

THE RAJAH OF SARAWAK.\*

These are volumes of great and intrinsic interest, besides that derived from the circumstances which have, avowedly, caused their publication. By all who have paid attention to the parliamentary conflicts which have taken place in connection with the question of piracy in the Eastern Archipelago they will be eagerly demanded, inasmuch as nearly all the information which we are likely to have upon the subject is here summed up, it may be said with a leaning one way, but very fully. Sir James Brooke, in one of his letters, says that he "hates people who are chary of affording information;" and here will the volumes be very open-handedly. Nor will the general reader find without their interest for the general reader who simply desires to hear something about the regions swayed by the energetic Rajah, as there is a great deal of detail regarding the productions of the country, its general characteristics, and those of its inhabitants. The letters of Sir James are, however, chiefly business letters, written apparently at high pressure speed, and without pretension to style or literary merit. Possibly, in their unstudied character will be found an available defence against much which will, we foresee, be said against portions of their contents.

The duty of a reviewer, in regard to these volumes, we take to be more clear than is usually the case in reference to books on a vexed question. The condition of that question obviously forbids the expression of a judgment. The case is *sub lite*, and these volumes are thrown in—there is no mystery made of it—as occasional affidavits are filed, to improve the position of one of the litigants. There is a commission sitting at Singapore to inquire into that part of the subject which is really important, and it is deemed by Sir James Brooke and his friends at home that the publication of a mass of letters and documents extending from the year 1838, inclusive, to nearly the present time, will produce a good effect upon the public mind, and one which will react upon the minds of those who will have to deal officially with the Singapore evidence. Clearly, therefore, it is not for a journal which will ultimately be expected to express its opinion on the whole case, to deal with it fragmentarily. We shall endeavour to indicate the contents of the volumes, and shall leave criticism to come in its natural course and order.

It may be convenient, however, to dispose of the history of the inquiry in prosecution at Singapore. In the year 1848 Sir James Brooke became governor of Labuan. On the 15th of June, 1852, Mr. Sidney Herbert, speaking on the Labuan estimates, expressed himself in terms which Sir James Brooke thought it desirable to notice. A few days later he wrote to Mr. Herbert, especially complaining that he had been described as a trader—one engaged in mercantile speculations. Mr. Herbert, in reply, stated that he had no intention of impugning Sir James Brooke's motives, but said that the questions he had raised were, whether Sir James's engagements and interests at Sarawak were of a nature to justify his appointment as governor of the neighbouring island of Labuan, and whether his selection for that office was conformable with the principles which were understood to regulate the choice of civil servants of the Crown in our colonial possessions. Some further correspondence passed, and Mr. Herbert withdrew from it, intimating that he had appealed to the Government to institute an inquiry into the matter, and therefore that he could not enter into controversy on what would again be a subject of discussion before Parliament.

We will now quote the editor of the letters, who thus accounts for their publication:—

"When, however, the pertinacity of Mr. Home obtained from the present Ministry their consent to a commission of inquiry, under circumstances that, on the part of some members of the Cabinet, implied at least a distrust in Sir James Brooke, and when this was followed by Lord Clarendon's letter of instructions to Lord Dalhousie, to appoint commissioners, conceived in such a spirit and containing such statements as evinced a feeling even deeper than distrust, I felt I ought no longer to withhold a correspondence which, in its intrinsic truthfulness, must carry conviction, and by showing the actions, feelings, and opinions of Sir James Brooke, during his career in Borneo, as given in all the confidence of friendship, enable his countrymen to judge between him and his defamers."

