

RAJAH BROOKE AND BORNEO.

The following letter has been addressed by the undersigned merchants of Singapore to Joseph Hume, Esq., M.P.:

"Sir,—We the undersigned (British) merchants and inhabitants of Singapore, have received information that it is your intention to bring forward a motion in the House of Commons relative to the proceedings of Sir James Brooke, K.G.B., which will, amongst other things, involve the consideration of grounds for inquiry into the system of what has been termed Borneo Piracy.

"We beg to testify our cordial approval of your valuable and persevering exertions as a member of the imperial legislature to call the attention of parliament and of the British public to the measures which have been pursued against the communities of the Serebas and Sakarran Dyaks, inhabiting territories on the coast of Borneo adjacent to Sarawak, and to discriminate between the usages and situation of these tribes, and the piracies of the formidable marauders of the Archipelago who have so long been known under the names of Illanuns or Lanuns, Sooloos, and Balaninis.

"It is a fact perfectly notorious in this settlement that until within these few years the alleged piracies of the Dyaks had never been heard of, and that the first circumstance which in any particular manner drew public attention in the Straits to the existence of the Serebas and Sakarrans as hordes of pirates, was the invasion of their countries by Captain the Honourable H. Keppel in H.M.S. Dido—a measure which was at the time commented on by many here as unjustifiable.

"There is not one amongst us who ever heard the captain of a merchant vessel or the *nacodah* of a trading prahu, mention their having seen a Dyak pirate; and the circumstance of either the one or the other of them having fallen in with, or been attacked by, prahus which were propelled by paddles, and had neither masts nor sails, would have been a novelty which could not have failed to attract attention, to say nothing of the want of fire-arms; and you will observe that, according to the deposition (printed in the Parliamentary Papers regarding Borneo piracy) of Siap, a Sadong Malay, a prisoner taken from the Serebas on the 31st July, 1849, 'there were not more than four small brass guns' in the whole fleet, although it could not have numbered less than 3,000 or 3,500 men; while it is a notorious fact that the same number of guns often forms the armament of a single Malay, Bugis, or other trading prahu of the Archipelago.

"Whatever language may have been employed to describe the depredations of the Dyaks of Serebas and Sakarran it is impossible, with the facts we have before us, that we can consider the continuance of the same destructive measures that have been pursued against them as 'consonant with humanity, with the interests of commerce, and the maintenance of our national position in the Archipelago.' We think, on the contrary, that these measures are much to be lamented, and that a more humane and considerate policy will better tend to the promotion of the true interests of trade.

"Neither can we assent to the proposition that 'the north-west coast of Borneo would be secure for trade, and the inhabitants of the different rivers at peace with each other, if not disturbed and harassed by these pirate hordes,' at least so far as the security of trade is concerned, as this representation leaves wholly out of sight the existence of the only marauders whom general experience has proved to be dangerous to trade in these parts—whom Captain Keppel, in the Dido, and the boats of that ship, encountered and fought no less than three times in the course of the short voyage from this place to Sarawak in 1843, and whose depredations and obstructions to trade the Singapore *Straits Times* and the *Free Press* have, number after number, for the last three months, been calling public attention to.

"The pacification of the north-west coast of Borneo, which in many places had been so long disturbed by intestine wars of its tribes, and other disorders arising from the absence of any regular government, and where lawless violence of the most flagrant kind had been daily exercised by the rulers and chiefs, is certainly an object to be greatly desired, as well for the sake of common humanity, as for the benefits that must ultimately accrue to commerce from the establishment of a better order of things: but we are of opinion that the course of policy to be pursued for the attainment of that desirable end will be best ascertained by means of that inquiry which it is your object to institute. It seems to us to be contrary to every principle to expect that any general pacification among the Dyak tribes will result from brigading along with the British forces employed against the Serebas and Sakarran Dyaks, the other Dyak tribes, who, according to every testimony, have been so long their inveterate foes. Such a system appears rather calculated to perpetuate the existence of the feelings which kept these savage feuds so long alive among the Dyak races; and we are, moreover, of opinion it is much to be deprecated by every friend of humanity.

"It is, of course, morally impossible for us to aver that the Serebas and Sakarran Dyaks never have committed what we understand to be piracy, but the current testimony of every account which we are aware of being before the public regarding the Dyak races, must be wholly rejected if every case of an attack by the Serebas and Sakarrans against a neighbouring territory, whether inhabited by Malays or Dyaks, is to be considered an act of piracy. Such, however, appears to have been the principle acted on in regard to them from first to last, as the history of every invasion, and every attack of which they have been the object, will abundantly prove. It appears to us that the most that can be said for those who advocate their slaughter as pirates is, that the actual character of these tribes is matter of doubt. In the face of the tremendous carnage of the 31st July, we will not here undertake to say that they were not pirates; but we confidently affirm our opinion that the evidence of their being pirates is the very opposite of being satisfactory.

"We conclude these observations with the expression of an earnest hope that parliament will see fit to accede to your motion for inquiry, without which there can be no issue of this question satisfactory to the public mind.

"W. W. Ker, L. Fraser, J. Guthrie, Robert Duff, John Steel, G. J. Dare, Thomas O. Crane, C. Spottiswoode, Wm. Spottiswoode, C. Baumgarten, H. A. Allen, M. D., John Henry, J. J. Greenshields, Simon Bach, R. C. Woods, &c."