

THE INSURRECTION AT SARAWAK.

LETTER FROM SIR JAMES BROOKE.

The following passages from a letter from Sir James Brooke, addressed to a personal friend, describe the events of the late insurrection:

"BALIDAH, MARCH 15.

"I may now relate more circumstantially the events of the last few weeks. Sarawak was as peaceful as it had ever been, and there was no cause to excite dissatisfaction among the Chinese or raise suspicion in our minds of any hostile designs; yet a conspiracy had been formed which had its ramifications in Singapore and in China. A follower of Tien-te, the rebel chief, had arrived in Sarawak, and some criminals, who had been banished the country, secretly returned from Singapore. I had been unwell for some days, and on the night of the 18th retired early to bed. My servant was sleeping in a room near mine, and Mr. Steel and Nichollets occupied a small bungalow close by. Between twelve and one o'clock I was awakened by yells and shots, and, seizing my sword and revolver, I opened a window and saw that the house was surrounded. The noise told me it was by Chinese. I opened door by door in the hope of finding means for escape, but in vain. I told Penty (his native servant) that our deaths were at hand, and, as the last hope, went down to the bathing-room, which was under repair. The door was not fastened. I opened it gently, and, seeing the way clear, ran across the lawn to the creek on the right hand of the house, and took the water close under the bows of the boat which had brought the murderers to their bloody work. I carried my sword and pistol across with me. Glad was I to touch ground on the far side, though not above thirty yards. I struggled through the deep mud, and lay down exhausted and panting in the road. Recovering breath, I got to the nearest house, and, launching a canoe, pulled up to the Dato Bandars kampong. All was in confusion. I was too exhausted to do much, and Hercules himself could not have restored courage or order to such a panic-stricken crowd. Here Crookshank joined me, bleeding from a severe swordcut in the arm. He believed his wife to be dead, and we both apprehended that the massacre would be general. Finding all hope of restoring affairs at the Bandars gone, I pulled to the kampongs above, and persuaded the people to secure their women and valuables in prahus, and to cross to the opposite or left bank of the river, so as to prevent the assailants from attacking them by land. My house, Arthur's, and Middleton's were long before this in flames. We got the women and children across the river, and Arthur, Crookshank, and myself retired to the same side, to the house of Nakodah Bryak. Here Crymble joined us with the intelligence that after an hour's defence our fort or palisade had been taken, and with it all our guns, small arms, ammunition, &c. It had been defended by Crymble, with four men and two prisoners; three of the defenders were killed, one or two wounded, and Crymble himself had been grazed by a spear in his side. Middleton, Steele, Ruppell, and Penty dropped in one after another. The bright fire went out, and the dull morning broke at length, but only disclosing to us the hopeless state of our affairs. We remained quietly at Nakodah Bryak's, doing what we could to animate the natives, and to prepare for such a defence as our means allowed, should we be attacked. I may here relate the fate and misfortunes of our fellow-sufferers. Poor Harry Nichollets was murdered on the grass, trying to reach my house. Crookshank and his wife escaped by their bath-room door. She ran first, and he protected her retreat with a spear in his hand, but, in passing the stable, one of these villains rushed from the opposite side and cut her down. Her husband jobbed his spear into the miscreant's back, but with a twist of his body he wrenched it out, and, seizing the shaft, he struggled to get the spear. Suddenly, however, letting go with his right hand, in which he held a short sword, he cut Crookshank across the fleshy part of the arm. Both staggered, both let go the spear, and Crookshank, weak with loss of blood, and believing his wife dead, staggered away and reached me. She, young and beautiful, lay for twelve hours weltering in her blood, conscious and calm in this extremity. One fiend hacked at her head till he cut off the long tresses which protected it; another tore her rings from her fingers; a third—for the sake of our common nature let it be told—gave her water to drink. By this time the remainder of the Europeans had been assured of protection; but when the bishop asked the leader's permission to carry her to his house, he was told that she should be left to perish. At length the boon was granted, and she was relieved and tended, and is now, God be praised, recovering. Middleton's House was attacked at the same time and in the same manner as the others. He escaped with difficulty. His poor little wife hid in a bakery till the burning rafters fell about her, and, from her concealment, saw the assailants kicking about the head of her eldest child. The mother was paralysed; she wished, she said, to rush out, but could not move. The youngest child was murdered and thrown into the flames, where poor Wellington's remains were likewise consumed, his head borne off in triumph alone attesting his previous murder. The day broke, as I said, and shortly after I heard that the Chinese had assured the survivors of safety; that they had communicated with the bishop, and sent for Helms