The editor proceeds to urge that when Sir John Pakington "relieved" Sir James Brooke of the government of Labuan, it was not intended as a demonstration of any want of confidence in him on the part of Lord Derby's Government, inasmuch as that Ministry, as a portion of the same arrangement, appointed him to a high ministerial office in the India Archipelago; but the Derby Ministry resigned before the formalities were complete, and her Majesty's present advisers refused to confirm the appointment. On the 23d of June last we find that Sir Charles Wood, as President of the India Board, directed the Governor-General of India to issue a commission to inquire how far the position Sir James Brooke holds in Sarawak is advantageous to the interests of Great Britain, and the letter of instructions enclosed one from Lord Clarendon, in which the character of the inquiry is pointed out. Against the tenor of these instructions, Mr. Temple, as Sir James's friend, protested; and several letters passed, until Lord Clarendon announced that no useful object would be obtained by continuing the correspondence. So the matter stands; and we may as well mention that we have adverted to this in the first instance, although the documents bearing upon the subject are naturally latest in the volumes before us, because we desired at once to show the best reason why we abstain at present from examination of the arguments in the book, or estimate of the value of the facts it discloses.

The letters, as we have said, begin in 1838, and are chiefly addressed to the writer's mother, or to the editor, whose position shall be self-defined:—"Sir J. Brooke was my early and intimate friend, from whose society I have derived the greatest possible advantage, and to whose friendship and example I attribute much of my success in life." He is addressed as "My dear Jack," and Mrs. Brooke as "My loved Mother." After the first brief farewell note from Devonport, we are confronted by a long paper, drawn up by the then Mr. Brooke, on the subject of his Borneo expedition; and these thirty pages will not be unacceptable to the general reader. Some not very interesting accounts of the merits, demerits, and squabbles of various members of the company of the "Royalist," and details as to natural curiosities and specimens sent home, chiefly occupy the voyage letters, and he arrives in May, 1839; and his first letter from Sarawak is in the August of that year. We will quote it in part, as it describes the country and its ruler:—

"The scenery at the entrance of the Sarawak is noble. The peak of Santoboug, clothed in richest verdure, rises close to the right bank; a straggling tree, mixed with cliffs, crowns the summit; a white beach, fringed with casuarinas, light and elegant, finishes the whole. Wild hogs in abundance, but as shy as they have been fired at all their lives, and some fine grey pigeons, very large, but we got none. We dropped on the river, taking a hasty survey, to the town of Kuchin (or Cat Town). The distance is thirty-five or thirty-seven miles; water generally deep, but here and there with awkward rocks. On one of these, being ignorant of the river, we were swept by an eddy of tide, but got off without harm; though had the ebb been running, our position would have been critical. The following morning we anchored off the town, and fired one and twenty guns to the rajah. We went on shore and visited him, and were received with marked distinction, he always addressing me as 'Tuan Besar,' or 'great man.' The limits of a letter forbid my giving you details, but I must say a word of Rajah Muda Hassim—a little man, mid-aged, with a plain but intelligent face. He is the uncle of the Sultan of Borneo, and virtually the governor of the vast country lying between Point Dattoo and the north of Borneo. He is a man of first-rate ability, and very partial to the English. Sarawak, or Kuchin, is a newly established place, and one likely to prove important in a commercial point of view. Antimony ore is produced in any quantity. Gold, tin, rattans, beeswax and birds' nests are likewise procured from the surrounding country; and at the place itself is a white clay, excellent for pipes, and which the Dutch would prize. In short, in the opinion of the Malays, it is richer than any other locality along the whole line of coast. Two days were wasted in ceremony; the rajah visited us, and we visited the rajah's brother, Muda Hammed, a sulky savage. In the evening of the same day I intimated my wish to be allowed to visit various places in the rajah's territory, particularly some Dyak tribes. I received his permission, to my surprise, to go to Samarahan and Landa—the latter full of Dyaks; but he informed me that he would not answer for my safety going up the river, as he was at war with some rebellious subjects. I was too glad to get this permission, and to-morrow morning we start on the first of these excursions."

