THE INDIAN ARCHIPELAGO.*

Mr. Horace St. John tells us in his preface to these elaborate volumes that upon them have been expended the labour of years. We can well believe it. Nothing but indefatigable and long-continued industry, gleaning from every variety of source, in every language, and of every age, could have accumulated so vast a treasury of detail—ethnological, historical, and descriptive—respecting the noble groups of islands of the Indian Ocean, as we find gathered together in the volumes before us. If anything, the book is, to coin a word, over-facted. The author, in his laudable anxiety to convey as much information as possible, has positively pelted us with facts; with a greater number, indeed, than we can conveniently take in or readily retain, the difficulty being much increased by the unfamiliarity of many of the Malay names of places, men, and things. A second defect in the volume results directly from the first. Not only does the mass of factual detail encumber us, but it has heavily encumbered the author. Indeed, it has greatly injured his style, broken it into fragmentary morsels, cut to pieces what otherwise might have been a broad and continuous stream of interesting and philosophic narrative, and left Mr. St. John no room for those breathing places of reflection and recapitulation in which the historian of unfamiliar scenes and little known nations finds it to his advantage, like the meeting spirits in one of the sonnets of old Donne, to "make a little stay." But the industry of the book is a phenomenon, and its value in many respects is great. It contains in a compact and closely condensed form the gist of almost every writer who has ever taken up the subject of the famous Spice Islands, and it includes a deeply interesting and indeed tolerably startling account of the piratical system which for ages has been carried on amid those islands by hereditary tribes of Malayan buccaneers. Mr. St. John relates, from its commencement, the history of these swarms of wholesale plunderers and murderers, and describes with great minuteness their exploits, their mode of warfare, and of life, depicting their profoundly rooted treachery and their untameable ferocity.

We find it impossible, in reviewing Mr. St. John's work, to follow him. All we can do is sketchily to describe him—to indicate the character of his chapters, without any attempt at what would be the weighty task of analysing their contents; adding, however, to our few points of objection one of complaint as to an omission which might have easily been supplied—that of a good map—or, better still, of sundry good maps; and this the more so as a number of the new names given by Mr. St. John to island groups and recently founded settlements are not to be discovered in the ordinary geographical sources of information.

