Brooke, Raja of Sarawak, Governor of Labuan, Resident, Consul, Merchant, &c., &c., are attracting attention, as also the doings of the East India Company's and her Majesty's vessels of war in the Eastern seas, which it would seem are under the direction of Sir James Brooke, and at his disposal for any work of slaughter he meditates.

The object of my present communication is to draw the attention of your readers, and especially of members of the British legislature, to a notice in last Friday's *Gazette*, that the officers and crew of her Majesty's ship *Samarang*, who are entitled to share for services against pirates on the 3rd of June, 1844, are to apply for their shares, respectively, at 39, Charing Cross, on the 29th inst. The amount of these individual shares is stated as follows:—Captain, 1,329*l.* 12*s.* 10*d.*; first class, 319*l.* 3*s.* 2*d.*; second class, 191*l.* 9*s.* 4*d.*; third class, 95*l.* 14*s.* 8*d.*; fourth class, 63*l.* 16*s.* 5*d.*; fifth class, 31*l.* 18*s.* 2*d.*; sixth class, 21*l.* 5*s.* 5*d.*; seventh class, 10*l.* 12*s.* 8*d.*.—Signed, Ommanney, Son, and Co., agents.

Now, sir, I am extremely anxious that there should be placed before the public a narrative of the transactions that are to be rewarded on the above scale on the 29th inst. Permit me, then, to direct attention to the account I have extracted with my own hand from a work entitled "Borneo and the Indian Archipelago, by Frank S. Marryat, late Midshipman of H.M.S. *Samarang*, Surveying Vessel. Longman and Co., 1848."

Mr. Marryat was not himself present at the massacre for which head money is to be distributed on the 29th; but he says (p. 54), "The account of this transaction is taken from the private log of one of the officers who was present in the barge during the whole time." That account is as follows:—

"Leaving the island of Ternate, we made sail to the southward, to survey a portion of the coast of Gilolo (another of the Spice Islands), which was supposed to be laid down incorrectly in the charts.

"On the morning of Monday, the 3rd June, the ship being off the coast of Gilolo, the gig with the captain, and the barge with several officers, left the ship with four days' provisions, to survey a portion of the coast. At 11 a.m. they landed on a reef running out about a cable's length from a small island. About 2 in the afternoon, a body of natives armed with spears and knives issued with loud yells from the jungle, and advanced towards them. At the same time a prahu pulled round a point and made towards the barge, which was at anchor about fifty yards from the shore. The captain was at the time on shore taking observations, but as the natives approached he retired to the gig and got the arms in readiness. The captain signed them to go away; they approached nearer, we gave them a volley, and they hastily retreated into the jungle.

"The barge was now prepared for the expected attack of the prahu, which by this time had approached within point-blank range of the barge's gun, which was a brass 6-pounder. Observing, it is to be presumed, that the boat was so well armed and the men were loading the gun, the prahu ceased pulling, and hoisted Dutch colours. They were ordered to pull for the Gilolo shore, which they did; a rocket fired at them quickening their speed considerably. At 3 p.m., the observations being completed, the astronomical instruments were re-embarked, on the barge, and the captain quitted the gig and went into the barge. Both boats were pulled towards the mainland. On the inshore side of the small island I have mentioned we discovered a village consisting of fifteen or twenty houses. The gig was despatched with two officers to burn the village; which was done, the natives who were in the huts escaping into the jungle. In the meantime the barge proceeded towards a large village in search of the prahu. On their way they fell in with a large canoe at anchor in one of the creeks.

"Taking the canoe in tow we again took to the oars, and in a short time perceived the natives hauling the prahu into a creek. A round of grape quickly decided the matter; the natives fled and the prahu was quietly taken possession of by our crew. Having effected our object, we proceeded along the coast with our two prizes in tow. At sunset, after rifling the boats of arms, flags, and gongs, we set them on fire, and made sail to the southward; the gig which had rejoined us being in company. About midnight we anchored in a small and lonely bay—I should say twenty miles from where the above occurrences took place. We took our meals, but did not attempt to repose till after two in the morning, although we were quite tired after the events of the day before. We then lay down and composed ourselves to sleep.

"We had not, however, been recumbent long, ere the sounds of gongs were heard at a distance, and shortly afterwards the man on the look-out reported that three prahus were coming into the bay. A short time sufficed to have everything in readiness for the expected conflict.