The next letter from which we shall extract is

\* The Private Letters of Sir James Brooke, K.C.B., Rajah of Sarawak, narrating the events of his life from 1838 to the present time. Edited by John C. Temple, Esq., Bentley.

from Singapore, the future Rajah having already warmed to his work, and wishing to be knighted in order to promote it more successfully:—

"The history of my late cruise to Borneo has agitated the society here, and while the merchants have presented me with an address of thanks, the Government, or rather the governor, has been cooler to me than before. He would have me lay aside all politics; but whilst I see such treachery and baseness on one part, and such civility and indifference on the other, I will continue to urge my voice at fitting seasons. I will not leave my native friends to be deceived and betrayed by either white nation, and (what the governor does not like) I will speak bold truths to native ears, convinced that it is the best means of preserving the independence of the Malay States, as it is the only line an English gentleman could take, who seeks their friendship, and enters their country with no other object than their good and his own improvement. Doubtless, however, that I would interfere, or force opinion or advice. Until asked, I am silent. If I was governor of the Straits, with power to restrict the Dutch, I would spread the British name and commerce through many channels now shut, or unopened."

"One thing I regret not having tried to effect whilst at home, and that is—getting a knighthood, a civic knighthood. You know me well enough to believe that such a distinction would never be sought by me, except to answer some purpose."

"I believe the mere name would be very useful to me with the natives and Europeans in this country. At home, I would not accept it, or wear the title; and though convinced of its utility, I will not beg or ask it; there are beggars enough in England. If they please to give it me on public grounds, as a barren reward, to facilitate a praiseworthy object, I will accept it."

In June, 1840, he thus writes to his mother:—"I am really becoming a great man, dearest mother; the world talks of me! the rulers of England threaten to write to me! Newspapers call me patriotic and adventurous! The Geographical Society pays me compliments! Am I not a great man? I wish you would write to me, and then they should see that I deserve something. At present my sphere, though I am well content with it, is very cramped. With more fortune, I would come home, and return to this field and finish it, and that would be a solid monument of fame, for it would rest on grounds which no reflection could overthrow."

Later, writing to Mr. Temple about the Chinese war, he says:—

"I should greatly have liked to have been dashing employed, or usefully; but to have joined the fleet as amateur, without something to do, is not in my nature. As for privateering, though I talk about it, I am too proud to dirty my hands with such a trade. Do let me tell you, however, that the China war, in my opinion, is just and politic. The more we submit—the more we treat—the more we are bullied."

But in a letter to Mrs. Brooke, from Singapore, in April, 1841, he sketches his own views and character more amply than elsewhere:—

"Had I been other than I am, had I sought for wealth or aggrandisement, I should never have obtained the hold I have on the natives; and now that it is obtained, if I were to lose the more principles I might gain something, but no real benefit would accrue to the natives. I may be, my mother, my own enemy, but I never will be an enemy to the human race, or to the numerous tribes who look to me for aid. I will never desert the principles I have cherished, and I will not through my whole life, that any paltry personal wealth is scarcely worth the seeking, save as a means, and that to devote a life to its acquisition is inimical to the higher virtues. I should like to be wealthy, but my present revenue is not great, and I wish to make me as happy as I can be. I have resources in books, in my pen, and my reflections. I love children and flowers. I love nature in every phase, and with all these objects I can never want for a moderate share of content; and with your society, that of my wife, and a few rational friends, I can secure wish for more. This is taking the future in the quietest light; but I trust there may be marked out for me a more useful existence—an existence which will enable me to lay my head on my pillow, and say I have done something to better the condition of my kind, and to deserve their applause. Their applause I do not seek particularly, but to deserve the commendation of good and intelligent men is a stimulus to pursue the path of goodness and intelligence. As a man of science, my medical or are they the rational aspirations that should guide us? I believe the latter; but if they be but the former, they are dreams which you know I have long cherished, and which I will not part with now."

