

**IS SIR J. BROOKE, K.C.B., A BUCCANEER?**

That is the question—the hard, iron-bound question put by Mr. Joseph Hume in a pamphlet before us, “*A Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Malmesbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, &c., Relative to the Proceedings of Sir James Brooke, K.C.B., &c., in Borneo.*” By Joseph Hume, M.P.” It is highly important to Borneo, if not to Sir James Brooke, that this question should be resolved—“highly important”—says the *Letter*—

“to inquire and ascertain whether the said Sir James Brooke’s tenure of the said government of Sarawak is, and has been, a legal tenure under the crown of Borneo, or the piratical tenure of a successful buccaneer and rebel.”

Now, Mr. Hume, in his own peculiar way, marshals certain reported, chronicled facts against Sir James Brooke, and then with his usual dogged energy—~~an~~ energy scarcely to be beaten, and never to be tricked or cajoled into quiescence—insists upon the necessity of a full inquiry.—There are many charges against Sir James Brooke. He has, it is shewn, acted the tyrant after the most approved fashion of the wildest burlesque (only the burlesque has been smeared with blood); but the great charge resolves itself into this. On the night of the 31st July, 1849, with the assistance of British forces and British officers “acting on the advice of his Excellency,” he laid wait for and attacked

“150 to 170 prahus, belonging to his neighbours the Sabedas and Sakarran Dyaks, on the allegation that they were pirates; and after totally destroying eighty or ninety of the said prahus, killing 500 of their crews in the open sea, and causing the death of several hundreds more on land and in the jungles, he continued for several ensuing days to ascend the adjacent rivers, plundering and destroying villages, and houses, and boats, even where no resistance whatsoever was made, and where the inhabitants had fled and deserted them, and otherwise committing dreadful ravages and devastation, attended with a fearful loss of life; in flagrant violation of the ninth article of the treaty then subsisting between the British and Bornean governments, according to which the powers of her Majesty’s officers entering the ports, rivers, and creeks within the dominions of the said sultan in pursuit of pirates are expressly limited to “capturing all vessels engaged in piracy or slave dealing, and seizing and reserving them for the judgment of the proper authorities;” and also in flagrant violation of the Act of Parliament, which renders persons convicted of the crime of piracy (heretofore punishable with death) liable to transportation only.

That the said Sir James Brooke undertook the above enterprise against the Sabedas and Sakarran Dyaks without the said tribes, or either of them, or even (so far as is yet known) any individual member of either of them, having ever, by any judicial investigation, been ascertained or adjudged to be pirates that although twenty-two Singapore merchants, in their address to the said Sir James Brooke, have stated that the “formidable expeditions” infesting the coasts of Borneo and the vicinity, have “been proved beyond question” to be “not merely these of tribes against tribes,” but to be “systematic combinations of organised and professed pirates,” yet the said twenty-two merchants nowhere state that such “formidable expeditions” and “piratical combinations” have been, or ever were alleged to have been, made by either the said Sabedas or Sakarran Dyaks; that, on the other hand, a much larger number of Singapore merchants, viz., fifty-three, in their address to Mr. Hume, M.P., have distinctly affirmed that “it is a fact perfectly notorious in this settlement that, until within these few years, the alleged piracies of the Dyaks had never been heard of; and that the first circumstance which in any particular manner drew public attention in the straits to the existence of the Sabedas and Sakarrans as hordes of pirates, was the invasion of their countries by Captain the Hon. H. Keppel, in her Majesty’s ship *Dido*, a measure which was at the time commented on by many here as unjustifiable; and that there is not one among us who ever heard the captain of a merchant vessel or the nakodah [or master] of a trading prahu mention their having seen a Dyak pirate;” that the said fifty-three merchants have accordingly “begged to discriminate between the usages and situations of these tribes and the piracies of the formidable marauders of the Archipelago, who have so long been known under the names of Illanuns or Lanuns, Sooloos, and Balaninis,” and have expressed “an earnest hope that Parliament will see fit to accede to Mr. Hume’s motion for inquiry, without which there can be no issue of this question satisfactory to the public mind;” and that the said fifty-three merchants have further alluded to the admitted fact, that “there were not more than four small brass guns in the whole fleet” of from 150 to 170 prahus, “while it is a notorious fact that the same number of guns often forms the armament of a single Malay, Bugis, or other trading prahu of the Archipelago: more than one British naval officer on that station having declined to adopt or carry out the said Sir James Brooke’s views and opinions with respect to the alleged piracies of the said Dyaks, and other officers recently stationed there having also expressed opinions unfavourable to the notion of the said Dyaks having really been pirates.

This is the great charge against Sir James Brooke. Mr. Hume expresses his sincere belief that this and other charges and allegations are capable of being distinctly proved.

“I, therefore,” writes Mr. Hume, “venture to suggest to your lordship that a full and fair inquiry is the only way to dispose either of their truth or falsehood: to which I may add that the said Sir James Brooke has himself stated that “he could have no objection to any inquiry conducted by competent and impartial persons,” and has since publicly announced his determination to “appeal to the House of Commons and his countrymen” in respect of my conduct in publicly advancing against him some of the above allegations.”

By all means let the competent and impartial tribunal be appointed. Society demands it: the character of Sir James Brooke demands it. Sir James—Knight Companion of the Bath—cannot otherwise elect than, even as with a late illustrious but now extinguished Prime Minister, to be tried by God and his country; and we are sure that Mr. Hume himself will be one of the first to cry—“And may God grant him a safe deliverance!”