

SIR JAMES BROOKE AND THE DYAKS.

The Rev. Walter Chambers, writes to the Editor of the *Times*, from Sarawak, under date of April 8th, 1853, the following conclusive answer to the long disputed question of pirates or no pirates:—

"I am a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. I came out hither two years ago. The objects for which I was sent were, of course, simply moral and spiritual. My intercourse, however, with the natives, and the publicity of all the proceedings of the Rajah's government, necessarily gave me some knowledge of Sarawak politics, past and present. In conversation with the Europeans of the place these were canvassed with the freedom with which I had heard them in England and during the passage out. From my remarks and questions it seems that I was here judged to be prejudiced against Sir James Brooke's acts and policy. . . . Six months after my arrival I went to live at Sakarran. It was rather a curious coincidence that while proceeding thither, I received the mail containing a report of the motion of Mr. Hume in reference to the attack on the people of the Sakarran and Sarebas rivers, and the comments of a portion of the press; for the consequence was, that while I held in my hand a denial of their piratical character they themselves were telling me of their piratical exploits—e.g., a Malay Abang was talking of having headed 8,000 (?) Dyaks out at sea—he bent on plunder, they on heads.

"In order to qualify myself for my object by a knowledge of the language, habits, and modes of thinking of the Dyaks, I mixed freely with them, until events occurred to make me conscious that I could no longer do so without a risk not warranted by the circumstances. Though this intercourse made me aware of many good qualities in them—of many things from which I anticipate the attainment eventually of the design of this mission of the Church—and also made me consider many of them in the light of personal friends—it has produced a full conviction alike of their inordinate passion for heads, and of their commission of piratical acts in the gratification of it. Of this, the skulls hanging in their houses—the property they possessed (e.g., diamond rings cut off the fingers of Nakhodas, whose boats they had met at sea)—their slaves, captured from every part of this coast, from Mato to Pontianak—all were so many visible witnesses.

"It is alleged that when the Sarebas and Sakarran Dyaks went out on these sea expeditions, they did so merely for the purpose of attacking their enemies. I can now confidently affirm my belief that when out at sea they indiscriminately attacked any vessel which they could approach, and indiscriminately made descents upon any coast on which they trusted to find an easy prey. . . . The following account was given me by a respectable woman. It is here as I wrote it down within the hour afterwards:—'Sixteen years ago I was living at Pulo Jambu, an island situated on a branch of the Batang Kapuas, a day's journey above the Dutch settlement of Pontianak. One morning, at daybreak, we were attacked by 20 boats filled with Sarebas Dyaks. They had Malay steersmen. We were in all 20 houses—Malays. Most of our men were away. They set fire to all the houses. Some of the people escaped by flight, 10 men were killed, and their heads taken, but I, together with fifty other women, was carried away to Sarebas. After living there seven months I was sold, &c. We had had no quarrel with the Dyaks. We knew nothing of them. They had previously gone up the Pontiamak river; being repulsed thence they entered another mouth of the Batang Kapuas, which brought them to our settlement.'

"I recently heard the following statement from a man of some rank: 'Prows going to and from the Natunas had frequently been attacked and destroyed by Dyaks issuing from the Sarebas. Occasionally they visited the island. The last visit occurred about 16 years ago. Two Sarebas boats attacked a place close to Sirhassan, the principal island in the Middle Natubas. Here they captured four women and killed 12 men. Among these were four servants of mine. Landing on another small island near this they dried the heads they had taken. In this occupation they were surprized by people from Sirhassan. The Dyaks beat them off, and took to their boats. One of these sailed away towards Cape Datu. The crew of the other landed at Subi. They proceeded to eat of some poisonous fruits, from the effect of which they all died, excepting six men, who were overpowered and captured by the inhabitants. They sent them to Sirhassan. The people of that island tortured them to death, notwithstanding the threats of their leader that should they kill him thus he would haunt them in the shape of an alligator or a dragon. They first covered them with red ants. Three of them they then buried up to their middles in the earth, and poured boiling water upon them! The other three they burned alive! [Another informant told me the last three were roasted.] The Sarebas Dyaks have never since ventured near Sirhassan.'

"Of such a nature, it seems to me, would be the fearful vengeance which, did Rajah Brooke forsake this country, would probably be inflicted by a combination of the natives of all these parts upon the Dyaks of Sarebas and Sakarran.

"Another instance, and I will conclude. It occurred three months ago; it took place 100 miles inland; yet it will illustrate equally well what I have alleged concerning the indiscriminate nature of their assaults at sea. A great Dyak chief, named Buahriya, holds the country between the head of the Sakarran, and Kano-wit rivers. With 100 boats he ascended the Rajang to the Dyaks of Punah. On the way he took the people of a village of Bukatans to act as his associates and guides on the war-path. Before reaching Punah, Buahriya, from some cause, relinquished his project, turned round on the poor Bukatans, and took their heads, returned to their village, captured their wives and children, and sailed home with, it is said, 50 heads and 100 captives.

"I think that had Mr. Hume himself seen what I have seen, and heard what I have heard during the last 18 months, instead of endeavouring to dishearten the Rajah of Sarawak, to distract his thoughts, and to diminish his resources, he himself would have been ready to greet him with 'More power to your arm, Sir James!'