Of course no one can find fault with the spontaneous revelations of feeling made by a son to his mother. But if those spontaneous revelations are published, it is for a purpose, namely, to be read and argued from; and it is to be hoped that Sir James's parliamentary advocates will not omit to do justice to the "children and flowers" passage. We hardly know to whom we should commit that part of the argument, but Sir Bulwer Lytton and Mr. Milnes are poets, and also members of Parliament, and perhaps will see the Rajah taken care of. But here is a little more confidence:—

"To continue, my loved mother, let me ask you, whether these views and endeavours do not deserve the support of my countrymen. If the Government, by placing me in an easy position, were to try the plan fairly, I am assured that perfect success would attend it. They might, by making me their envoy, form a commercial treaty with Borneo, the very fact of which would ensure Borneo her independence, and make me the resident commissioner. On public grounds these things would be highly desirable, but my share in the transaction would be greatly diminished. When my memorandum comes home, read it with attention, and do work for me; fight, dear mamma, like a hen for her chickens, and do make our relatives interest themselves in our behalf. They will be proud of me as a relation, even now, but I will make them even prouder yet; and they are good people too, and I like them because they are kind-hearted and gentle. You know, I want to be a knight, though you laugh at me, because Sir James would be an immensely important person here. Indeed, it is difficult to tell you how great the advantage would be; but you know what I have done, and whatever I may do, is in spite of the most adverse circumstances. So, mamma, do stir yourself."

The following letter to Mr. Temple, dated 1841, may have its value as connected with the subject of the inquiry:—

"You know, I think, how greatly I have served the Rajah Muda Hassim, and the unqualified promise he made me, agreeing to give me the country, and to assist the government which I thought best. On these promises I bought a second vessel, and put into her a cargo, in all costing me a great sum; and when I arrived here, with many friendly professions he took the cargo, and was to give me the antimony ore in exchange, at a favourable but fair rate. So far all went smooth; but arrived at this point, I first observed a slackness, then a slight shade of coolness, and then an evident wish to evade all discussion about the settlement of the country; and last, a measure to try me, which went to the ruin of the country. It was nothing more nor less than allowing 120 piratical Dyak boats, to go into the interior here, to attack the Dyaks of this country. When I resisted indignantly this gross breach of our agreement, he denied all knowledge of it; but his knowledge was no less certain, and the measure his own! You must see, antimony ore is easily and readily got; but though he has taken this cargo of mine, he has delayed giving me the return, and has not allowed the natives to work the stone. Now if this was a European, I should be sure he wanted to deceive me; and I believe this friend is false, and thinks to weary me out, and thereby cheat me, and get me away in disgust; but he is mistaken. I have taken my measures. One vessel, partly full of ore, has returned to Singapore for provisions. The 'Royalist' has been despatched to Borneo Proper to demand a shipwrecked crew; and I remain here with Mr. —, and Peter and another, to watch my friend and creditor. If I conclude that he wants to break his promise, and cheat me too—and there can be no surer proof than that he could give me the full return in one month, and hence me five, without allowing, say, preventing his people working—if, as I say, I am sure of this, I will fleece him to his very last clothes; and if he scolds, fight it out. I regret this very much, because in the general calculation of the feasibility of the plan we reckoned the chances of success against failure, and with the same chances again, though greatly against success, I would, on the same ground, do as I have done; but when the uninvited proposer, the uncollected giver, turns at the very first step, of course all previous calculation is defeated, and the scheme has no fair field. I have done this man many benefits; and if he prove false after all his promises, I will put that mark of shame upon him that death would be lighter."

Upon the subject of this objectionable Muda Hassim and the antimony, we find some more decided declarations:—

