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THE BROOKE AND BORNEO INQUIRY.

On all the points of inquiry but one the Commissioners have delivered substantially a verdict against Sir James Brooke. That one is the alleged piratical character of the two incriminated tribes, the Seribas and Sakarran, of whom so much has been said. Here we have an acquittal by both Commissioners. One of them, admitting indeed that the manner of punishment was not of the right sort, calls them "piratical hordes, whose suppression justified the interference of European nations;" while the other, of a stronger stomach, denounces them as a race of "indiscriminate murderers, whose slaughter afforded no reasonable ground of sympathy." We are nevertheless clearly of opinion that the evidence under the Commission goes against the Commissioners, and that they have here pronounced sentence in the very teeth of adverse proofs taken by themselves. As the subject is both curious and important, we shall, for the most part, confine ourselves to it in the present article.

Every aboriginal tribe of Borneo, from one extremity of that great island to the other, is addicted to head-hunting. All of them are marauders in pursuit of human heads, each according to its ability. If any one abstains, it is from sheer inability. The more powerful undertake such expeditions, as it was a custom of the Moghuls of Hindostan formerly, and is of the Manchooes of China still, to undertake grand *battues* against the wild animals of the forest. Sir James Brooke calls this horrible propensity of the Dyaks of Borneo an ancient superstition, and really it looks very like the human sacrifices of other barbarous nations,—less atrocious only because more summary in execution and unattended by torture.

Now, these head-hunting expeditions always excepted (and they are not brought in question by the transactions about to be discussed), the principal Dyak tribes are peaceable, industrious, and hospitable even beyond the usual measure of barbarians. Their war-boats consist of planks stitched with rattan, without a nail. When they quit their rivers they are obliged to hire Malay pilots and steersmen, and they never venture out of sight of land, even with these appliances. Of all which the proof is contained in the evidence taken before the Commission, the testimony in every case being that of witnesses living under the government of Sir James Brooke, parties brought forward by himself in his own vindication.

The Malay head-man of sixteen of the Dyak tribes of Sir James gives the following evidence:

Do you know the Seribas and Sakarran country of your own personal knowledge? Yes, I have been there.—Are you acquainted with their prows? Yes.—Are they nailed together, or stitched with rattan? They are of planks tied with rattans.—When the Seribas and Sakarran Dyaks go along the coast, do Malays always accompany them? The Malays go along with them. They are paid and hired by the Dyaks to go with them and steer for them.—You have stated that the Seribas and Sakarran prows are stitched together with rattans; would these prows manned be able to stand in a rough sea? They can stand a heavy sea, but half the crew jump overboard and hold on by the sides.—If they did not do so, what will happen to the vessel? The boat will be swamped.—When the Seribas and Sakarran Dyaks are at peace with Sarawak, are they honest and quiet men? Yes, they are honest and good people.

Here is the evidence of another subject of Sir James Brooke, a pious Mahomedan Malay, on his way for a pilgrimage to Mecca. He had traded with the Seribas, and had been hospitably entertained by one of their chiefs, named Rantap:

Did you find your residence there agreeable? Yes, he gave me presents and was hospitable, and gave me fowls and rooms. When you go to trade, they treat you well and do not take your heads.—Did you ascertain there, why they continued to make attacks on other tribes? I have asked them, "how is it you, Rantap, are so fond of attacking other places?" He said, "because I am fond of heads."—Was he fond also of plunder? Yes, he takes plunder, also.—Where did you hear of the attack on Pontianak? Rantap told me. I was with him two nights, and he sat up, telling his different adventures. He related the whole of them.—Did Rantap, in describing his expeditions, mention that he had any cause of quarrel with any of the tribes he attacked? He did not mention any cause. There was no other cause but the desire of heads. If a relation of Rantap, his father, mother, or wife, should die, they go out on an expedition for heads. It is a relief to his feelings, and he is satisfied. When the men return with heads, they have free access to all the women; they go into the houses and do as they like with the women. I learnt this from themselves.

We give yet another sample, the witness being the commander of a Malay trading prow, residing in the territory, under the direction of Sir James Brooke.

Are there any other tribes than the Seribas and Sakarran which the Malays of the coast are afraid of? They are moderately afraid of the others; but the Seribas and Sakarran they are very much afraid of. The others are the Siriki and Kanowit Dyaks, who are few in number, and they are little afraid of. But all Dyaks kill; those two tribes, who are numerous and powerful, we are very much afraid of.—Do other tribes besides the Seribas and Sakarran go along the coast in bangkongs (war-boats) to take heads?