"The foremost of the prahus approached within ten yards of the barge, lowered her sail, and rounded to. A native, one of the chiefs, we presumed, inquired in broken English if we belonged to a ship. The captain would not satisfy him on that point, but desired him to go away.

"The other two prahus having been joined by a third (making four in all), had now closed within half-pistol shot and lowered their sails.

"Seeing that we were completely enclosed, a musket ball was fired over the largest prahu. The men in the prahus gave their accustomed yell, and the whole force advanced towards us.

"The six-pounder, loaded with round and grape, was now fired into the largest prahu; the cries and confusion were great; the crew of the prahu leaped into the water, but few arrived on shore—they sank under the fire of our muskets. The other three prahus then commenced a spirited fire from their guns and small arms, assisted by a flight of arrows and spears.

"Pulling within 20 yards of them, we plied them alternately with grape and canister from our six-pounder. The engagement continued with great vigour for some time, when their fire slackened, and shortly afterwards two more of the prahus were deserted by their crews, who had made for the shore; the fourth made off. The three prahus were taken possession of, towed into deep water, and anchored. Leaving the gig in charge of them, we went in pursuit of the fourth prahu, and soon came up with her, but her crew escaped by running the boat on shore.

"Another prahu now hove in sight, pulling, or rather padding towards us. Leaving our prize we faced our new antagonist, saluting her with grape and musquetry, and causing so much havoc, that, shrieking and yelling, they made for the nearest shore, without returning a single shot. We followed her, firing into her as fast as possible. On coming up with her we found her aground, with six dead and one mortally wounded; the remainder of the crew had saved themselves by wading to the shore. After getting this prahu afloat, we brought the other prahu, which we had just before captured (No. 4) alongside. This boat was crowded with dead and dying. Among the latter was a female child, apparently about eight months old, in a state of nudity. The poor little creature's left arm was nearly severed from its body by a grape shot. She was removed into the boat, where the rest of the wounded were placed, with as much care as possible. A low moaning sound escaped from her lips, her eyes were glazed, and she was evidently fast dying; it would have been a mercy to have put an end to her sufferings. The dead were then thrown overboard, and the prahu set on fire. The last prahu, containing the wounded, was left to her fate.

"It was now daylight, and, on looking around, we perceived five more prahus off a point between the gig and ourselves in the barge, and several others pulling in from seaward. We gave way for the five prahus, which were drawn up in a line ready to receive us. Notwithstanding their fire, assisted by their spears and other missiles, we pulled within fifteen yards of the outermost prahu of the five, and discharged our gun, accompanied by a volley of musketry. The other prahu now closed, and poured in a heavy fire; but although the barge was struck not one of our men was injured. The repeated fire from the boats soon caused the people in the prahu to make for the shore through the water, when many of them fell from our musketry. It was now about six o'clock in the morning; our last charge of canister shot was in the gun, the last rocket in the tube, and nearly all the percussion caps expended. The barge was pulled closer to the nearest prahu, to give more effect to the discharge, and the captain was in the stern of the barge, with the rocket tube in hand, when one of the prahus on shore fired her swivel; the ball struck the captain and knocked him overboard. He was hauled in, and we found that he had received a severe wound in the groin, which was dressed by the surgeon.

"Lieutenant Baugh now took the command, and the gun was discharged with good effect, and all the people on board the prahu who were able to escape made for the shore. One of our marines was wounded in the neck with an arrow; and, with the exception of the captain, no other casualty took place.

"The fight would have been continued with the round shot still left in the barge, but the assistant surgeon was anxious that the captain should return to the ship and have the ball extracted. The barge, therefore, pulled for the ship, whose royals were visible above the horizon. The pirates, finding that we were retreating, returned to their prahus and fired their guns at us, but without effect.