Mr. St. John opens by detailing at great length the general features of the luxurious and luxuriant islands of the East, and by describing the silvery veil of romance which long hung round them in the imagination of Europe. He next proceeds to classify and distribute the groups, and then plunges into a sea of detail as to their natural productions—animal, vegetable, and mineral—the richness of their ores and the wealthy luxuriance of their spice groves—the beauty of their verdure—the brightness of their birds—the brilliancy of their flowers—the clearness of their seas—the great variety and goodness of their fishes—and, finally, the gaudiness of their shells. Thence he takes up the different tribes, assigning the origin of the population of the great groups to Hindoo China on the one hand and New Guinea on the other. The Malay race he believes to have been of Tartar origin; but, in fact, it would appear that the present population has been formed of a blending of all manner of Oriental Asiatic tribes, mingled in no small degree with the European element introduced by Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, and English adventurers and settlers. In the early days of the islands, the Malays seem to have at once taken the lead, and never since to have lost their native predominance. The Portuguese were the first Europeans who found their way in any strength into the Indian Archipelago, and who first traded, then settled, then, according to use and wont, tyrannised savagely over the native tribes, who, in turn, retaliated, and a succession of wars, sieges, and massacres ensued. During the progress of these contentions, new islands were discovered, details respecting which Mr. St. John weaves into his historic narrative—although a good portion of the former is nearly a repetition of the original descriptive chapters, dealing with the same general features of nature and humanity. The Portuguese entered the archipelago about the beginning of the sixteenth century, and group after group of islands was rapidly discovered. The Spaniards speedily followed their neighbours; but with the exception of their establishment in, and their commerce with, the Philippine Islands, they never succeeded in rendering the archipelago a source of such gain or a scene of such conquest as their South American possessions. The Portuguese monopolised the spice trade, then the most profitable in the world, until in turn they fell before the Dutch. The first English expedition which penetrated into these sunny seas was that of Drake, and to him succeeded Cavendish, while not long after the flag of England that of Holland was borne into the arena. From this period, towards the end of the 16th century, the aspect of affairs began to change, and the Dutch to carry all before them. Not that England did not make some rather feeble attempts at resistance. The Hollanders, however, as all the world knows, achieved the vast superiority, and by a course of determined, selfish, and ruthless policy long maintained it. The history of Dutch supremacy, of Dutch colonisation, and Dutch warfare, occupies a goodly portion of Mr. St. John's volumes. Monopoly was the watchword to the Hollander, and monopoly he enforced at any sacrifice of blood or treasure. The Dutch East India Company became one of the most powerful bodies in the state, and the seventeenth century had not far waned when the flag of the Netherlands floated upon every principal island of the archipelago. Meantime our principal standing-ground was in Sumatra, but in 1760 we were driven from it. The conquest of Manilla, the capital of the Philippines, however—we say nothing of the attempted exaction of the famous Manilla ransom—somewhat re-established the position of England amongst the isles, while the seeds of our Eastern Empire were beginning to be sown on the plains of the Carnatic. The story of the break-up of the Dutch power in the archipelago is well known. It arrived suddenly, fed at once by European and colonial causes, and the empire which it had taken centuries to build crumbled in as many years. The English took Malacca—then Java—the Dutch East Indian Company was dissolved, and the monopoly of Holland came to a warning end. In 1824, it will be remembered, occurred the treaty by which Holland, now thoroughly humbled, received back great part of her old possessions, and in turn commenced a more liberal system of commercial policy. Mr. St. John passes rapidly over the history of the islands from that time to the commencement of Rajah Brooke's career, the incidents of which he prefaces by an account—forming what will probably become the most popular part of the book—of the extraordinary piratical system of the Indian Archipelago. Since their first discovery, this plague of robbery and murder has been the scourge of the whole cluster of groups, from the Philippines to New Holland, no less degrading and brutalising to one portion of the population than desolating and wasting to another. In the very dawn of the history of these islands we find piracy a trade and murder a profession, jointly followed by a curiously great proportion of the population. Sea kings and Algerines fade away from our estimation as we read of great pirate islands, great pirate princes, great pirate fleets, whose regular occupation was to rove about the entire archipelago, their cruise sometimes lasting for years, and to pounce upon every honest vessel or every industrious village which they thought they could easily overcome, carrying off the entire portable wealth in both cases—in the former murdering every man of the crew, in the latter slaughtering the men and carrying the women and children away to sell into slavery. These extraordinary and abnormal people are represented as ferocious to insanity and voluptuous to excess. When not afloat, "getting heads," they are described as commonly in the practice of spending their time in the grossest orgies and debaucheries, in their towns, situated upon inland lakes and marshes, and approached by secret water channels leading through the coast forests, unknown to all but themselves, and towards the sea strongly fortified by masked batteries. These towns are described as having been partially formed of houses built on stakes above the water, and partially of the still floating hulls of worn-out ships. For centuries the pirate tribes had their places of refuge in these wilds—retreats stored with every species of plundered luxury—and it was only by an overwhelming force of British men-of-war steamers that several pestiferous nests of the kind were routed out, the arms and stores of the inhabitants, of all kinds, seized, and their piratical craft sunk or burnt. A savage race, called the Lanuns, of Malay breed, were long the most renowned and most ferocious of these freebooters, but in describing their haunts we must allow Mr. St. John to speak for himself. The following picture will startle the professors of ordinary naval warfare:—

"The economy of this pirate haunt is of the most singular description. Throughout the range of the vast bay there have been constructed a number of ingenious machines or tramways of timber, over which, in case of sudden and hot pursuit, a vessel may be hauled across the slip of land into the interior waters. Strong trees of an elastic wood are driven obliquely into the earth, and their upper ends are securely lashed to others of the same species left to grow. Thus a V-shaped frame is constructed at an angle of 120 degrees. The end is carried into deep water, with a gradual inclination, while the other leads towards the launching place on the lake. Stripped of their bark, these trees are kept slippery by the constant and spontaneous exudation of a mucilaginous liquid which renders them still better adapted to the purpose they are designed to serve. A Lanun vessel hotly pressed makes for one of these escapes. The whole line of the bay being watched by sentinels ensconced in little houses amid the foliage of lofty trees, an alarm is given to the population on the lake. They immediately crowd to the point which their fugitive confederates are expected to make for, the bushes are pushed aside, an opening is cleared, and the Spanish or Dutch cruisers, unless accustomed to these incidents, are startled by seeing the chase press stem on for the land, lift herself, by one simultaneous stroke of all the oars, upon the slippery way, fly through the grass, and disappear amid the foliage which closes behind her. A hundred ropes are, with amazing celerity, attached to her sides; a host of men are in an instant yoked to her; and she is, without a pause, dragged over the spit of land, and triumphantly launched upon the interior waters.

"Should her pursuers venture near the shore, to investigate the secret of this manœuvre, a storm of round and grape shot salutes them from the batteries of heavy brass guns, masked by this dangerous jungle."