The Siriki, the Kanowit, and Kaluka and Sadong and Singa Dyaks are those who go to the coast in their bangkongs for that purpose.

From the evidence it further appears that the Dyaks under the authority of Sir James Brooke are equally prone to decapitations as any of the others, and that being prohibited by Sir James to take heads, they refused to accompany him on the slaughtering expedition of July, 1849, although three friendly tribes did so and were not idle. One of the European witnesses who was present in the *melée* saw these useful allies returning with a quantity of heads, which he estimated at eighty. Even the Malay followers of Sir James, in the action in question, appear to have been infected with the passion of beheading. This is shown by the evidence of the chief, whose testimony we first referred to.

Do you know anything of the taking of a small boat with four men in it by that spy-boat (the scout boat manned by the Malays of Sir James Brooke) when it was despatched? The spy-boat engaged with the enemy, and then returned to my boat with three heads in it covered with blood, and newly taken in the engagement.—Can you state the particulars under which these heads were taken? The spy-boat was despatched into the river, and fell in with a boat containing four men. The spy-boat fought with them and killed three men. The other jumped overboard and was drowned. They took the heads of the three they killed.—Did Sir James Brooke know that these heads had been taken? Yes, he did know.—What did he do about it? There were none but Malays in the spy-boat. He said they should give the heads to the Sarawak Dyaks. I was there and we agreed to give them. The Soboogo Dyaks received the heads.—How many men were in the spy-boat? Fifteen men.—When the heads were brought alongside your boat, were they taken to Sir James Brooke or you? The spy-boat returned first to Mr Brooke's prow, and then to my boat, a different one from Sir James Brooke's.—In which of these prows was the order issued from to give the heads to the Dyaks? The two prows were close alongside of each other, and Sir James Brooke said to me: "These heads, Patingi (chieftain), we had better give to the Dyaks."

That is certainly very circumstantial, and the testimony of a friendly witness, but it is fair to add that in so far as concerns the order for the appropriation of the heads, alleged to have been given by Sir James Brooke, the fact is denied by his secretary, who was present.

What, then, from such evidence as we have now adduced, is the inevitable inference? Why, simply that in the indulgence of an immemorial and detestable superstition, the Seribas and Sakarrans make, in common with all the other savage tribes of Borneo, frequent expeditions in which they murder and maraud, their attacks being directed against all who are not in alliance with them. They are, it is true, far more formidable marauders and murderers than any other of the savage tribes of Borneo, with one exception, the Kyans, too remote to have come within the sphere of the operations of Sir James Brooke. But the reason is not difficult to find. With the exception just mentioned, the two associated tribes are the most powerful of the north-western side of Borneo. Compare them with the nineteen tribes of Dyaks under the rule of the Rajah of Sarawak. The official *locum tenens* of Sir James Brooke states their numbers at from 100,000 to 120,000 souls, while the Malay chief of sixteen tribes of Sir James Brooke's Dyaks reckons the heads of families of the latter to amount to more than 1,140, which at the usual estimate would give a population of no more than 5,700. The two inculturated tribes, therefore, are about twenty times as numerous as sixteen of the government of Sarawak! And they are not only more powerful by numbers, but also by civilisation, for they smelt and forge malleable iron, grow corn, rear cotton, and from it spin and weave their own cloths, while most of the other tribes neither manufacture iron nor grow corn, but continue to be clothed in the bark of trees.

The two associated tribes never venture to sea, except when under the guidance of Malays; they never, even then, go out of sight of land; in a squall, half the crew jump overboard and cling to the boat to avoid swamping her; and the utmost distance they creep along the coast does not exceed a couple of hundred miles. The real pirates, on the other hand, range the Archipelago and the Philippines over two thousand miles of latitude and three thousand of longitude. But the Seribas and Sakarran are not the only tribes who venture occasionally to put to sea on head-hunting expeditions, for the evidence above quoted shows that five other tribes do so even more frequently, and this for a very plain reason, that they are close to the coast, while the localities of the Seribas and Sakarran are in the interior. As to their having attacked the persons or property of British subjects, this is not even pretended. Most of the European witnesses, although living within a few hundred miles of them, and several of them trading with Borneo, never heard even their very names, until they were made known to them by the first raid eleven years ago. Even the rather reluctant Junior Commissioner fully admits that there is no evidence of their having ever attacked British ship, boat, or territory.

