

THE PRAHUS OF THE SAKARRAN AND
SARABAS DYAKS.

From all that has appeared in the dispatches and debates on the valourous exploit of destroying some hundreds of unarmed and unresisting traders and fishermen, in the peaceful pursuit of their occupations on the coast of Borneo, it seems that we are to admit that Sir James Brooke and the other heroes did really believe that those unfortunate persons were pirates, and are consequently exonerated from all guilt. Whether the historian, English or foreign, will be equally complaisant, is quite another affair. If the slaughterers did believe those poor people to be pirates, we can but admire the ease with which accusations may be sometimes received when unsupported by evidence, particularly if there should be the temptation of blood-money to beguile the judgment of some, and if there should be the prospect of crushing ancient enemies without expense of men or treasure, to assist others in forming a correct estimate of the character of those against whom an opportunity of employing an overwhelming force occurs.

That the Dyaks were pirates, we are not to doubt, whatever Mr. Hume, and other gentlemen acquainted with the Malay tribes, may say to the contrary; yet, surely, we may be permitted to ask for positive, not hearsay evidence of the facts. What European, or what British Indian vessel was ever assailed by the prahus of the Sakarran and Sarabas Dyaks? Not one has been alleged, in the course of the several debates that have taken place on an affair, which, if it does not discredit, most assuredly does not honour the British character. Something, indeed, has been said of acts of piracy between Sarawak and Singapore, and it was observed, that "Surely it was an act of mercy and justice to put an end to such acts." So it may have been; but robbery by sea and land has always been legitimate among uncivilised people. Homer's heroes were confederated pirates, making war upon pirates; our ancestors were notorious pirates, at a time when piracy was a most honourable pursuit; and the present states of the continent owe their foundation to the northern hordes of robbers, when robbery was deemed sufficiently honourable to gain the reward of nobility, and laid the foundation of all modern titles of rank. With the people of Sarawak and Singapore the same notions of warfare and honour prevail; in fact, they have not yet acquired any other—and all in those seas will long look upon Sir James Brooke's noble action as the unprovoked foray of a pirate, who owed his success to the lucky accident of attacking people who were in no way prepared with the means of defence or offence. As to the slaughter's being an act of justice, it is altogether a one-sided act. By the allegation there were two parties; but one alone is punished. It was exactly such an act of justice as might be performed by one European nation destroying another, because it was at war with a third.

But 20*l.* a head for every pirate slain or taken prisoner wonderfully assists the judgment in the absence of evidence, and we ask on what pretence any reward should be given to the men and officers in her Majesty's service for discharging the duties, for which they are regularly paid the very sums, for which they contract their services; if they do more than their duty, then let the extra work be estimated by a competent court; but if it is merely what they engage to do, every shilling given for it beyond their stipulated pay, is a robbery of the country.

We look with suspicion upon blood-money of every description, and with good reason. In the time of William III., an act was passed, by which, in addition to 40*l.* for the apprehension of a highwayman, his horse and arms were to be the prize of the captor; and about the middle of the last century, it was discovered, that a number of innocent people had been hanged for highway robberies, which were planned for the purpose of securing the Parliamentary blood-money by a gang of thief-takers, men whom both juries and judges believed to be worthy of credit. The trials of these scoundrels may be found in the Old Bailey Sessions Papers, and a narrative of their crimes in the magazines, and, we believe, in the *Newgate Calendar*. Up to the detection of their systematic murders under forms of law, these men seem to have borne good characters, and certainly both the Government and the public thought well of their services. On the whole, it is highly probable that they were corrupted by the temptation of the blood-money. After this dreadful experience of its effects, a rational people would have instantly abolished such rewards for ever. They did not; for in the first quarter of the present century, several police officers, also of good character, were convicted of the very same practices as the thief-takers. The name of one was *Vickery*, but we forget the others: the victims, through whom they were detected, were three Irishmen, not one of whom could speak English. They were entrapped into the uttering of false coin, condemned to death, and might have been executed, but for the humane and timely interference of the late Alderman Wood, who procured their pardon, which is dated September 19, 1816, and caused the successful prosecution of the gang.

Under these well-known circumstances, and the well-established influence of blood-money in corrupting men's minds, it was both imprudent and discreditable to offer blood-money to her Majesty's paid servants for capturing pirates, even if such capture had not been one of their acknowledged duties. As it is, the prospect of 20*l.* per head, when several hundred people can be shot without risk to the shooters, leads to suspicion, that their extra-judicial condemnation may have been somewhat precipitate.—There is, to be sure, the authenticated list at Lloyd's of 40 British vessels attacked by "Borneo or Dyak pirates." We use Mr. Forster's words in the debate, Now Borneo is thrice as large as our own island, and the Dyak territory is not the two-hundredth part of it; and what would be thought of the French or any other government, if, because some Cornish wreckers had plundered 40 of their ships, they were to do military execution on the people of Newcastle-upon-Tyne or Hull, because the robbery was done by English or Cornish wreckers?

We, however, do not believe that there is a pirate in Borneo; but the Dyaks were an ancient enemy of the Sarawaks, and there was a reward of 20*l.* a head for killing pirates.

We have adverted to the giving of extra rewards to men for performing the duties for which they are hired by the nation. On what principle do captains of men-of-war claim salvage? On what principle is salvage awarded to them? If one of them neglected to succour an Indian in distress when able to save her, would he be punished for dereliction of a very obvious duty, or is the performance of this duty discretionary? In our opinion, every pound claimed and awarded as salvage to such persons is so much shamelessly extorted from the merchant, who contributes his portion to the payment of the fleet.

The Dyak affair and that of the French colonel in the cavern in Algeria, seem to be parallel exploits; and we wish both nations joy of such heroes, and such national glory as they can achieve for them.—*Morning Advertiser*.