

THE ministerial bill to repeal the Head-Money Act stands for committal to-night in the House of Commons. No opposition having been offered to this measure on the second reading, there is little likelihood of any successful attempt to obstruct its progress in committee. It is too brief to afford a handle to quibbling opponents; it is indeed laconic enough to have emanated from LYCOURGUS himself. Whereas such an act was passed in such a year, and whereas it is expedient that it should be repealed, be it enacted that the said act is hereby repealed. It could be wished that examples of this Spartan brevity were more frequent on the pages of "the statutes at large."

Indeed it is not easy to surmise any quarter whence opposition to the repeal of the Head-Money Act could come, except from a few agents. Sir THOMAS BARING told the House of Commons on the night of the second reading that the late admiral on the Chinese and Indian station, had declared the Head-Money Act served as a pretext for undertaking enterprises and claiming head-money in virtue of them, of a nature that its framers could not possibly have had in contemplation. Months ago the act was denounced in the *China Mail* as obstructing the suppression of piracy, by encouraging the indiscriminate slaughter of the crews of vessels attacked upon suspicion, and thus rendering inquiry impossible. The same view of it has repeatedly been taken by the ablest civil officials in the East, both in their public and private correspondence.

A rumour which had been circulated at Hong Kong, though discredited some time before the despatch of the last mail, relative to the re-appearance of the pirate chief SHAPINGTSAI at the head of a new force, elicited from the *Friend of China* some admissions curiously illustrative of the effects of the head-money system. "Heretofore," said the journal we have named, while labouring under a panic on account of the reported resuscitation of the pirate force, "Europeans have escaped—at least it is not known for certain that any of the vessels missing were captured by pirates—but this will not continue." The writer goes on to state why he thinks it will not continue. "So long as we left the Chinese traders to his [SHAPINGTSAI'S] tender mercies it was his policy to let our vessels pass scot free. But our relations are altered; now he looks upon us as his most implacable enemies." Entertaining this opinion, and "burning for the loss he has suffered by the English vessels of war, he will scarcely fail to avenge himself upon the peaceful traders. \* \* \* Nor are the receiving vessels at the various stations from Cumsingmoon to Lookong beyond the reach of such a formidable foe."

Here we have the results of the destruction of SHAPINGTSAI'S fleet, which will probably cost this country 30,000*l.* for head money alone, stated by a writer who is exhorting to a repetition of the exploit. So long as the Admiralty instructions to men-of-war on the China station, not to meddle with any vessel on a charge of piracy, in the Chinese waters, unless they saw her attack a British ship, or had such evidence of her having done so as would be sufficient in a court of justice, were attended to, no British traders were assailed. But since these instructions have been disobeyed, in the case of SHAPINGTSAI, our merchants are alarmed for their vessels. And not without cause, if the pirate chief be animated by a tinge of the revengeful disposition attributed to him, or have one-half of the power he is said to possess of gratifying it. With a shallow hypocrisy the government (the Leadenhall directors, with the knowledge and sanction of the Board of Control) who sell the opium with which the clippers are loaded, declines to protect them by its men-of-war, because they are smugglers. On the terms upon which SHAPINGTSAI is understood to stand with the Chinese authorities, he might seize every opium-receiving ship on the coast, and if captured and tried for piracy, plead that he had been employed by his government to suppress smuggling. Our English diplomacy would be rather perplexed by such a plea. It appears, therefore, that all that has been gained for English traders by the late 30,000*l.* worth of slaughter is the exposure of the most valuable portion of their vessels to dangers from which they were formerly exempt. And there is no lack of charity in saying that but for the temptations of the Head-money Act the Admiralty instructions would not have been disregarded, and this danger could not have been incurred.

From the helpless Dyaks of Sarebas and Sakarran no such retaliation, as is apprehended from the daring Chinese pirate-chief, is possible; but the abuse of the Head-money Act in their case is more disgraceful. The palliators of the Rajah of SARAWAK are assiduously labouring to confuse public opinion, and avert a correct judgment of his proceedings by declaiming about Malay piracy. Enough has of late been said in our columns to show that even Malay pirates are not the dangerous persons they have been represented. But the Dyaks of Sarebas and Sakarran are not Malays. The

Malay pirates cruise in fleets which are fitted out sometimes from one station and sometimes from another, and which keep the sea for two or three years together. Individuals belonging to Dyak tribes have been known to join these fleets, but piratical expeditions undertaken by Dyaks alone are unheard of. The Dyaks and their vessels are easily distinguished from the Malays and their vessels. The Malays are armed with krises and fire-arms, and their prahus have masts, sails, and rude native artillery. The Dyaks have mere paddling canoes, are armed with rude sabres, spears and sumpitans, and are too much afraid of fire-arms to use them. The flotilla destroyed by the *Nemesis* was a Dyak one: the sketch which accompanies Mr. VIGERS' account of the affray in the *Illustrated London News*, shows that there was not a sail-boat in it. The petty war that flotilla had been waging against a neighbour tribe had nothing in common with the expeditions fitted out at times by the Sooloo and other Malays, to take and plunder all vessels they meet with which are not too strong for them. Not a single instance has yet been adduced of the Dyaks of Sarebas and Sakarran, or any Dyaks whatever, having attacked a British vessel. Even though it could be proved that ten or twenty years ago some Sarebas canoes had acted as auxiliaries to a fleet of Malay pirates, that would not warrant the attack upon the Sarebas and Sakarran flotilla in July last. The Dyaks are, in respect of civilisation and power, exactly on a par with the natives of Polynesia. Wars are frequent among these islanders; yet it has never been heard that European commanders have held themselves authorised to take part with one of the belligerent forces and exterminate the other. No British captain has proposed to exterminate the natives of Herromango, although an English missionary was murdered there. When American citizens were murdered at the Feejee group, Lieut. WILKES only captured the guilty party, to convey him to America. When, about the close of last century, a British and an American vessel were cut off nearly at the same time by the natives of the Sandwich Islands, VANCOUVER seized and punished the leaders of the attack on his countrymen, but did not hold himself entitled to interfere in the case of the Americans. These facts speak trumpet-tongued against the massacre of the Sarebas and Sakarran Dyaks, by whom no British subject had been injured; and they show the necessity of repealing that act which has enabled the Rajah of Sarawak to bribe British seamen to become his accomplices.