

Manchester Times
(Manchester, England),
Saturday, July 12, 1851

THE EXAMINER AND TIMES.

MANCHESTER,
SATURDAY, JULY 12, 1851.

RAJAH BROOKE AND THE DYAKS OF SARAWAK.

There has been no species of atrocity in connection with the treatment of native tribes by the more civilised nations of Europe, in any quarter of the globe, that has not found a ready and unscrupulous defence at the hands of those vested with authority. It matters not whether the colonisers have been Englishmen or Spaniards, what deed of sanguinary horrors has not found its panegyrist wherever territorial aggrandisement, or the supposed interests of a usurped dominion, has afforded the plea for oppression or extermination? What does Spanish history say of the murders and barbarities that were practised by the bloodthirsty invaders of Peru and Mexico? Were the wrong-doers ever in the wrong or without an ample vindication, whenever they could show an extension of empire, or appeal to the cupidity of the mother country by exaggerating the spoil or the advantages likely to accrue from their crimes? In what page of our own history can we point to any single case of wrong or oppression inflicted by our love of dominion, that has not found the ready plea of interest or necessity to justify similar deeds? Pretexts for every species of iniquity that has been perpetrated under the sun have never been wanting to the strong where the lust of power, gain, or glory incited to the subjection or oppression of the weak. We have not yet outlived the curse which blinds our moral perceptions as a nation whenever guilt on a grand scale can be made to wear the garb of heroism, or murder by wholesale be metamorphosed into merited chastisement for imaginary crimes. We affect a mission in the name of civilisation precisely similar to that which the Spaniards of the 16th century claimed for themselves in the name of the Pope and Christianity. The welfare of the human race serves for the plea of despotism in all quarters of the globe. With a curious consistency, we always contrive to interpret the law of nations in our own favour. Ethics and politics have but one name in the eyes of all governments; and Justice is like JANUS, it has a different face for all sides of the compass. What France is in Algeria—Austria in Hungary—Russia in Poland, England is, or can be, with impunity, everywhere but at home. We adopt the maxims of despotism when it suits our purpose, but we take good care to go a long way from our own shores to put them in practice. We are civilised enough to be shocked with atrocities that our nearer neighbours sometimes find it expedient to practise upon their subjects, but our humanity loses all its sensitiveness when we play the same part ourselves for the special training to more civilised habits of mountain tribes in India, pastoral Kaffirs at the Cape, or pirate Dyaks in Borneo. Who ever heard of English cannon or broad swords booming or flashing in any other cause than a just one? A majority in Parliament always settles that question, and invariably in the same way. Let the aggressor, be he Lord CLIVE or Rajah BROOKE, set up any plea he likes, and that plea will stand good through all issues. What we have done in India, we have commenced in Borneo, and we have not seen the end of the first footing made in that quarter yet. A little bit of coast at the Cape has been expanding ever since we got hold of it, until we have now assumed the sovereignty of a territory with a thousand miles of barren frontier; and Sir HARRY SMITH and Lord GREY are covetous of carrying it to the Equator. In India we acquired a province, and have since found it necessary, step by step, to conquer an empire for its security. Rajah BROOKE has fought his way to a small sovereignty in Borneo, and as the first step is all that costs anything in human enterprises, we shall gradually find "justice and necessity" compelling us to take a part in providing a ring fence for his dominions, which will always be unsafe at some point until it embraces the whole circumference of the island. We shall find out before long, that the Dyaks are pirates on land as well as on sea, and shall require nothing more than Rajah BROOKE's depositions to prove them such. We have added another heritage to our Eastern patrimony, and the next generation will witness in Borneo what the two last have seen completed in British India. And every act, from this first slaughter of the Dyaks to the final consummation of our bloody career of spoliation and conquest, will be defended by assertion and assumption of the same kind as that which on Thursday night induced the House of Commons to sanction the murderous massacre at the mouth of the Serebas River.

