

DESTRUCTION OF BORNEAN PIRATES.

On Wednesday night a public meeting, called by the Aborigines Protection and Peace Societies, was held at the London Tavern, Bishopsgate-street. The object of the meeting was stated to be "to consider the fearful sacrifice of human life on the coast of Borneo in July last, and to petition Parliament for the total and immediate abolition of the practice of awarding head-money for the destruction of pirates."

Mr. Joseph Sturge, of Birmingham, took the chair shortly after 7 o'clock; and upon the platform were—Sir J. Walmsley, M.P., Mr. G. Thompson, M.P., Rev. R. C. Gribble, Rev. Dr. Cox, Rev. H. Richards, Rev. J. Turnbull, Rev. W. Bean, Messrs. J. H. Parry, C. Gilpin, S. F. Woolmer, Joseph Barrett, James Bell, E. Mills, J. Mayfield, A. Gilkes, J. Morland, L. A. Chamerovzow, &c. The large room was about half filled at the commencement of the proceedings. Between 300 and 400 persons were probably present at a subsequent period.

The CHAIRMAN opened the proceedings by reading a letter from Mr. Cobden, expressive of his concurrence with the object of the meeting.

The CHAIRMAN said, he believed the present movement would command the sympathy of every one who had any spark of humanity remaining in his heart. It was said these proceedings had been adopted for the protection of commerce; but as a commercial man he challenged those who defended them to find a single instance in China in which the pirates had attacked an English vessel engaged in legitimate commerce. He quite agreed in the opinion expressed by one of the liberal representatives of the House of Commons, that in the history of the 200 years there would be found nothing more atrocious since the attack of the Spaniards upon the Mexicans than what would be laid before them as having been done under the sanction of British authority at Borneo. (Applause.)

A burly honest-looking seafaring man, whose face was bronzed by exposure to the weather, here declared from the body of the meeting that he could produce proof that these pirates had attacked a British ship. This announcement caused some confusion, and a gentleman upon the platform rose to order. The individual in question (who, it appeared, was Mr. Aaron Smith, captain in the merchant service) was informed that he was not in order until a resolution was moved and seconded, and, being invited to do so, he took his seat upon the platform.

The Rev. H. RICHARDS then addressed the meeting at great length, commencing with the history of Rajah Brooke's career in the Eastern Archipelago, and contending that he had branded the Sarawaks as pirates, although they were only engaged in intertribal war with the race of which he was chief. He charged Sir J. Brooke not only with illegal conduct, but with having, according to the law of God, been guilty of massacre. (Cheers.)

The Rev. R. C. GRIBBLE, a minister of the established church, moved the first resolution:—

"That the recent slaughter of 1,500 or 2,000 Dyaks off the coast of Borneo by English seamen acting under the direction of Sir James Brooke, on a vague and general imputation of piracy, is a gross outrage on all the rights of justice and humanity, and calculated to cast deep dishonour upon our national character as a civilized and Christian people; and that a thorough and searching inquiry should be immediately instituted by Parliament into all the circumstances of this transaction, as well as the general line of policy pursued by Sir James Brooke in his treatment of the aboriginal tribes of Borneo."

Mr. J. TURNBULL, dissenting minister, seconded the resolution.

Captain AARON SMITH, the merchant captain who had previously interrupted the proceedings, here stepped to the front of the platform, and in a blunt straightforward manner said,—I didn't come here to offer obstruction to the meeting; but the chairman said there had never been a British ship attacked by pirates in the China seas. Now, I am an ocular demonstration to the contrary, and facts are stubborn things. (Cheers and confusion.)

The CHAIRMAN: I merely attempted to show that in the China seas our legitimate commerce was never attacked by pirates.

Captain SMITH: Now, I have been attacked at midnight by a fleet of Malay pirates. (Sensation upon the platform, and some confusion in the meeting.) I have navigated those seas 30 years. I am not a naval officer in Her Majesty's service, and have never received a farthing of Government money; but I am proud of being a British seaman (cheers), and I will say that the naval commanders in those seas possess as much kindness of heart and as much humanity as any other class of Her Majesty's subjects. (Cheers and confusion.) I have not the pleasure of being acquainted with Sir James Brooke, but I must say, that those people who navigate those seas are under obligations to those gentlemen for what they have done. I have passed many sleepless nights in those seas from fear of the pirates. I was bound from Sourabaya to China, when at 12 at night, on the 30th of April, 1836, we were surrounded by a fleet of pirates. I hastened on deck, and very soon a shot passed between me and my steward. A three hours' engagement ensued. I was attacked at midnight, nor was it the first time I had been engaged with them. I have heard it said there may have been some mistake about their being pirates, but there was "no mistake" here. There were 20 prahus, with 100 men in each. I have heard it said to-night that their boats are made with bamboo and rattans, and that they are mere "baskets." I can only tell you that they are manned by 100 men a-piece nearly, and that they are pulled by 70 or 80 oars; and after that it is for you to determine what kind of "baskets" they were. (Cheers, and confusion in the body of the meeting, and agitation upon the platform. A voice.—"He is smashing the meeting!") It is not my object to tell you about myself. I do not eulogise myself, but if these fellows had come at midnight to attack you it would have been your duty, and the duty of every man, to do as I did, and defend himself. (Grave and dubious looks from the chairman and other members of the Society of Friends upon the platform.) We had a three hour's engagement, and during that time I can tell you I killed as many men in proportion as Rajah Brooke. (Gentle exclamations of horror and surprise from the ladies, and much excitement among the gentlemen who surrounded Captain

