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POT AND KETTLE.

There has lately been a good deal of hot discussion in commercial circles, as well as in the columns of some of our contemporaries, respecting a transaction in which the parties concerned are,—that truly active person, in his own and other men's concerns, the Rajah of Sarawak, and a certain trading association called the "Eastern Archipelago Company."

The question seems to us a very simple one indeed. In 1847 a certain Company obtained a royal charter of incorporation, for the purpose of working the coal of Labuan and the opposite coast of Borneo. The Company was not to commence business until the one-half of a capital of 100,000*l.* was paid up, and by their engagement with the Board of Trade they were bound to give in a certificate that this 50,000*l.* was paid. They did give in the certificate, but they included property as paid up capital. The officers of the Board of Trade assented to this principle. "Whether we were right or wrong," says the Law Adviser of the Board, in a letter on record, "in allowing the property to be reckoned as part of the paid up capital, we certainly did it with our eyes open." There can be as little doubt, we think, that a very great impropriety was thus committed, "with our eyes open," of which the blame may be apportioned equally. The Directors were decidedly wrong in calling, and the officers of the Board quite as wrong in accepting, property as "paid up" capital. It was assuredly no more so than the land over which is to pass a future railway is paid up capital, because the provisional directors of such an adventure promise to buy, from a shareholder, certain acres of land at an arbitrary valuation as soon as they shall have obtained an act of Parliament.

Now Sir James Brooke bears no goodwill to this Eastern Archipelago Company. The said Company would appear, in some way or other, to cross the path of his political or commercial ambition, and he determines, if he can, to overthrow it. His first application is to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, who replies that he sees "no ground for the interference of her Majesty's Government." Next, he tries the Court of Chancery, but finds no equity to suit his purpose there. At last he prosecutes in the Court of Queen's Bench, and has a partial success, which leaves the matter just where it was. The Company is absolved from the charge of fraudulent representation, and the jury simply finds, as it might be supposed it would do, under the direction of such a Judge as Lord Campbell, that property was not paid up capital. In a transaction, indeed, in which all was above-board, and in which the parties on one side were such men as Denis Le Marchant and Mr John Shaw Lefevre, the charge of fraud and collusion was too extravagant for belief, and accordingly the jury did utterly disbelieve it.

And now a few words for the Informer, in which character Sir James Brooke appears before the public on the occasion. An informer is rather at a discount in this country. Burke regretted, in his own case, that it was so; but that was when, as a public prosecutor, he was bringing a great public delinquent to justice before the highest tribunal in the kingdom, and Burke's hands were certainly clean. Is Sir James Brooke in as dignified and favourable a position when he prosecutes by writ of *scire facias* in a court of law, and this in a very small cause? Upon this point an impartial witness has spoken. The able, temperate, and experienced member for North Lancashire declared, in his place in Parliament, towards the close of last session, that "Sir James Brooke, of all living men, was the most unfit to file a bill against the Company, for he had a large interest on the opposite side." We entirely agree with him.

No informer, indeed, it may safely be asserted, ever before presented himself as an accuser in a court of justice in this country, under circumstances so anomalous and so suspicious. A bare statement of these circumstances will show it. Sir James is British Governor of Labuan, and, as such, can neither hold land, nor carry on trade, without being guilty of a misdemeanour. He is her Majesty's Consul-General in Borneo, and as such, ought to be the protector of traders, and not play the utterly incompatible part of trader himself. But Sir James, the Governor and the Consul-General, is a trader in Sarawak, and, in his sovereign capacity, may trade with Borneo and Labuan, or

any other place. His trade, indeed, is principally with British ports. Sir James is a competitor in trade with the very Company that he seeks to overthrow, and, moreover, the avowed personal enemy of one of its Directors, his *quondam* "dear Wise." Sir James is also her Britannic Majesty's Commissioner or Representative to the Independent Chiefs of Borneo; having told us himself, in a public despatch, that there is no independent prince in Borneo before whom he can represent her Majesty, the only man who could be called so being the mere shadow of a sovereign; and having, indeed, proved the sincerity of this opinion, by battering the palace of that same shadow of a prince about his ears. This was when the latter was a fugitive in the jungle, Sir James taking the same occasion to release himself from his vassalage by exacting a grant in perpetuity to himself and his heirs of the territory of Sarawak, including a yearly payment of 400*l.*; and further illustrating the small account in which he holds the shadowy potentate, by always living from 300 to 10,000 miles away from his Court, at which he is, or ought to be, her Majesty's representative.