Mr. HUME's motion for a commission to inquire into the proceedings of Sir JAMES BROOKE, on the north-western coast of Borneo, was supported by an amount of evidence that, if adduced against similar acts on the part of any other government than our own, would have been pronounced conclusive and irresistible. For, in point of fact, the Government was the really responsible party in this affair. Sir JAMES BROOKE is Her Majesty's Commissioner and Consul-General to the Sultan and independent chiefs of Borneo, and the slaughter of the Dyaks was executed by the forces of the Royal Navy. Without the complicity, if not the cognizance of some department of the Government, no naval officer would have undertaken the responsibility of such deeds. Sir JAMES BROOKE was the adviser, and the authority under which this barbarous act was executed, but the shame and the guilt rest equally on the Government that adopted his suggestions and enforced his policy. Sir JAMES BROOKE may be an able and an energetic man, but that he is ambitious and unscrupulous—that his aim has been to acquire, and that his interest is to uphold, dominion, his history in connection with the

Rajahship of Sarawak sufficiently testifies. It may serve the purpose of those who admire that sort of genius which delights in founding new empires, whether great or small, to extol his virtues and magnify him into the proportions of a hero. But whatever may be the inherent capabilities of such natures, they have never been remarkable for much more than the sagacity that could discern, and the will that could prompt the way by any means, fair or foul, to the successful prosecution of their interests or ambition. Force or fraud, in such hands, are usually held to be right weapons for conquering difficulties; and justice or mercy are words in their vocabulary that have no meaning until translated into some show of accordance with the course of their purposes or policy. Sir JAMES BROOKE may deserve all that can be said of him by those who have a fancy for bucaneeering heroism, that goes prize hunting among savages for sovereignty, when the chances are unfavourable to similar speculations in more civilised regions; but we have a right to look with some suspicion in such quarters so soon as we find ourselves invited to share the cost of his conquests, without any probable prospect of profiting by the alliance. He has obtained a principality, and finds it rather inconvenient to have troublesome neighbours, who are not altogether disposed to leave the frontier of his newly acquired territory in perfect repose. The Dyaks are a native tribe, inhabiting a portion of the island contiguous to his Rajahship of Sarawak. Their habits are wandering and predatory, and they are constantly engaged in wars with other border tribes. Nobody ever suspected or admitted that the Dyaks were pirates before Sir Jas. BROOKE gave them that character. Not one tittle of direct evidence has been produced to show that they were ever guilty of piracy. It was only after Sir JAMES BROOKE had taken possession of his Rajahship that this discovery was made. Since 1844, Sir JAMES BROOKE has been hunting down these miserable savages, who are ignorant of the use of firearms, as pirates. Mr. HUME, in the course of his speech on Thursday night, read five letters, from as many naval commanders on this portion of the Bornean coast, all of which affirm that the Dyaks were never known to attack any foreign or English vessel. The pirates of the Indian Archipelago are a perfectly different race. They are all Malays from the peninsula of India; and the only evidence that Dyaks are in any way implicated in piracy is derived from the fact, that they are occasionally found as sailors or slaves on board the vessels of Malay pirates. Fifty-three merchants of Singapore signed an address to Mr. HUME, in which they declare that "there is not one among 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 falling in with, or "being attacked by prahus, which are propelled with "paddles and have neither masts nor sail, would "have been a novelty which could not have failed to "attract attention, to say nothing of their want of "fire-arms." Sir JAMES BROOKE's own description of these tribes renders the idea of their being pirates perfectly ridiculous. Speaking of the Serebas tribes he says, "The sound of musketry or cannon "was enough to put the whole body to flight, "and when they did run, fully the half of them disappeared, returning to their own homes." Now it is just the two tribes, the Serebas and the Sakarran, which were massacred by wholesale as pirates. The other tribe—the Sakarran—Sir JAMES describes as equally incapable of attacking a rigged or armed vessel of any description. "The spear and sword," he says, "comprise their weapons; they have no "muskets or fire arms, and never use the sumpitan." The sumpitan is a blowpipe used by some of the Bornean tribes through which small arrows are discharged. Throughout the whole of the debate on Thursday night not the slightest evidence was produced that could implicate these unfortunate Dyaks as pirates. Lord PALMERSTON cited the depositions of two masters of native vessels examined by Colonel BUTTERWORTH to prove that the Dyaks were habitual pirates. But neither of these masters, although constantly trading on the coast, had ever been attacked, or witnessed an attack. They both distinctly state, that they have had no personal evidence of piracy—they had only "been told" that the Sakarran tribes were addicted to piracy. And it was on mere rumour, that can be traced to no better foundation than Rajah BROOKE's own personal asseverations and assumptions, that a British naval force was stationed at the mouth of the Serebas River, and in conjunction with and under the instructions of Sir JAMES BROOKE, literally swept, with cannon shot, a whole fleet of petty prahus loaded with Dyaks, out of the water, murdering in cold blood, without chance of escape, 1,500 or 2,000 of these defenceless wretches. When a few years ago, the French troops in Algeria surrounded a mountain in the caves of which the defeated Kabyles had taken refuge, and after closing every outlet, forced a continuous volume of thick smoke through the recesses, suffocating the gallant remnant of their vanquished foes, leaving not a man alive, what loud-voiced exclamation filled the columns of the English press in denunciation of such cold-blooded atrocity! But was the barbarity less or greater in the case of the *Nemesis*, securely dealing out destruction to the miserable Dyaks, who could neither grapple with their murderous assailant, nor escape from the booming cannon shot that swept them without mercy into the waves? The following is a description of the most warlike of these native Bornean tribes, the Kyans, from the pen of Mr. T. DALTON, an English trader and traveller, who lived for some time amongst them, and was most hospitably entertained for several months:—