Now, as to the vessels so miraculously handled. What would Mr. Cobden say to being chased, in the tidy little yacht in which he had gone upon a pleasure trip amongst his *protégés*, by a craft of this kind?

"The vessels employed by these bold and ingenious marauders in their enterprises of plunder are formidable, not only to the superior craft of the natives, but to European trade. Generally they are built very sharp, wide in the beam, and more than 90 feet in length—long for the breadth, but broad for the depth of water. A double tier of oars is worked by a hundred rowers—usually slaves, who never fight unless an extremity of danger presses, when every man is called to action. The fighting men of the free and dominant class amount to thirty or forty, though prahus of the largest size carry from fifty to eighty. For their use there is a raised deck above a cabin which occupies about three-fifths of the length and two-thirds of the beam. At the bow it is solidly built out to the whole width, and fortified with hard wooden baulks, capable of resisting a six-pounder shot. Here a very narrow embrasure admits of a gun—varying in size from a six to a large twenty-four pounder, generally of brass. In addition to this, the armament consists of numerous lelahs or swivel pieces, of from one to twenty-four pounds calibre, longer in proportion than other cannon, and bell-mouthed. The smaller sizes are habitually used in native prahus, mounted in solid uprights secured about the bulwarks, and fought by the chiefs themselves. These, immediately on any prospect of battle, attire themselves in scarlet clothes—a colour which distinguishes the Lanun pirates from the honest tribes of the Archipelago. They wear also armour of steel plate or ring chain, or shirts of mail. Personally, they are accoutred with the kriss and spear, in addition generally to a huge two-handed sword. They also carry muskets, and the vessel is supplied for close engagements with an abundance of wooden lances, hardened at the point by fire. When Captain Belcher was attacked by them in 1844 he found on board large stores of arms and ammunition, many swivels, heavy brass guns, too ponderous for an English gig to carry, and English muskets with the Tower mark. These warlike munitions are invariably evidences of a piratical character, as well as the tight scarlet clothes, which are only worn by them; for the peaceful traders attire themselves in dull coloured clothes of native manufacture."

These prahus have no fixed masts—such appendages would be likely to impede their progress among the trees—but each is rigged with a pair of shears, capable of being either raised or lowered with great rapidity, and bearing an immense mainsail. The fleets formed by these vessels are under a peculiar constitution. The chief is the admiral. Each boat has two captains, and from five to fifty free men—the rest are rowing slaves, more or less under compulsion. In the division of the booty, "captives, guns, money, and the finest description of silks and cloths, belong to the lordly class—the rest may be seized indiscriminately by the crew." At one period the Lanuns could form a fleet of 400 sail, and Sir Stamford Raffles estimated their strength in his time as, at the least, 10,000 fighting men. Mr. St. John gives a sort of programme of the annual cruise of one of those fleets—of the manner in which it divides its strength—of the coasts which it visits, and the rendezvous where the galleys assemble. Sir James Brooke examined a fleet of eighteen Lanun vessels, containing from 500 to 600 men:—

"It had been absent from the Lagoon several years, had cruised among the Moluccas and the islands lying to the eastward, had pillaged the Bay of Boni and other places in Celebes, and passed through the Straits of Makassar. They had lost or worn out many of their own boats, but were continuing the cruise in prizes which they had captured, and fitted up for warlike purposes. They had attacked one of the Tambelan isles, where the people had repulsed them, and were preparing for a descent on Sirhissan, one of the southern Natunas."

Mr. St. John gives accounts of many such fleets, and many such expeditions, and then, traversing the islands, he points out the main settlements, not only of the Lanuns, but of the whole piratical brotherhood. To this, as may be supposed, a considerable space is necessarily devoted, during which our author takes frequent occasion to introduce characteristic details of his subject. Take for example a picture which we have already hinted at—the Lanun at home:—

"While the warriors are absent, the women and children remain in charge of the villages; and not unfrequently the defence of their haunts, by an Amazonian garrison, has been fierce and successful. In Mindanao, however, the natural difficulty of approach, with the fame of its powerful defences, has hitherto rendered the pirate city impregnable; and the whole of the fighting men are seldom away at one time. At particular seasons the place is crowded with its possessors. In their retreat on the lake, they pass their hours partly in superintending the equipage of new fleets, partly in the Sybaritic enjoyment of their season's gains—debauch, opium-smoking, cock-fighting, and festivals of barbarian character. War dances they delight in; and whirling through its evolutions, the Lanun appears no poor image of manly grace. He is dressed in a fine helmet, with plumes from the bird of paradise, and decorated with gold belts and silk sashes of variegated dye. His sword is adorned with streamers of red cloth, his long upright shield jingles a number of brazen rings; and so accoutred he rages in the excitement of the performance so wildly as often to fall exhausted at the end. At other times, however, the demeanour of the Lanun, though polite, is grave, with an affectation of priestly composure."