The Seribas and Sakarran (says he) are, however, merely local pirates, and it might be questioned whether these tribes were proper objects against which to employ her Majesty's naval forces. Great Britain has no possessions on the coast which was harassed by their ravages, and it is not supposed, so far as I have learnt, that any British vessel has ever been taken by them.

To call, then, the Seribas and Sakarran savages of Borneo "pirates," that is, men guilty of the crime of robbing on the high seas (for that is the only legal definition of piracy), is about as extravagant and absurd as if we were to call the highwaymen and footpads of Bagshot heath a hundred years ago, corsairs and buccaneers. But although they are not pirates, there is not the least doubt that they are atrocious murderers and marauders, and as such deserving of the heaviest punishment that can be inflicted on them by those governments, the persons and property of whose subjects they have assailed. Such are the governments of the Sultan of Borneo, of the Netherlands, and of Sir James Brooke, but most assuredly not of Queen Victoria, to whom they have

done no earthly harm. When her Majesty, therefore, is advised to preach a crusade against homicidal savages over the wide world, we shall be content to see the Seribas and Sakarran included with a hundred other tribes of the same island,—but not until then. It may be here remarked, indeed, that even the Commissioners of Inquiry themselves do not go the length of charging the associated tribes with the judicial crime of piracy. They carefully avoid calling them pirates, simply confining themselves to the very loose phrase of "indulging in piratical habits." Even the native word which with a certain parade of accuracy the Commissioners exhibit for pirate, means simply marauder or plunderer; the language, as we are credibly informed, having actually no name to distinguish the party who robs at sea from that which robs by land.

Thus all which the late Mr Hume asserted respecting the transactions on the coast of Borneo has been substantially proved by the report of the Commissioners, by the admissions of Sir James Brooke, and, far better than either, by the evidence. Full of years and honours, no doubt, Mr Hume passed to his grave, yet we could have wished that he had lived to witness this last triumph of his honest perseverance against power and prejudice, in the cause of justice and humanity.

As to Sir James Brooke, whatever may be the technical character of his relation to the barbarous Sultan of Borneo, he remains at all events the *de facto* ruler of the little state of Sarawak. Formerly he was in a false position, even by his own admission; but from this he is now relieved, and may give a full rein to those commanding talents for administration which he unquestionably possesses. We agree entirely with the Senior Commissioner in thinking that it was "neither necessary nor expedient that he should be entrusted by the British Crown with the powers he exercised, and we will add that it is highly inexpedient he should have a successor, unless, which is not likely, the Government should resolve on squandering money on an appointment not only worthless but mischievous. There are already on the spot two competent governors, and not far off a governor-general and a naval commander-in-chief.

That Sir James Brooke has done much good is beyond all doubt, and we think it equally beyond doubt that he would have done far more good, and much less mischief, had he trusted to his own unaided strength. When he took possession of his little territory in 1841, its mere Malayan population was but 200, and it has now risen to 15,000. In 1849 its export and import trade each amounted to no more than 10,000*l.*, and in 1853 they had risen to 170,000*l.*, employing 30,000 tons of one kind of vessel or another. In short, Sir James Brooke's genius has created the most prosperous state that ever existed in Borneo, an island which, for the 350 years it has been known to us, no other European had been able to turn to any good. It was his own lamentable fault that he allowed himself to be blinded and misled by the pernicious incense of a fashionable mob, which would not be satisfied to praise him for results actually achieved, but right or wrong would insist on representing him as a hero of romance destined to achieve results quite impossible in our matter of fact days.

But now a few parting words for the Commissioners. They were paid for doing whole work and giving whole opinions, and they have done but half work, and given but half opinions. They confined themselves to taking evidence at one spot only, though they were instructed to take it at four. They refused to hear any witnesses except those that offered at one spot, while several of the principal witnesses were within easy reach. They were instructed to inquire into the complaints of private parties who were alleged to have suffered injury from Sir James Brooke, and two flagrant cases presented themselves, but they refused to entertain the subject at all. Finally, overpowered by the superiority of Sir James Brooke, they allowed him to dictate the very excuse they should have been ashamed to plead, and appear not to have taken heart of grace to arrive at even their own lame and impotent conclusions until they had also arrived at Calcutta, when 2,000 miles of ocean were interposed between themselves and the redoubted Rajah of Sarawak.