

THE BORNEO PIRATES.

Mr. HUME moved for an address to her Majesty praying for a commission to inquire into the proceedings of Sir James Brooke on the coast of Borneo, and specially with reference to his attack, aided by a naval force belonging to the East India Company, upon certain wild tribes of that island called Sakarran and Sarebas Dyaks on the night of the 21st July, 1849. The Hon. Member referred to a variety of documentary evidence to show that these Dyaks were a comparatively feeble and inoffensive race. Under these circumstances the attack made upon them was equivalent to a massacre, and he contended that a full inquiry ought to be made, in order to determine how far the Governor of Sarawak was justly amenable for that grievous crime.

The motion was seconded by Mr. URQUHART.

Mr. HEADLAM, after waiving the plea that Sir J. Brooke had been once already tried and acquitted on the same charge, contended that the documents recently presented to the House made his justification more complete. The accusation was founded entirely upon allegations that the Dyaks were harmless and innocent, and the attack of July, 1849, altogether unprovoked. On both these points the Hon. Member cited largely from the returns and correspondence, and declared that the evidence was irresistible as to the fact that the tribes in question were addicted to piracy, and had proved themselves very formidable to the merchant vessels navigating in the Bornean seas.

Mr. URQUHART controverted the assertions of Mr. Headlam, and denied that any evidence existed that the Sarebas tribes were guilty of piracy. So far from being pirates, they did not even possess the means and weapons necessary for piratical expeditions.

Mr. M. MILNES demurred to the demand that had been made upon Sir J. Brooke, to prove the individual guilt of the Dyaks attacked in July, 1849. Ethnologically, however, there was no doubt that the Dyaks belonged to the Malays, who were, and had long been, notorious for piracy. The conduct and career of the Governor of Sarawak had throughout been admirable, and entitled him to claim the best construction for actions which might not be susceptible of direct explanation.

Mr. DRUMMOND remarked that numerous petitions had been presented to the legislature by commercial bodies, praying to have piracy put down in the very seas where it was now said no such crime existed or was possible.

After a few words from Mr. M'GREGOR,

Mr. B. COCHRANE read extracts from a letter of Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane, testifying to the existence of piracy on the coasts of Borneo, and to the high principles that had inspired the administration of Sir Jas. Brooke.

Mr. GLADSTONE concurred in believing that Sir James had acted under critical circumstances with wisdom and philanthropy.

Lord PALMERSTON, addressing himself to the argument of Mr. Gladstone, observed that the mitigation of the punishment for piracy was applicable only to the treatment of pirates after capture. In the present instance the Dyaks were killed in the attempt to capture them, and belonged indeed to a race who preferred always to be killed rather than surrender. They were treated as enemies according to the laws of war. Turning to the question of piracy, the Noble Lord referred first to the undeniable proof that the Bornean seas were eminently unsafe for unarmed vessels. Many had been attacked, and escaped; others had never been heard of, and were supposed to have been taken by the pirates. By other testimony he showed that the Dyaks, without exception, were engaged in piratical excursions, and lived by no other apparent means. The whole charge, therefore, he submitted, fell to the ground, and he trusted to the justice of the House that the malignant persecutions directed against an officer who had done so much that was good and glorious, would be deprived of their sting.

Mr. COBDEN explained that the responsibility for the Dyak massacre was only fixed upon Sir J. Brooke because that officer had himself always assumed it. The Hon. Member briefly recapitulated some of the negative evidence adduced by Mr. Hume, including the letters of five naval officers, who concurred in ignoring the charge of Dyak piracy. Commenting upon the anomalous position of Sir J. Brooke as governor, consul, and trader, he claimed a right to suspect the motives that induced him (Sir James) to employ British and East India ships in a war against his own next neighbours. They had asked for proofs of the alleged piracy of the Dyaks, and had obtained abundance of reclamation, but not a tittle of proof. The Dyaks were not Malays, and the asserted piracies were little more than inter-tribal disputes, yet the Governor of Sarawak had pursued them for years, and slaughtered them by thousands.

Sir F. THESIGER declared that the proofs demanded by Mr. Cobden existed abundantly. Besides a mass of individual testimony, the question was twice subjected to judicial investigation in actions for "head money," when it had been decided that the Dyaks were pirates, beyond the possibility of doubt or denial. Referring to the arguments of Mr. Gladstone, he contended that by the law of England and all other civilised countries, pirates were always considered as the enemies of the human race.

Col. THOMPSON, after closely scrutinising the evidence, believed no more in the existence of Dyak pirates than in that of Cappadocian dragons.

Mr. FORSTER had found a different belief current at Lloyd's, where also he had procured a list of thirty or forty vessels captured by Malay or Dyak pirates.

Mr. HUME replied, and the House divided:

For the resolution .....	19
Against .....	230
Majority.....	—211

The Stock in Trade Bill was passed through committee.

The House adjourned at one o'clock.