Let us present a companion of the Lanun at sea:—

"Not only are petty fishing-craft and trading-boats attacked: the armed cruisers of Java have frequently been compelled to fly before a squadron of Lanun buccaneers, though in general great caution, if not timidity, is displayed on the approach of a square-rigged vessel; for though able to distinguish a merchantman from a ship of war by the colour of the canvas and the general appointments, they have so often been deceived by disguises that their circumspection has improved from experience. When, however, they find a body of Europeans in boats, away from their ship, or watering on shore, their pride is in the capture or destruction of such a prey. Endeavouring by manœuvres to cut off all escape, they advance in martial attitude, with threatening gestures, shouting, whirling through the evolutions of their war dance, and hurling their spears before them. When sure of their prize, they aggravate their yells, their gesticulations, and their fury, beating gongs to a loud and stirring tune, and often in the strength of more than 1,000 men. Their fine athletic forms are displayed in magnificent attitudes, as they move with the bearing of warriors to the attack. But when, on the contrary, a force appears in sight too powerful to be overcome, and when there is no chance of plundering safely, they descend for a time from their haughty occupation to the humble and more honest calling of traders and fishers.

"It is, however, among the barbarous populations that they appear most truly the savage masters of the sea; they sweep the waters with adroit audacity, move with sails and oars along the coast, and make a descent wherever an unprotected village appears in view. It is sacked and burned, any defenders who resist the attack are killed, the young persons of both sexes are made captives, the old and helpless are murdered, and the spot is left to solitude and desolation. In this way all the unprotected towns and settlements lying in their route experience the cruelty of their arms, for their mode of warfare is barbarous in the extreme. They slaughter the cattle, ravage the plantations, sweep away all the moveable property, and with gratuitous cruelty wound and maim the victims of their power. Slaves in hundreds are carried away. Captives, indeed, are the principal objects of pursuit—the most valuable in themselves and the most readily disposed of. When an island is attacked, the women and children, with as many of the young men as are required, or as will not die fighting, are ravished away. When the prahu is full, laden with this freight of human misery, it quits that coast to sell them on another. A cargo of slaves captured on the east of Borneo is sold on the west; the victims of the south are readily purchased in the north; and the woolly-haired Ethiops of Papua, who are universally prized, are offered at a high rate to the chieftains and princes all over the Archipelago. Wherever, indeed, a scanty undefended population exists, it becomes the prey of the freebooter. In 1834, a horde of Lanuns swept with a fleet round the coasts of a small island near the Straits of Rhio, and carried off every one of the inhabitants. In June, 1845, a Lanun prahu, watering near Meado, was captured, and the pirates, refusing to surrender, were killed in action. Twenty prisoners were found on board and released."

The reader will now be tolerably well acquainted with the character and the exploits of the tribes who have found friends and defenders in the House of Commons of England. It is impossible to doubt the statements of Mr. St. John—founded, as they are, upon such a vast array of authorities, both as to opinion and to fact—when the personal testimony of British naval officers, of British colonial governors, and British travellers by the score, is evoked to prove the real character of the pirates—when long lists of British merchant-ships are given, with their names, their captains' names, and the date and place of their capture, and the destruction of every living soul aboard.

Into the sketch of the career of Rajah Sir James Brooke we do not mean to enter. As it is yet proceeding, it belongs rather to intelligence than to history or literature; but we may give Mr. St. John ample credit for the clearness and fairness of this portion of his narrative. The account of the expeditions undertaken against the Lanuns and the Dyaks—the latter a *fac-simile* of the former in every ferocious and treacherous quality—occupies a considerable space in the narrative of Sir James's Indian life; and not the least gratifying portion of the tale is the circumstantial account of how the English Rajah spread civilisation, instituted laws, and established industry around him, winning even piratical tribes from the lawless employment which they and their ancestors had been pursuing for ages, and introducing them to the benefits of agriculture and commerce.

Altogether, then, Mr. Horace St. John's volumes form a book quite *sui generis*. Other writers have taken up different parts of the subject, but it has been reserved for Mr. St. John to treat it as a whole, and to exhaust in that treatment the most precious materials of his predecessors.

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* The Indian Archipelago: its History and Present State. By Horace St. John. London; Longman and Co.