"To-morrow or next day must decide one of these three things; first, whether I have the absolute and uncontrolled power; second, whether he makes a fair arrangement to repay me all my money and expenses; and thirdly, whether I shall attack him, and take all he has, and be off. The 'lex talionis' is an alternative only in case of extreme necessity, and when it becomes apparent that he has been, and is, cheating and deceiving me. I give you leave, dear Jack, to ask what are the capabilities of this country, and how I am to support the expenses till the capabilities are developed. I think I have before told you, that antimony ore is the staple commodity of this river. The antimony ore I shall retain in my own hands, and by holding a monopoly of it in the European markets, the price will never sink below 10s. a cwt., and will probably be higher. By this ore I shall derive a revenue of £1,800 or £2,000 a year, clear of expenses of carriage, duty, commission, &c. There is besides a considerable quantity of gold, and the immigration of Chinese will increase that quantity, so another branch of trade will be open, as well as small quantities of beeswax, birds' nests, and the like; by these extra profits, I propose paying my household expenses, and my household matters—said to the best advantage with the coast, which will certainly look here, if prices are moderate, and you have my prospects for the first year. Each year will, however, add to the immigration of the Chinese, and to the growth of rice, which the country is well calculated for; and after the first year I shall put a rice tax on the Dyak tax (Malay), and either a rice or gold tax on the Chinese; all this being in prospect, I will not dwell upon."

A large portion of the volumes is devoted to the Dyak question, and Sir James's letters are all confirmatory of the conviction which the House of Commons so repeatedly asserted of the piratical character of those for whose destruction the "head money" was demanded and received. This part of the book is stirring and interesting, and will probably be read by numbers who do not greatly care whether the Rajah was a trader or not, important as the question is when regarded in connection with British policy. We shall not linger over a summary of a narrative which most persons will read in *extenso*

for themselves, nor shall we enter into the quarrels with Mr. Wise, or the Archipelago Company affair, for the reasons already assigned, and because they have interest only as bearing upon the matter in issue. The second volume, which contains letters from 1844 to 1848, abounds in complaints and disputes, and occasional answers to newspaper criticisms at home; but it also traces the history of the writer's Sarawak administration, and describes the steps he took for the advantage of the natives. Mixed, therefore, with matter which will be skipped by the general reader, are many passages of hastily-given information; but, as has been said, graphic power is not among the gifts with which fortune has endowed the Rajah of Sarawak. In the third volume is a letter, in 1850, on the subject of the attacks of Mr. Home and others, and thenceforth this is the keynote. He says (p. 65) that he is inclined to believe Joseph himself not a bad fellow, barring his obstinacy and suspicious turn of mind, and with this limited tribute it may be amusing to find the out-speaking of Mr. Henry Drummond as to another assailant of Sir James. At the dinner to the latter, given at the London Tavern, in April last, Mr. Drummond says:—

"I am somewhat surprised, after what you have heard of the House of Commons, that you should think it worth while to propose its health at all [laughter]. As you have called upon me to return thanks, I do so because I adhere to the first teaching of my school-boy days—'Obedience from a sense of duty.' It is perfectly true that I do not stand here as an old friend of Sir James Brooke. It happened that being much abroad at the time which he has alluded to, I had scarcely heard his name, until a gentleman in the House of Commons, a worthy, good sort of man, in his narrow way—I have no objection to mention his name, it was Mr. Cobden—said to me one day, when the piracy question was coming on, 'Did you ever look into this question? I wish you would look into these papers,' at the same time giving me a box of books on the subject. Well, I read all these wondrous blue books and white books, and I came from the pursuit with a conviction exactly the opposite of that at which Mr. Cobden had arrived—with the strongest possible conviction that Sir James Brooke had taken the right course, the only proper course that, under the circumstances, he possibly could have taken."

The remainder of the book is chiefly composed of documents bearing upon that part of the subject to which we first adverted—the correspondence being given at length; and there is an appendix containing a further examination of the piracy charges, and the report of the dinner we have mentioned, with a list of the attendants. The omission of the *carte alone* prevents the record being entirely complete. It will, therefore, be seen that into these three volumes it has been sought to throw whatever is likely to give a favourable colour to the character and conduct of Sir James, and to testify to his popularity among his fellow-men; and, while abstaining from comment upon the book, we may, perhaps, take credit with him for having assisted in his object to the best of our ability, by letting him speak largely for himself, and by apprising all our readers that in this book they will find great varieties of testimonials on the part of Sir James Brooke and several of his friends to the equally various virtues of the Rajah of Sarawak.