

LITERATURE.

A Visit to the Indian Archipelago in her Majesty's Ship Meander. By Captain the Hon. H. KEPPEL, R.N. 2 vols. Bentley.

The names of the *Meander*, and of her gallant commander, Captain Keppel, are tolerably familiar to all who have interested themselves in the affairs of Sir James Brooke and his raj of Sarawak. It was in the *Meander* he set sail to take legalised possession of his territory, and it was with her assistance that some of his forays against the Dyaks were achieved. The captain, overtaken by that *cacochætes* from which in these times of bookmaking even sailors are not exempt, has here set forth in two reasonably large volumes his impressions of the Indian Archipelago in general, and his opinion of the conduct of Rajah Brooke in particular, the greater portion of the first volume being taken up with a vindication of the slaughter of the Dyaks, with references to a copious appendix of documentary evidence. But this question has already been discussed and decided upon in parliament. The Rajah has been whitewashed by the verdict of the collective wisdom, and the poor Dyaks must rest in their unhonoured graves with the opprobrium of piracy still clinging to their memories. It is a very painful subject. We shall only say, that Captain Keppel's case for the defence,—as spread over these volumes,—leaves our minds still unsatisfied as to the necessity of such extreme measures as were resorted to by the Rajah. Emergency may have called for them, circumstances may have justified their use; but after all, it is a humiliating reflection that the colonising career of the mightiest and most civilised nation in the world should be thus eternally stained by the blood of the naked aborigines of conquered territories, and that the blessings of civilisation and the light of Christianity should still, even in this great nineteenth century, be dispensed from the points of boarding pikes and the portholes of men of war. A short extract from the first volume shows that to make out a case against the Dyaks, our author finds it necessary to mix them up rather ingeniously with the Malays, whose piratical habits have never been decided. At page 128 he says—

The Dyaks of the Serebas country comprise of themselves numerous communities, numbering several thousand warriors. While their warlike operations were confined to the intertribal feuds so common among savages, their weapons were the spear and the sword—formidable enough in Dyak hands. They adopted, however, other arms, according as they became mixed up with the operations of the Malays, in the manner in which I shall presently explain; but they always were, and still are, a distinct people.

Such being the state of things in the Serebas country, the Dyaks, about eighty or even one hundred years ago, were gradually trained to piracy by the Malays, commencing their apprenticeship as pullers in the Malayan prahus, in which service they were rewarded with the heads of the slain (for which they had a peculiar taste), and they received also such captives as were useless to the Malays for slavery.

In the course of time these Dyaks became expert seamen; they built a description of prahu, or bangkong, peculiarly suited to their stealthy and rapid movements; and, together with the Malays, formed the fleets composed of one hundred or more prahus, which swept the seas, and devastated the shores of Borneo over a distance of 800 miles.

Thus the character of piracy was altered, and rendered more bloody, by the infusion of this Dyak element. I therefore wish my readers distinctly to keep in view that the pirates who are the subjects of this chapter are the Malays and Dyaks of Serebas; that it was against these Malays and Dyaks, conjointly, that I had to act in the years 1843 and 1844, and against whom Captain Farquhar was engaged in 1849.

Further on we have a description, marked by sailor-like brevity, of a fight with prahus, which to unprofessional judgment must appear to have been little better than a massacre; and in the second volume, an attempt, resting on rather doubtful testimony, to add cannibalism to the catalogue of Dyak enormities. The subject seems uncongenial to the gallant captain, who writes but tamely whilst upon the Bornean waters, whereas when he launches out fairly into the Archipelago, his descriptions are well written, graphic, and interesting. At the Island of Lombok he found a new variety of the Suttees. A gusti, or chief, having died, his favourite and most beautiful wife determined upon bearing him company to the Malay Paradise. Here is the *modus operandi*:

Women brought out the wife of the gusti with her arms crossed. She was clothed with a piece of white linen only. Her hair was crowned with flowers of the *Chrysanthemum Indicum*. She was quiet, and betrayed neither fear nor regret. She placed herself standing before the body of her husband; raised her arms on high, and made a prayer in silence. Women approached her, and presented to her small bouquets of kembang spatu, and other flowers. She took them one by one, and placed them between the fingers of her hands, raised above her head. On this the women took them away and dried them. On receiving and giving back each bouquet, the wife of the gusti turned a little to the right, so that when she had received the whole, she had turned quite round. She prayed anew in silence, went to the corpse of her husband, kissed it on the head, the breast, below the navel, the knees, the feet, and returned to her place. They took off her rings. She crossed her arms on her breast. Two women took her by the arms. Her brother (this time a brother by adoption) placed himself before her, and asked her with a soft

voice if she was determined to die, and when she gave a sign of assent with her head, he asked her forgiveness for being obliged to kill her. At once he seized his kris, and stabbed her on the left side of the breast, but not deeply, so that she remained standing. He then threw his kris down, and ran off. A man of consideration approached her, and buried his kris to the hilt in the breast of the unfortunate woman, who sunk down at once, without uttering a cry. The women placed her on a mat, and sought by rolling and pressure to cause the blood to flow as quickly as possible. The victim being not yet dead, she was stabbed again with a kris between the shoulders. They then laid her on the second platform, near her husband. The same ceremonies that had taken place for him, now began for the wife. When all was ended, both bodies were covered with resin and cosmetic stuffs, enveloped in white linen, and placed in the small side-house on the platforms. There they remain until the time is come when they are burned together.