"We arrived on board about 9 a.m., and the ship's head was put towards the scene of action, while the barge and two cutters were despatched in search of the gig, of whose safety we had great doubts. About 11.30 a.m. the second cutter, being in advance, discovered a sail on shore, and which, by the aid of our telescopes, we made out to be the gig. When we closed with her, and found that all was right, we were greatly relieved. We heard from Mr. Hooper, the purser who was in her, that after waiting in vain for the barge's return, he set fire to the prahu. In one of them he found a woman and child alive, whom he landed at the nearest point. He then pulled in the direction we had gone, being guided by the sound of our guns. On his arrival in the bay we were not in sight, and perceiving several prahus with flags flying and gongs beating, he naturally concluded that we had been overpowered, and he was making the best of his way towards the ship. The boats continued pulling towards the shore, leaving the gig to return to the ship, and ease the minds of the ship's company respecting her safety.

"On our arrival in the bay with the barge and cutters, we found that the prahu had hauled into a creek, on the banks of which was a masked battery, which opened a spirited fire upon us as soon as we came within range. After an hour's cannonading on both sides, we were joined by the gig, with

orders for us not to land, but to return to the ship at sunset. This order was not received with pleasure, as we hoped to have a chance of punishing the fellows a little more. We pulled a short distance along the coast, and entered another bay, in which we destroyed two prahus; after which we returned to the ship.

Such is the account given of these most sanguinary and fatal conflicts by an officer who was present in the barge during the whole time, and entered the facts in his own private log.

The *Samarang*, passing through the Straits of Patientia and the Bonta Passage into the Java Sea, arrived at Singapore on the 28th of June. Mr. Marryat then makes the following observations on the above proceedings:

"I may as well here remark that the Dutch made a formal complaint against our captain for having attacked the prahu, which they asserted were not pirates, but employed by them against the pirates. It is but fair to give the arguments that were used against us, particularly as the authorities at Singapore appeared to think that we were to blame.

"They said you were in boats and you touched at Gilolo; the natives accustomed to be taken off by the Ilianoan pirates, were naturally jealous and suspicious seeing no vessel.

"They came alone armed to ascertain who you were. At 100 yards they stopped; you signalled them to go away, and they advanced nearer to you, but they committed no act of hostility.

"You fired a volley at them and they retreated. Here the aggression was on your side.

"At the same time, you say, a war prahu pulled round the point and approached to within range; when the prahu was close to you she ceased paddling, and hoisted Dutch colours. You desired it to pull for the Gilolo shore, which it did. There was no aggression in this instance and nothing piratical in the conduct of the prahu.

"After she had obeyed your order to pull to the Gilolo shore, you wantonly fired a congrue rocket at her; your conduct, in this instance, being much more like that of a pirate than hers.

"In the afternoon you pull along the Gilolo shore, and you discover a village. You send your boat ashore, and set fire to it. Why so? You state that you were attacked by Ilianoan pirates, who reside at Tampasuk, some hundred miles from Gilolo, and you then burn the village of the people of Gilolo, and that without the least aggression on their part.

"Is it surprising that you should be supposed to be pirates after such wanton outrage?

"To proceed: You state that you then go in search of the prahu, which you ordered away, and that on your way you captured a large canoe, which you take in tow, and afterwards perceive the pirates hauling their vessel into a creek. You attack them and they run away, leaving the prahu in your possession, and as usual after rifling the prahu and canoe, you set them on fire.

"Up to this point there has been nothing but aggression on your part, and it is not therefore surprising that you were supposed to be pirates, and that the communication was made along the coast, and the vessels employed against the pirates were summoned for its protection.

"Again, the prahu came out and surrounded you; they did not fire at you, but hailed you in English, requesting to know if you belonged to a ship. Now, if any thing could prove that they were not pirate vessels, it was their doing this, and had you replied, they would have explained to you what their employment was; but you think proper to give no answer to this simple question; order them to go away, and then fire a loaded musket into them, which brings on the conflict which you so much desired."

That these observations were true it must be admitted, and the complaint of the Dutch, with the hoisting of the Dutch flag, gave great weight to them; however, pirates or no pirates, the Admiralty Court, on our arrival in England, considered them to have been such, and as will be seen by the extract from the *Times* below, awarded head-money to the amount of about 10,000*l.* to the captain and crew of the *Samarang*, and for his wound received, our captain obtained a pension (I believe) of 250*l.* a-year.

(Extract from the *Times*.)