Smith upon the platform.) I only did my duty, for it was my duty to defend my ship. After a three hours engagement there were about 100 of 'em shot. (Sensation.) I destroyed one crew, and disabled the rest. The next morning I hoisted out the British ensign that the chief of the pirates might know who he had to do with. But he hoisted up another British ensign. Now, he could'nt have bought one in those seas, and the one he held up could only have been gained by the massacre of those to whom it had belonged. (Cheers.) Why, there had been many Manila vessels that had never been heard of, and the Java seas were notorious for that class of men. (Hear, hear.) These gentlemen have told us that Rajah Brooke took possession of Borneo in his yacht, but they don't seem to know that Borneo is an island eight times larger than England, and nearly half as large as Europe. We have heard something about the merchants of Singapore. Now I don't like to slander a man behind his back, and what did they do about Rajah Brooke? I have had dealings with the Singapore merchants, and I know that a more honest, a more just, a more religious, and a better class of men do not exist than the British merchants of Singapore. (Sensation and expressions of dissent from the platform.) Now, what have they done? they are within a stone's-throw; they have had dealings with the Dyaks; and they have signed a unanimous declaration that Governor Brooke is justified in what he has done. It is said you ought to take these men alive. If you can take a man alive, do it. (Hear, hear.) But, remember, you may meet 300 prahus with 1000 men in each, all armed with poisoned spears. "I wish," (said Captain Smith with great emphasis, and turning round to the rev. gentlemen behind him—"I wish any of you would go on the coast of Borneo.") (Great consternation upon the platform, expressions of horror from the ladies, and much confusion in the body of the room.) Why I have been obliged to land with a brace of pistols and a sword at my side to procure water; I have had poisoned spears thrown at me like a wild beast. Humanize them if you can, but depend upon it you must either put them down or they will cut off every British ship *seriatim* that goes in those seas. (Increased confusion, and a voice from the body of the meeting, "Give him fair play!")

A gentleman upon the platform, indignantly: He shall have no unfair play here.

Captain SMITH: I am sorry if I have at all interfered with this meeting ("Oh, oh," and laughter and cheers from an increasing party in the room who appeared to be gained over by the undaunted captain); but I could not stand by and see those brave men and defenders of their country—(The conclusion of the sentence was drowned in cheers.) One gentleman has talked about Nelson, and said he would not have done such a thing; but, when you get among pirates who will kill every man they can get hold of, and boil you next day, what are you to do? (A laugh, and "Hear, hear.") If our sailors have done wrong in destroying such men, what did Nelson deserve at Copenhagen? The fact is, they have done no more than they legitimately could to suppress piracy, and they ought to have credit given them for having done their duty. (Hear.) There is no evidence that they have committed any unjust act of cruelty, and I say they should be praised rather than censured. (Cheers.) I agree with you that there ought to be no such thing as head money. ("Hear," and cheers.) A naval officer should be paid for his services, and that is enough. If you can civilize these pirates, do it; but I thought, (as I happened to be present, I would tell you that a more gallant race of men than our

officers and sailors in these seas never existed, or a more humane set of men. (Captain Smith here resumed his seat apparently to the inexpressible relief of the promoters of the meeting.)

Mr. G. THOMPSON rose amid vociferous cheering. He said, the experience of Rajah Brooke refuted the assertions of Mr. Aaron Smith, for he had entered the river Sarawak, not on the quarter-deck of a vessel of 600 tons, like their burly friend who had just spoken, but in his small yacht; he had made excursions into the interior, and had received every hospitality from the natives. (Cheers.) He feared their friend Mr. Smith must have been wanting in courage a little. (A laugh.) That mishap that he had met with in the Indian seas had filled his brains with phantoms ever since.

Captain SMITH said, that imputations had been thrown out against him. (Hear.) Now, he did not throw out improper imputations against any one; but since Mr. Thompson had charged him with want of courage, he would say that he had received a purse of 150 guineas from the merchants, a piece of plate of £50 from the country captains, and 100 guineas from the Mutual Indemnity Association for his conduct in these waters. (Hear, and cheers.) To charge him with want of courage in this way was, therefore, very bad conduct to say the least of it. (Hear.)

Mr. G. THOMPSON said, they had graver matters to deal with than bandying either soft words or hard words with Captain Smith. (Cheers.) Naked and alone Mr. Rajah Brooke had proved the temper of these natives. If a man were ever obliged to kill his fellow men—and if such an obligation could ever fall upon him—he (Mr. Thompson) liked to see him sorry for it, and did not like to see him gloat over the recollection. If he got a committee to inquire into the massacre off Borneo, and he (Mr. G. Thompson) were a member, he would have this gentleman before it. (Cheers and laughter.) He should like to turn him inside out (much laughter), and to know a little more about him. [Captain SMITH: "He will never be ashamed of his name."] The hon. member concluded by contending that no man ought to be punished without trial, and that the motto of the Borneans, as of themselves, should be "Strike! but hear." (Cheers.)

The resolution was then put from the chair, and passed unanimously.

Mr. J. H. PARRY moved the next resolution, condemning the principle of giving head money in the destruction of pirates. It was seconded by Mr. S. F. WOOLMER, and carried without opposition.

A petition to Parliament, embodying the substance of the resolutions, was then proposed by Mr. J. BARRETT, seconded by Mr. J. BELL, and carried.

After a vote of thanks to the chair, the meeting broke up at about eleven o'clock.