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#### DEATH OF A GRANDSON OF BURNS THE POET.

Robert Burns, the grandson of the great Scotch poet, has fallen a victim to robbers in the Eastern seas. He had sailed in a small schooner on a trading adventure to the northern coast of Borneo, and about the beginning of September was murdered, along with the commander of the vessel and some of the Javanese crew,—not by regular professional pirates, although of the two great piratical tribes, but by the crews of two small boats, without fire-arms, who amounted in all to no more than eleven persons, of whom a few only boarded the schooner and perpetrated the murders, coming on board under pretence of trading.

The history of Mr Burns' sojourn in the Eastern Islands is soon told. He had penetrated further into the interior of the great Island of Borneo than any man who went before him, and is known to those that take an interest in the question as the author of incomparably the best and most authentic account of it that has ever been published. He had lived long, without fear or apprehension, among the most powerful and warlike tribe of the Dyaks, had acquired their language, and married the daughter of one of their princes. While on these terms with the rude, but not blood-thirsty natives, he discovered extensive coal-fields and rich mines of antimony. He made arrangements for working the latter, but was quickly driven from his purpose by the agents of the monopoly of antimony at Sarawak. Not able to bear a rival near their commercial throne, they addressed a threatening letter to the Dyak chiefs, which Mr Burns, in his complaint to Lord Palmerston, says was read and shown to him. The intimidated natives entreated him to withdraw, and he complied, thus abandoning a project which would equally have redounded to his own advantage and that of the neighbouring British settlement of Labuan. It was after being virtually thus expelled from the safe scene of honourable enterprise, that with restless enterprise he engaged in the perilous adventure in which he lost his life.

So much for the lamented descendant of the great poet; but we have now a few words to say of the use made of his fate by an able contemporary. The *Times*, in an article on this subject, contains a greater amount of unwarranted assertion than we have yet seen on this topic of wonderful delusion. According to it, the Imperial Parliament was occupied six months ago in "a grave discussion as to the existence or non-existence of piracy on the coast of Borneo." We never heard of this discussion before, and should be heartily ashamed of any honourable members whose knowledge was so pitifully low as to entertain it. We thought the question debated had been whether certain rude, untutored, feeble inhabitants of Borneo, described by the instigator of the attacks on them as having neither musket, matchlock, blunderbuss, pistol, or cannon,—whose missiles, blown with the breath of their nostrils, were about as innocuous to Europeans as the arrows which the Lilliputians shot at Gulliver,—who took to their heels and disappeared at the first sound of fire-arms,—who had no sails to their boats,—whose boats were crazy, and whose nautical enterprise never carried them out of sight of their own swampy coast,—who were never charged in the course of three centuries and a half with piracy, until the European Rajah of the Dyaks of Sarawak became their accuser,—could by any possibility be pirates dangerous to English merchantmen or to English cockboats. The question at issue related to the alleged piracy of slaughtered Dyaks, but our contemporary ignores the Dyaks, as if no such people existed. Under the generic name of Borneans he groups them with half a dozen other people of the island, in a totally different state of society; just in the same way as you might, by calling them Europeans, ascribe the same virtues and vices to Croats and Albanians, as to Germans and Dutchmen.

The existence of pirates in the waters of Borneo has never been doubted that we know of, by any man of sense

or knowledge. The first Europeans who ever set foot on Borneo, the companions of Magellan, found pirates in the very river of Borneo Proper itself, but they were Malays and not Dyaks. The greater part of the coast of Borneo is occupied by Malay States; some of the eastern coast being possessed by native settlers from Celebes, and some of the northern by settlers from the Sooloo group and the island of Mindanao, while the parts of Borneo where the rude aborigines reach the sea are confined to a few isolated spots of the north-western coast. The other insular settlers in Borneo are men in a comparatively advanced social state, who possessed a knowledge of fire-arms long before the arrival of Europeans, and who have the power, and have often had the inclination, to commit piracy. Any one who looked at the Lanun (not Dyak) pirate prau in the Great Exhibition, will soon be satisfied that a fleet of such vessels would be an ugly customer for a small, unarmed, and incautious European merchant ship.

The *Times* says "there was no doubt about the race or country of the marauders" that murdered Mr Burns. "They were," it says, "Borneans." That would not necessarily make them Dyaks, any more than Laplanders would be proved to be buccaneers because Frenchmen, Dutchmen, and Englishmen were once well known to have been so. It so happens that the men who murdered Mr Burns were not only not Dyaks, but not even Borneans in the sense of being Malays; for they were settlers from the Spanish island of Mindanao, and inhabitants of the neighbouring group of the Sooloo Archipelago, subjects of the prince with whom, in the name of Queen Victoria, Sir James Brooke had lately concluded a treaty for the suppression of piracy, a treaty that is, and has been from the day of its signature, a dead letter. The spot where the murder was committed was the very same in which Admiral Cochrane, under the guidance of the same Sir James Brooke, is supposed, a few years ago, to have extirpated piracy! The robbers and assassins were, in fact, some stragglers of the Lanun and Sooloo tribes, who at present furnish the only formidable pirates of the Archipelago. A real Bornean chieftain recaptured the schooner, and preserved her and her cargo for the owners; and to show that he was in earnest, delivered over, along with them, two heads of the murderers.

The minor errors in the article of the *Times* are numerous. Take a few samples. Mr John Bright, the member for Manchester, is described as having "with considerable plausibility quoted Mr Robert Burns, a namesake and descendant of the celebrated poet," as a witness for the non-existence of piracy. The honourable member is not known ever to have quoted Mr Burns at all—anywhere, or on any subject; when the debate in the Commons took place, indeed, he was not in the House, for he was watching his father's death-bed. Moreover, Mr Burns himself was not so ignorant as to have been known ever to have asserted the non-existence of piracy. The writer in the *Times* is surely either very careless or very credulous. "While," says he, Mr Burns "was thus engaged, the chief of the pirates suddenly drew a concealed kris and struck his head from his body." The kris is a stabbing, not a cutting instrument, and the *Times* might just as well have said of a Scots Highlander that he suddenly drew his dirk and struck a Saxon's head from his body. The professional amateur who decollated poor Col. Despard, although he wielded an amputating knife, haggled, and bungled, and was hissed off the platform; but here is an expert Malayan pirate who does the thing in a trice, with a weapon not made to cut. This is almost as wonderful as Dyaks capturing English merchantmen with no other missiles than blow-pipes, spiriting arrows. The writer in the *Times* had not read the evidence of the crew of Mr Burns' schooner, taken before the magistrate of Singapore, or he would have found that the smart decollation which he describes was an affair of the imagination. The *Times* describes the scene of the murder of Mr Burns thus: "Maludu Bay, a gulf situated at the north-eastern angle of Borneo, some leagues above Labuan." The bay in question is at the most northern extremity of Borneo, neither east nor west; and instead of being some leagues from the British settlement of Labuan, it is distant from it by near two degrees of latitude and as many of longitude. The map ought to have been looked at. Mystifications of the sort now referred to neither screen nor defend the Rajah of Sarawak; on the contrary, they expose him to assault, and expose him, too, so stark naked, that even an arrow from the blow-pipe of a Dyak might wound him.