Sir James Brooke's position in all these affairs is by no means mended by his connexion with certain "large and influential merchants of Mincing lane," who "declare that they are damnified by being prevented, at present, from working the coal mines of Labuan and the mainland of Borneo." The damnification which those much injured men are represented as being subjected to, appears to amount simply to their not being allowed to seize on the property held by others, under grant and charter, and on which these others have either already laid out, or are ready to lay out, having the cash in their bankers' hands, the sum of 50,585*l.*! The injured party happen, moreover, to be the contractors for the antimony monopoly of Sir James Brooke; and the mines happen to be the very same mines which Sir James made a merit of obtaining from his then friend the grantee, as stated in his own public letters dated in 1846, and respecting which he concludes one of them with the following characteristic remark: "If you make your fortune, as you expect, you may make me a present of a few thousand pounds." Was there ever such a case of pot and kettle?

We really, for ourselves, can see no interest that the public has in this matter at all, except in the money paid from the British treasury for services rendered, or not rendered to it. It is only when Sir James Brooke is present in Labuan, discharging the functions of Governor, that he is serving the public. When in Borneo, or away from Borneo or Labuan, it is clear that he is only serving himself. He has, then, been actually present doing his duty in Labuan forty days, and for this time he has drawn from the British Exchequer the sum of 8,000*l.*, or at the rate of 200*l.* a day. Assuredly, no British Governor-General, or Viceroy, was ever paid so exuberantly. He gets two and a half times as much as the Viceroy of Ireland, and very nearly three times as much as the Governor-General of India, who rules over 150 millions, and is not thought to be underpaid! And what are the advantages we gain? In the fifth year of its existence, this Colony, the Governor of which costs 200*l.* per diem, has a population of 800 souls, most of them in the employment of the vituperated Coal Company (of which, though by no means indiscriminate admirers, we may remark by the way that it is at present the means of saving 20*s.* a ton to the State on the coal used in steam navigation); while of this same Colony the exports and imports are so minute that the local functionaries dare not name them for fear of being laughed at.

But what, after all, we have most to complain of are the Bornean delusions, which have been for some years, with mischievous industry, palmed on the public. The Directors of the Eastern Archipelago Company are by no means free from this imputation, as we shall presently demonstrate; but the great master of the craft has been undoubtedly the Rajah of Sarawak. A fine sample of his powers in this way is presented in that letter to his agent in England which gave a project for the establishment of a joint-stock Company, with a capital of 300,000*l.* or 500,000*l.*, the avowed object of which was to take the sovereignty of Sarawak, the amelioration of the Dyaks, his monopolies, and his stock in trade off his own hands. These are the terms he would make for himself: "On my own part, the cession would be made on easy terms, such as a moderate salary as Governor, on the same terms as any other Governor; the employment of the few persons who have followed my fortunes at fair salaries; the purchase of whatever stock in trade may be on my hands; and the present of a certain sum in the shares of the Company, which would make my success dependent, in a great measure, on theirs, and enable me to reward the gentlemen with me." Do you call these easy terms?

The following were the baits held out. The Company, on payment of a sum computed at 2,500*l.*, would have the entire territorial right of Sarawak, "which might be extended at pleasure." The profits were to be derived from various sources. "Diamond mines" were one. These diamond mines are represented as lying on a certain river called the Sintah, and certainly no man out of Sarawak ever heard of the diamonds of the Sintah. The only diamond mines of Borneo are within the Dutch territory, 350 miles distant from Sarawak. The Government of the Netherlands purchased them from a native prince, a few years ago, for the sum of 10,000*l.*; and although they extend over ten times the area of Sarawak their annual produce is no more than 1,900 carats, all small stones, the largest found being of no more than thirty-six carats; and these diamonds being, of course, rough. After paying for the expense of cutting and mining, it is pretty certain that the proceeds would not

be sufficient to pay Indian interest for the outlay. The ingenious projector of the Joint-stock Company adds: "I will not dwell on the topic, as it must become a matter of inquiry." Whether the inquiry has been made or not we cannot tell, but certain it is that the diamonds of Sarawak are still either in the bosom of mother earth, or nowhere; for we have heard no more of them after a lapse of nine years, which corresponds but ill with the assurance given that "the working is easy and the expense slight" (boring sometimes to the depth of sixty perpendicular feet!) "and the mines would come into operation in six months." Hints were also thrown out about "veins of gold," and of the possible existence of tin and copper; but the ingenious projector very truly observes, "as they are uncertain I need not dwell on them," which is discreet.