Arrived at Port Essington in Australia, Captain Keppel finds the natives entitled to a much higher rank in the human family than is generally conceded to them. Thus he takes issue with "The naturalists":

It has been the fashion with naturalists, and writers who copy their matter from their predecessors, without taking the trouble either to inquire into the subject, or to judge for themselves by actual examination, to place the Australian very low indeed in the scale of creation. If they do condescend to admit him into the human race, still they evidently show some compunction at allowing him to take his place over the head of the intelligent monkey, or the sage-looking chimpanzee. A greater mistake than this has never been made. The native of Northern Australia is intelligent and apt. His intelligence is manifested both in the daily concern of life, and in the acquisition of languages. Many of the natives speak two or three dialects; and some, in addition, speak English and Malay fluently. They are apt enough in learning everything that may prove useful,—some of them have gone away to Sydney, Java, and Macassar, on board European ships; and have made good seamen, and on their return have given intelligent accounts of what they had seen. They have been employed about the settlement in a variety of ways, and have shown no want of quickness in doing what was required of them. When riding through the jungle on a shooting excursion, I gave my gun to a naked savage to carry: I was rather astonished at his addressing me in very good English, with, "Should an opportunity offer, sir, I shall fire!" This man was frequently with me afterwards. One day he said to me, "If you English could thrash Bonaparte whenever you liked, why did you put him on an island, and starve him to death?"

They give, it appears, their old men some privileges, in the exercise of which they come off pretty much as our own old men do under similar circumstances:

One of the greatest privileges of old men, and one of which they always avail themselves, is that of betrothing to themselves girls when very young; and marrying them when they arrive at mature age. A man of fifty years of age becomes betrothed to a girl of seven or eight, and marries her when she is about eleven. The consequences are much the same as might be expected in any society: the young lady is besieged by less fortunate and more suitable admirers. On the other hand, the old gentleman has his eyes wide open, and jealousy keeps him constantly on the watch. Hence it not uncommonly happens that the youthful couple are surprised by the barbed point of an ugly spear, passing violently through some fleshy part of their sable frames. The wounds, however disagreeable, heal more rapidly than those inflicted by Cupid's darts: young people will be young people to the end of the chapter;—they flirt on; the old man, in his fits of jealousy, maims and sometimes kills, but is at length destroyed himself by the cares and anxieties of watching his juvenile spouse. Beauties are frequently carried off by force, often change lords and masters, and give rise to many quarrels,—in short, are much the same as in more civilised states.

The natives, he says, are well made, and tolerably long-lived, but the population is kept down by the horrible practice of infanticide. Scarcity of food is their palliation, but the place only wants a few of the arts of civilisation to make abundance. That the bushman of Australia has all the intelligence of a practised hunter will be seen by this our last extract:

It is very interesting to see a native kangarooing. All his energies, instinct, and cunning, are brought into play. When he comes to a place likely to contain game, he becomes watchful and excited, his eyes roll about, his ears appear to stand out, his body erect, and as steady as a statue. After a while he moves, his step noiseless and cautious. When he sees a kangaroo he becomes rivetted to the spot; not a movement of either body or limb is discernible. The uninitiated observer at a short distance looks in vain for the cause of this attitude; after straining his eyes for some time he at length perceives the head of a kangaroo peeping over the long grass, in the direction of the native. The two animals watch each other for a variable period, until the kangaroo, which has persuaded itself that the motionless object before it is likewise lifeless, has gone down again on all fours, to dig a root or play with its young. The dark object then moves with measured pace towards his victim, which soon takes another peep to see if all is right. The native again assumes his fixed attitude; in this way he keeps advancing with most extraordinary care and patience, sometimes for nearly an hour, until within range of his game; then the fatal spear is placed in the throw-stick, by a sort of magic, for no apparent motion accompanies the operation; the weapon is poised—and sent with unerring aim and fatal effect. The native or natives now, with hideous yells, pursue the wounded animal, which of course does all in its power to escape, but is soon obliged by pain or loss of blood to cease running; it then takes up a position with its back to a tree or rock, determined to defend itself or its progeny; but a few well-directed spears from a short distance soon decide the contest. Poor kangaroo dies, is carried away in triumph, and is soon devoured.

The remainder of the volume is filled with interesting particulars respecting the Australian continent, all tending to prove, that even apart from its gold fields, it is the finest field for emigration in the world.