

BRITISH PIRATES IN BORNEO.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DAILY NEWS.

SIR,—The Borneo papers have just been published, and, although very meagre, still yield some strange revelations. The subjects of the battle of the 31st of July are shown by the very assailants themselves to be the helpless beings which the *Daily News* has all along represented them. Both Sir James Brooke and Captain Farquhar, the naval commander, admit the absence of firearms on the part of the Dyaks. The latter expressly says, "The Dyak villages being one continued house, built upon high posts, are well adapted for defence, but the Dyaks being almost devoid of firearms, cannot stand against a well-armed force, their weapons being the sumpitan, with poisoned arrows, spears, &c., and a short sword, having a shield for protection." Sir James Brooke confirms the testimony which he had before given in his diary; "should these pirates," says he, "become possessed of musketry, which is but too probable, the result must be deplorable alike to the peaceful inhabitants of the coast; to the native trade, and ultimately to European commerce." We have here in this sentence a fair sample of the broad assertions which have been dealt in, and pawned upon us for facts. It begins with begging the question, and upon the beggary is then raised a climax which is quite frightful.

Sir James would have been quite as reasonable had he said, "Should Malay pirates one day become possessed of steam navigation, which is but too probable, the result would be that they might run a muck across the Cape of Good Hope, and in the long run, finding their way into the Atlantic ocean and the British Channel, produce results deplorable to European commerce."

Sir James, in the same despatch, describes the Sakarrans and Sarebas as "a fierce horde of pirates traversing the high seas and devastating the coasts." But he happens to be contradicted by Captain Farquhar; and this, too, on his own authority. "Acting," says the naval commander, "on the advice of his Excellency, who has a thorough knowledge of the character and habits of these piratical tribes, and who informed me that their expedition would certainly not extend over five to seven days, I determined to await their return, guarding well the entrances of the Kaluka and Sarebas rivers, the only avenues to their country." Thus it turns out that the hordes described as "traversing the high seas," and whose cruises occupy an entire monsoon, sweeping the whole Archipelago, are never absent from home above five or seven days—that is, never make a voyage of above half that length from the mouths of their own rivers. In fact, it appears that the piratical cruises of these formidable buccaneers without fire arms are confined to the coast of their own island, and never extend over more than 100 miles even of that.

The poverty of the Dyaks is as pitiable as their want of military resources. Sir James Brooke on his "own mere motion" imposes a fine of 150*l.* on a certain Dyak tribe called the Kenowit, charged as being aiders and abettors of piracy, and receivers of stolen goods. One might expect to find that the mulct was paid in hard cash, the proceeds of the alleged stolen goods, but that was not the case. "After considerable difficulty," says Captain Farquhar, "a portion of the fine was brought in, gold ornaments, brass guns, and gongs." We have in fact a tabular view, in the Borneo papers, of the produce of the fine, which consisted of nine lots of brass popguns, weighing in all some nine cwt.; twenty-one lots of gongs; seven lots of women and children's gold ornaments, which sold for 1*l.* 1*s.* 8*d.*, and seven lots ditto brass ornaments, which sold for 2*l.* 17*s.*, with six lots of old jars. The produce of the whole fine was but 9*l.* 17*s.* 2*d.*, so that there remains due to Queen Victoria a balance of 58*l.* 2*s.* 10*d.* What a pitiable example is all this exhibition before a British senate!

The lapses of the Borneo papers are more abundant than their information. The pirates killed in action are called 400 by Sir James Brooke, and 500 by the naval commander, who estimates that at least as many more perished in the jungle, making the total destruction 1,000, against one European wounded by an accident with his own hand, on the part of the victors. Not one word is said about the fire-arms captured, nor is there even a return of the swords, sumpitans, and shields taken. Of the prisoners there is only an allusion to some having been made, but there is not a syllable about their numbers. They were all, it is discreetly stated, set at liberty; and, still more discreetly, not one of them was sent for trial, or even as a witness before the Admiralty Court, sitting at the moment at Singapore.

Of the depositions taken at Singapore, and by commission in Borneo, on the faith of which 20,700*l.* are to be paid by the British people, not one is contained in the papers. Sir James Brooke's despatch, giving an account of the "battle," is of half a page, and composed of round assertion of piracy, promptly and effectually contradicted by the internal evidence of his own despatches. The instructions from the Foreign-office amount to six lines, equally vague. Sir James is described in them as representing the sovereign of the British empire to "the native and independent chiefs of Borneo." Who are they? The principal, of course, are the rulers of Borneo proper; but of them Sir James himself, in his first despatch, says, "Indeed, their government is so weak, and their influence so inconsiderable, that it would hardly at present be worth while to punish them for their bad faith." Who the rest of the independent chiefs may be it is not easy to conjecture; but possibly the sovereign of the Kenowit Dyaks, who could only raise sixty per cent. out of the mulct imposed on him by the representative of his ally, Queen Victoria, may be one.

Throughout the whole of the papers, the alleged piracy of some fifty obscure miles of the coast of Borneo is ridiculously and pompously treated of as if it were the piracy of the entire Archipelago.

In conclusion, I will only just add that there is one judicious public paper in the collection, the instructions of the late Lord Auckland, a man of Indian experience and calm judgment. "You will much rather," says he, "endeavour to check piracy in the islands of the Archipelago by a good understanding, and by enforcing the observance of treaties with the native chiefs, than by encouraging hostile operations, and expeditions of a coercive character." The late operations conducted on the coast of Borneo are not only not in compliance with these instructions, but in utter contempt and defiance of them.

I am, &c.,

A LAWYER.

Temple, March 21, 1850.