ADMIRALTY COURT. (BEFORE DR. LUSHINGTON.)
ILLANOAN PIRATES. BOUNTY.—In this case a petition was presented by Sir Edward Belcher, the captain, and the rest of the officers and crew of H.M. ship-of-war *Samarang*, setting forth that on the 3rd June, 1844, the *Samarang*, being then engaged on surveying duties, and near the island of Gilolo, on her passage towards the Straits of Patientia, Sir E. Belcher, with two officers and four men, quitted her in the gig, accompanied by the second barge, armed with a brass 6 pounder gun and small arms, and manned with twenty officers and men. While engaged on the extreme side of a reef, extending from a small islet, in taking astronomical observations, they were disturbed by an extraordinary yell, proceeding from about 40 men of colour, who were advancing from the islet along both sides of the reef with the evident intention of surrounding Sir E. Belcher and his party, on hearing whom they commenced hurling spears and arrows, though without effect. They were soon repulsed, and put to flight by musketry. In the course of the day several large prahus made their appearance, manned by large crews of Malay pirates, and several conflicts took place between the respective parties, in one of which a ball

from the leading prahu struck Sir E. Belcher on the thigh and knocked him overboard, severely and dangerously wounding him; but, having been lifted out of the water, and dragged into the barge, he shortly after resumed the command, and ultimately succeeded in destroying all the prahus.

Dr. Addams applied to the court to award the bounties specified in the 6th Geo. IV., c. 49, for the capture and destruction of piratical ships and vessels. He submitted that the affidavits produced clearly showed the character of the persons on board the prahu, and that not less than 1,350 persons were alive on board the several prahus at the beginning of the attack, 350 of whom were killed.

The Queen's Advocate, on behalf of the crown, admitted that a very meritorious service had been performed, and made no opposition to the application.

The Court pronounced for the usual bounties on the number of pirates stated.

In conclusion, Mr. Marryat, referring to the private log of his brother officer, makes the following very important observations. In his narrative, it will be observed, he makes no mention of the natives who came down upon them having "thrown spears" at them, although in the extract from the *Times* it is so stated. It would appear, also, that there was some mistake as to the number of men on board the prahu and the number killed. A war prahu generally contains from 50 to 80 men. Some are smaller, and occasionally they are large, but not often. Captain Keppel states 50 men to be the usual number in his work, and in his conflict with the pirates estimates the force accordingly. Now, the first day there was one war prahu, which ran up a creek, and, on being fired at, the crew deserted her. On the second day there were five prahus all captured.

"On the third day the five prahus engaged were not captured, the boat returning to the ship after the captain was wounded. So that in all, it appears, there were nine prahus, and allowing 80 men to each, the force would only amount to 720 men, or about one half of the number stated, namely, 1,350. How the killed, amounting to 350, or about half the number, were arrived at and estimated, it is impossible to say; but in the narrative of the officer, which I have given, the major portion of the crews deserted the prahu and got on shore."

The following extract reveals with great simplicity the real objects of the *Samarang* in her cruise in the Indian seas. Mr. Marryat says:

"Our captain having now nearly recovered from the wound which he had received, we found that our destination was Borneo; but previous to the ship getting under weigh, the boats were ordered to be manned and armed to proceed on an excursion to Romania Point, distant about 30 miles from Singapore. It was expected that we might there fall in with some of the piratical vessels which so completely infest the Indian archipelago, and if so, we trusted to give them a lesson which might for a time put a check to their nefarious and cruel system of plunder and rapine. I found that my name was down in the list of the party selected for the expedition.

"Bidding, therefore, a temporary adieu to Singapore on the 2nd of August, we set off on the expedition, with a force consisting of two barges, one cutter, and a gunboat belonging to the merchants of Singapore, which had been expressly built to resist any attacks of these bold assailants.

"Although the real object of the expedition was, as I have above stated, to fall in with the pirates, our ostensible one was to survey the islands off the Point Romania, which is the most unfrequented part of the Malay peninsula. We arrived there late at night, as ignorant whether the pirates were there as the pirates would have been of our arrival. We had therefore nothing to do but to anchor close under the land, and keep a sharp look out, in case of being the attacked instead of the attacking party."

I shall reserve my comments on the scenes above described until the re-assembling of parliament, when I trust many more potential voices than my own will be lifted up against one of the most wicked systems which has ever been sanctioned by the British government.

Sir, &c.,

GEORGE THOMPSON.

6A, Waterloo-place, Dec. 10.