

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY NEWS.

SIR,—I see that the "head money" return has been presented to the House of Commons. Considering the quarter from which it comes, the Admiralty, it deserves the epithet of "lubberly." There is no return of the bills drawn for "head money" from the 1st of January, 1849, to the 7th of March, 1850, on the plea that the particular government office on which such bills were drawn is not the one named in the order, so it contains no account of the cost of the recent exploits on the coasts of China and Borneo. Then it shows that in nine cases out of ten the government was ignorant what nation or people committed the 54 acts of piracy for which the public money was paid. Again, there is no summing up of the pirates killed and the pirates captured, of the 20-pounders and the 5 pounders, and, finally, one of the condemnations is stated to have taken place in a court which has no existence—"The Vice Admiralty Court of Prince Edward's Island." It ought to have been Prince of Wales Island, which is within 5 degs. of the Equator, whereas the place laid down by the geographer of the Admiralty is some 45 degs. distant from it.

The lame return, however, imperfect as it is, yields by analysis some curious revelations. It extends over a period of 24 years, from 1824 to 1848. In that time 1878 pirates were put to death at 20*l.* sterling per head, making a total sum of 37,560*l.*, and 3,339 prisoners were made at the cost of 5*l.* a piece, making the total charge to the nation of 57,255*l.*

For the first 12 years of the 24, the piracies were confined to the Grecian and Columbian Archipelagos, in which buccaneering is known to have been rife, during the struggle for the emancipation of Greece, and the Spanish and Portuguese American colonies. During the 12 years in question not a single piracy is mentioned as having occurred in the Indian Archipelago. The earliest in this quarter occurs in 1836, and in the next seven years we have the capture of 31 boats, with crews of 867, giving an average crew of some 27 for each boat, and not 50, as has been usually estimated. All these seem to have been genuine Malay or Illanoon pirates. From this list, however, I am obliged to exclude one condemnation of the Vice-Admiralty Court of Bengal, on account of its surprising vagueness. The entry runs thus:—"The crews of several proas, being Malay subjects of the Sultan of Lingen." The "several" proas had crews amounting in round numbers to exactly 500, and they are charged as having been all made prisoners at 2,500*l.*

Twenty years passed away before there is any mention in the return, or any in any public document of the British or any other nation, of Dyak pirates. They first appeared in 1845, when Rajah Brooke became sovereign lord of Sarawak. In that year six war proas are expressly called Dyak, an average crew of 55 men being assigned to each, or the number given to a regular Malay or Illanoon pirate. On this occasion (for 190 of the crews were put to the sword) the British exchequer paid 4,500*l.*, a sum probably equal in value to at least 450 of the war-beats in question, arms, stores, and ammunition included.

But besides these six proas, expressly called Dyak, there are others in the same year, evidently Dyak also from the locality in which they were attacked, viz., "15 miles up a branch of the Sakarran river." This is the entry: "The crews of a great number of piratical vessels belonging to Sheriff Mulah, a notorious pirate chief." The crews of the "great number of piratical vessels" amounted to a nett 400, as Providence would have it, neither more nor less than exactly 400! In the absence of all witnesses, except parties having a direct pecuniary interest, one only wonders how a British court of justice, or any other court of justice, could proceed to judgment.

One curious fact connected with the return is the absence from it of the name of the Indian Commander-in-Chief, Sir Thomas Cochrane. He had destroyed in person the only formidable nests of pirates of which the destruction has been accomplished. I can only account for this by supposing that Sir Thomas Cochrane has no taste for blood-money, and that he thinks a man may do his duty without this particular sort of provocation to it.

Of the total sum of 57,255*l.* paid for head money in 24 years, 21,000*l.* and upwards are paid for Bornean heads. This is, of course, exclusive of the 98,930*l.* asked for in the present year's estimates, a sum which alone exceeds by above 70 per cent. the whole expenditure of 24 years, including the cost of suppressing Greek and Spanish American piracy.

I am, &c.,

VIGILANS.