The next bait to money-lenders and speculators offered by Sir James Brooke in this letter was "Bornean agriculture." "Coffee, nutmegs, sugar, and cotton" might be cultivated "on the finest ground, the clearing of which by the Dyaks would cost but trifling sums." The clearing of a forest on the equator, not by indolent and unskilful savages, but by skilful civilised men, is one of the most expensive processes of colonial husbandry. Coffee requires rich mountain land, and is produced by the natives of Java, Sumatra, Bali, and Celebes, because they have such land; but not a berry is produced by the natives of Borneo, or even of the Malay Peninsula, although far more advanced, and this from sterility of soil in both cases. The nutmeg will only thrive easily in the Spice Islands, its native country. Everywhere else, it is grown by a kind of elaborate hot-house cultivation, little suited to the genius of Dyak husbandry. Cotton alone, of all products named, is cultivated by the natives of Borneo, but of the coarsest sort, and in patches no bigger than a cabbage garden. Is it not evident, then, that a man who can put forth such wild notions as these, knows about as much of tropical husbandry as British oxen may be expected to understand of the growth of the clover and turnips that fatten them?

The tempter next held out his monopolies. He estimates his monopoly of antimony at 5,000*l.* a year, which we have been given to understand is 150 per cent. more than it has ever yielded. On the opium monopoly he sets no specific value, but expresses a hope that, as the Chinese increased in numbers, their consumption would improve its worth. Whatever may be Sir James Brooke's philanthropy (and in his latest and highly curious correspondence, to which we refer the reader in another column, we observe as usual a large and serviceable stock in trade of religious professions), it is at least clear that he is not of the party of philanthropists who deprecate the use of the opium drug.

But the superlative of self-delusion was left for the last sentence of the prospectus. "I do not myself see why this opening should not lead to results similar to India itself." Sir James Brooke cannot see why an island covered with primeval forest, and scantily inhabited by piratical fishermen and savages, should not, under his own auspices, and that of an English Joint-stock Company, spring up at a bounce to the condition of a country, which, for at least two-and-twenty centuries, has stood in the first rank of Asiatic civilisation. He cannot see why his own little nook of Borneo, with 10,000 inhabitants, should not equal British India with 100 millions, paying a revenue of 25,000,000*l.*, and having an export and import trade, each of 30,000,000*l.* He who can even dream such things ought to forego realities altogether, and try his hand at a Persian or Arabian tale!

And now a word for some similar delusions on the part of the Directors of the Eastern Archipelago Company. When they petitioned for a charter they represented the island of Borneo as "a rich and fertile country," without one iota of evidence to adduce either of riches or fertility. And now, in their last published report, and in grandiloquent phrase, they announce the arrival of a sample of Labuan cotton grown by their superintendent of coal mines. This is like exhibiting "a brick" for an Egyptian pyramid. Among these Directors are to be found able, accomplished, and travelled men; yet we will make bold to say that not one of them could speak more distinctly about "cotton soils" and "cotton wool" than "a babbling brook." If the whole island of Labuan (about twenty square miles) were planted all over with cotton, and if the cotton was all of a right kind and at a right price, the supply it would yield would not keep the looms of Lancashire at work for forty-eight hours! Borneo is ascertained to produce abundance of good accessible coal, and abundance of good accessible sulphuret of antimony; but beyond this we are absolutely in the dark respecting its riches. Good iron ore is highly probable, and copper is not unlikely. The gold has never been very great; and in comparison with the newly-discovered stores, is very small indeed. The diamonds are a trifle not worth speaking of. As far as Borneo has been examined, it is found to consist exclusively of sedimentary rock formation, without a volcanic vestige. Such a country, in the Indian Archipelago at least, is necessarily rich in minerals but poor in soil; as in the cases of the Malay Peninsula, Banca, and the parts of Sumatra that are not volcanic. On the contrary, lands of volcanic formation are rich in soil and very poor in minerals,—witness Java, Bali, Lombok, and the volcanic portions of Sumatra. We entreat a truce to Bornean exaggerations, and a cessation of the gullibility that swallows them. We also think it would be well that traders and speculators should keep clear of each other, and above all that the pot should leave the kettle alone.