

The Examiner (London),
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“WONDER WITH A FOOLISH FACE OF
PRAISE.”

To our no small surprise we have found the following very silly and very absurd panegyric on the once much-talked-about Rajah Brooke in a publication which ought to have known better:

Our final conviction is that James Brooke is one of Nature's Princes—a man of genius to begin with, and of that high order of genius which can act in any direction: that he has the devout pertinacity of a Columbus, grounded upon a similar sagacity; the gay magnanimity of a Raleigh; the adventurousness of a Cortez; the administrative ability of a Penn; the joyful devotedness of a Père d'Estévan; the moral courage and good sense of a Wellington; the domestic affections of a Collingwood; the robust purity of a hero whose energies are occupied with adequate aims; and the simplicity which is always supposed when genius is described, because simplicity is its most prominent and inseparable attribute.—*Westminster Review*, October, 1854; p. 382.

Mercy on us! Just think of the human phoenix that comprises, in one small mind and body, all the virtues of Christopher Colon; all the accomplishments of Sir Walter Raleigh, without his piracies or other rogueries; the enterprise of Ferdinand Cortez, without his ferocity or bigotry; the political wisdom of Penn, without his drab coat or broad-brimmed hat; and the moral courage of the conqueror of Spain and of Napoleon, although his own victories have been only over naked and unarmed savages in the rivers and marshes of Borneo. If Rajah Brooke be not too deeply bronzed by a Malay sun, the colour must come to even his cheek when he peruses this vile and injurious bombast of his indiscreet adulator. The Rajah of Sarawak has really some good points. He is clever and adroit,—a man of courage, strong will and resource; but the unskilful artist who is his advocate in this case has so bedaubed him with his coarse paint, that he has obliterated every natural feature of a character rising considerably above mediocrity. Is it the same Mr Carmine who contributed to the *Times* of Thursday the pictorial narrative of an “Exploit in Borneo” which Mr Scriblerus himself might have envied for its mock-heroical absurdity?

The plain tale of Rajah Brooke, without the fudge, may be told in a very few words. An English gentleman whose private fortune was sufficient to enable him to live at home at ease, in the spirit of adventure repairs in his own armed yacht to a British settlement in India. There he hears that on a certain river of Borneo near at hand, there exist the richest mines of antimony in the world. Our Raleigh becomes enamoured of the antimonial El Dorado. He purchases a cargo of Manchester piece goods, proceeds with it to Borneo, and sells his goods to the lord of El Dorado, who from bad faith or inability does not make payment in the promised antimony. Our adventurer exacts payment by the *peine forte et dure* of his yacht's cannon, and the payment is the principality of Sarawak with its antimony, in which a monopoly has ever since been exercised, after the fashion of an English or a Dutch East India Company of the seventeenth century. This happened some ten years ago, and ever since our Anglo-Saxon Rajah has maintained his government through the raw material of tartar emetic and printer's types.

Our bold adventurer, now dubbed a king, becomes, like other new-made kings, involved in quarrels with his neighbours. These neighbours are savages, without a knowledge of fire-arms,—men who, by his own recorded statement, take to their heels and flee into the jungle at the sound of a single musket-shot. They are denounced by him, notwithstanding, as dangerous Malay pirates; having, let it be marked, neither the language, the religion, the manners, or the predatory habits of Malays; and the British navy, on four several occasions, is called in to assist in putting down these formidable corsairs without fire-arms. In one dark night 1,000 of them, according to his own report to the Secretary of State, are put to the sword, or nearly three times as many Englishmen as lost their lives on the bloody field of Alma!

In virtue of such feats as these, our lucky Rajah is next made her Britannic Majesty's representative to a prince whom he himself represents as a mere man of straw, and in due course governor of one of her colonies which he visits once in three years. Thus, at one and the same moment, he is the tributary of a barbarian king, and an independent prince by the will of the people; a British ambassador to a barbarian's court, and a British governor. From the last of these functions, however, he has since been relieved by the Executive Government of this country, for the most convincing of all reasons—that, being an habitual absentee, he neither had performed, nor could perform, its duties. A Commission of Inquiry is also now sitting in India to inquire into the proceedings of the Rajah of Sarawak during the last ten years, and more especially to ascertain

whether it be suitable that a British subject, claiming to be an independent prince, should be the representative of the Queen of England to an admitted sovereign of straw, from whose court he resides at a distance of some 300 miles. And this is the moment tastefully chosen for a fulsome panegyric, provoking ridicule and hostility by its extravagance, and almost as hurtful and offensive to its object as the Templer Letters themselves!

Sir James Brooke is not “one of nature's princes,” nor a man of “a high order of genius;” but if his friends would not overlay and hide his better qualities with their foolish praise, we should find him a man of respectable talents, and certainly of great energy and enterprise. He has administered his little domain far better than any Malay could have done, but not better than many Europeans have already governed similar possessions. What he has done has been simply to substitute European vigour and intelligence for Asiatic feebleness and barbarism in one of its lowest phases. In his little principality, which we understand to be a jungle of about thrice the extent of the Isle of Wight, he has raised the population to 12,000, and materially increased the trade. Much of this he owes to his own abilities, undoubtedly; but at least as much he owes to the virtues of antimony, which had brought Sarawak into notice a good many years before it had the benefit of Rajah Brooke's rule. This is attested by a most intelligent writer who visited the place in 1832, eight years before the advent of the Anglo-Saxon Avatar.

Soon after the establishment of Singapore (1819), some people from Borneo Proper who had touched at Sarawak to procure water, on their voyage to the settlement, brought with them a large lump of metal ore which they had picked up there. This, after puzzling the Chinese for some time, was stumbled upon by some English gentleman, who (in 1824) discovered it to be antimony ore of a very superior quality. On learning that this commodity would be purchased at a good price by the merchants of Singapore, the Rajah of Borneo Proper sent a small party of his people to Sarawak, and a friendly intercourse was soon established with the Dyaks, who brought down large quantities of the ore, which they exchanged for beads and cloth, &c. &c. Soon afterwards the Malay chiefs of Sambas, who were glad of an opportunity of carrying on a commerce free from the control of the Dutch, purchased two or three brigs and ships, which they employed in the trade, and in a few years the annual importation of antimony ore at Singapore amounted to 1,400 tons.—*Earl's Eastern Sea*.

The merchants of Singapore themselves afterwards engaged directly in the trade, and, from the papers laid before Parliament, we find no fewer than thirteen of them engaged in it as traders or marines before Sir James Brooke had ever seen it,—the parties in question being the very men who came forward to tell Parliament that they had never seen or heard of a Dyak pirate before the revelations of Sir James Brooke. The establishment of his monopoly has been followed by the usual results of all monopolies. The produce of antimony has fallen off, from 1,400 tons, enough for the consumption of all Europe and America, to about 1,000. Such, without amplification or detraction, is the simple and unvarnished story of Rajah Brooke and his achievements.