"What these people," says he, "most dread is "the musket; it is inconceivable what a sensation of "fear comes over the bravest of the Dyaks when they "have the idea a few muskets may possibly be "brought against them; no inducement will prevail "on them, however numerous, to go forward; hence "the Bugis, with a handful of men, act towards "them as they think proper, making them deliver "over, not only the produce of the country for a "trifling exchange, but a certain number of "their children yearly, whom they sell as slaves. "Selge can bring at least twelve thousand "fighting men, and the Bugis, with fifty muskets, "and a few boat swivels, will not hesitate to meet "them; the fact is, they no sooner hear the report "of a gun, than they run deep into the jungle; if "they are in boats, they leap into the water, and after "gaining the shore, never stop until they are out of "bearing of the report. The most sensible of the "Dyaks have a superstitious idea of fire arms; each "man, on hearing the report, fancies the ball is "making directly towards himself, and he therefore "runs, never thinking himself safe as long as hears "the explosion of gunpowder. Thus a man hearing "the report of a swivel five miles off, will continue at "full speed with the same trepidation as at first."

The very supposition of such a race engaging in all the desperate hazards of piracy, is too ridiculous to be dealt with in serious terms. And yet, in the British House of Commons, this modern PIZARRO, on a small scale, has found the most chivalrous defence for atrocities that cannot be paralleled by any feat of Spanish butchery. And Bishops of the Church of England can be found, in language that sickens the soul, to extol as a service to heaven such awful barbarities. The Bishop of CALCUTTA, writing from the deck of the *Semi-ramis* war steamer on the way from Sarawak to Singapore, thus panegyricises the peace which has been purchased by the blood of these wretched savages. In allusion to this feat of Rajah BROOKE, he says, "The peace thus "established, like that of the Roman empire at the "incarnation of our Lord, prepares for the Gospel, "renders the diffusion of it practicable, and calls im- "peratively on the Christian church at home to seize

"with eagerness the occasion to which nothing "parallel has perhaps ever occurred."

If Christianity can find no better precursors for its missionaries than extermination and massacre, we should prefer to keep its messengers at home, than to prepare a path for them by such pioneers.