

THE PIRATES OF BORNEO.

(From a Correspondent of the *Times*.)

I enclose you an extract from a Sarawak letter, received by this mail, by which you will see that the Sakarran Dyaks, encouraged by the long suspension of support on the part of this country to the peaceably-disposed portion of the community, have broken out afresh, and that a young English gentleman, named Lee, has fallen. History scarcely affords an instance of a more undaunted courage than was shown by him, and he adds another glorious example of that heroism and devotion which is so admirable in a noble cause.

To understand the extract properly, you must bear in mind that these forts were erected by Sir James Brooke, after the measures which led to the destruction of the pirate fleet of Sarebas and Sakarran by Captain Farquhar, in 1849, had been approved by the Government, and were intended by Sir James as the best and most humane mode of checking piracy, by preventing the exit from their rivers of the piratically-disposed Dyaks in their bankongs, or war proas; and he trusted that, by enforcing this rule for a few years, the people would be gradually weaned from their evil habits. This for a time was entirely successful, and many of the better disposed engaged themselves in the peaceful avocations of fishing and farming. Two young English gentlemen, of the names of Brereton and Lee, volunteered to take charge of two of these forts, the one at Sakarran, the other at Linga; while a third, on the Rejang, was placed under Mr. Steele's command. They were all dependent entirely on their own resources, or such as Sir James Brooke could afford them, and they cheerfully undertook the risks and privations of such a life, as the pioneers of civilization and good government among a wild and aboriginal people. Nor is it to be doubted but that a very moderate amount of support, the occasional visit of a steamer—in short, anything like encouragement from the power of England, would have enabled them to maintain their position. Such, however, was not accorded them, and his countrymen have now to deplore the loss of a gentleman who so early had developed those rarely combined qualities—an invincible courage with great powers of command. I will now transcribe the extract:—

“I shall now attempt to give you some of the particulars of a most unfortunate occurrence that has befallen us. Rentab had for several months past been collecting a ballah and taunting Brereton. About a fortnight ago he sent word to Gasim and Lingi, and the others who had been friendly with Brereton, that unless they joined him and forced their way to sea, he would attack their houses and take all their property. Brereton, upon this, determined to go up the river and defend their houses. He sent for Lee and the Balows and the Batang Lapurs, and collecting as large a force as he could, proceeded to Bandang's house, which he hastily fortified. Rentab came down with only two boats, was fired into, and ran away. Brereton and Lee rushed to their boats, and, followed by one other Malay boat, and a few Balows in sampans, pursued the retreating foe. The boats soon scattered, and on the leading boat suddenly turning a sharp point of the river, she was received with shower of spears, and four huge bankongs lying in wait were upon her before her crew could get at their guns; they fought, however, most gallantly till Lee came up and took off the attention of two of the enemy. Lee shot with his gun two men, right and left, but had no time to reload. Brereton's fire also killed several men, but his boat was soon swamped alongside the gigantic bankong of Rentab, and he and her crew got to the shore without a weapon. Boat, guns, rifles, everything fell into the Dyak hands. While this was going on the Balows, who fought well at first, finding they had no chance in their small boat, and with 27 of their number wounded, gave way in all directions. Lee's men, some killed and many wounded, after vainly urging their leader to fly, jumped overboard, with the exception of four, who gallantly stuck to him till all were wounded. They begged and prayed him to jump overboard and get ashore. Though desperately wounded, the gallant fellow fought on, saying he would never run away, he would die, but never be shamed by turning, and as his follower jumped overboard, Lee was seen to spring sword in hand into Rentab's boat, where he was soon despatched, and so we have lost as gallant and noble an English gentleman as ever stepped. I think you scarce knew him—he was shy and retired at first, but on acquaintance he much improved, and has endeared himself to all by many admirable qualities. Every one in Sarawak, including Malays, deeply feel his loss; he was a great favourite with all, his courage was Spartan. The news from Kanowit is also unsatisfactory. Bria Hiab got past the fort, with a large ballah, and has gone up the Rejang. Kum Nipa has been trying to get up a combined attack on the fort, and it is said Pa Lambung, of Sarebas, is preparing a tremendous ballah for the same object. I have despatched the Badger, with orders to Steele to take every precaution, and with supplies of muskets and ammunition, also strict orders not to quit his fort. I much fear Kanowit, Sarebas, and Sakarran will break out this season; there are evident signs of it. St. John has asked for a steamer, but I shall not rely on his getting one—we must defend ourselves, and, thank God, our people are ready and willing. If the Dyaks should break out now, the mischief will be terrible, not only to the rapidly rising trade, but to hundreds of unsuspecting people who are fishing and farming on the banks of the rivers, almost to the sea.”

I may mention that Mr. Brereton had arrived safely at Sarawak, and I trust that some prompt measures may be taken to insure the safety of life and property on the coast of Borneo, which is evidently in great peril.