and Ruppell. I then, hopeless of doing good, started for Siolo, a small stream which has its outlet far below the town; it was a wild walk; we swam the stream, washed out every track of our footsteps in the mud, and took refuge in a mangrove swamp as dark came on. By eight o'clock two small boats came to carry us away, and in an hour afterwards I was in Abong Buyong's prahu, manned by forty men, with six smaller boats in company. Our party consisted of Arthur Crookshank, Crymble, Middleton, and Panty, and, after the trials and fatigues of the twenty-four hours, we slept as though misfortune had not overtaken us. On the morning following I landed at Sabong, and I wish I could explain to you the tender care, the generous sympathy showered upon us. Here we received information that the Chinese, after forcing the Europeans and Datoos into oaths of fealty, had agreed to retire up the river. It was clearly their intention, having, as they thought, disposed of myself and Arthur, to take the country into their own hands, to be friendly with the Malays and Dyaks, to patronise the Europeans and to encourage them to trade in order to the supply of their own wants. There were two parties requisite to the success of this notable project. My intention was to proceed to Sakarran, to collect as large a force as I could, and with it to retake the town, or to command a base of operations in its vicinity. I awaited, however, the intelligence, and on Sunday, having heard of the retirement of the Chinese, I was again entering the town, when down they came a second time, before we were in any manner prepared to receive them properly. The consequence was, they gained the town before I could even land, and I again retired with all the Europeans, with the firm intention of proceeding to Sakarran. This was the only evening I felt the depression of spirits attendant on ill fortune, but I did not show it. There were, outcasts—women and children, and helpless fugitives to be provided for—the town in flames, and my people without firearms and ammunition, panic-stricken, and fleeing with their families. A force from Sakarran was our only hope, and with a base for operations we might rally the people, re-arm and act against the enemy. The next morning I was on my way to Linga, when the steamer hove in sight. I boarded her. Skinner was most zealous and active. Here was the very base for our operations we wanted. We drove the miscreants out of the town, found the Dato in a cluster of prahus, and heard that he had recaptured nine sampans and one of our prahus containing stores of powder, some guns, &c., of which we were in great want. This was the first blow struck at the Chinese. I felt assured that each day would improve our resources and diminish those of our enemies. Their body of men was nearly annihilated, for taking the jungle behind the town or making off by the road, as they had no boats to carry them away, they were cut off by the Dyaks or starved. My next measure was to let the land Dyaks loose upon them, and within a circuit of 30 miles from Siniawan, Bau, and Bula they were driven into their defences with great loss of life, and all communication between Bau and Siniawan prevented, excepting by means of large parties of armed men. Night and day they were harassed by alarms; every straggler was cut down. In short, it was a guerilla warfare of the most harassing character, and quite shut the enemy up in their two places of strength, Bau and Siniawan. The want of food was sure to do the rest, and it was a mere question of time how long they could hold out. Simovar and Bank were each covered, the former by the fort of Balidah, the latter by its landing-place; but early in the month the Chinese again came forth in five prahus, and began ravaging the banks of the river. I was collecting my people and re-assuring them after their panic. The Dato Bandar, on the 9th, was in a single Malay prahu on the look-out at Linda Tarak when this Chinese party came there. They declined an engagement on the water, but landed and threw up a stockade, which they defended with four guns and manned with about 250 men, armed with muskets and rifles. The Dato came down himself in a small boat, and by 1 o'clock on the 10th we got off two more large prahus, some 30 Dyak bangkongs as a reserve; other prahus were preparing, and some followed the same evening, but too late. These three prahus ranged themselves in line and dashed at the Chinese stockade, landed sword in hand, and carried it without a check. The Dyaks cut the Chinese to pieces in the jungle, and the half-hour before sunset cost our enemies from 100 to 120 men. Again the remnant was distressed in the jungle. Our party returned; had it ascended the river, no man, woman, or child of our enemies would have escaped death or capture. This defeated party consisted of their picked men, and their two great leaders were killed in the stockade. A panic now seized them. On the night of the 11th I heard that Balidah and Simovar had been abandoned, and, hurrying up the following morning, the intelligence greeted me that Bank was likewise deserted, and had been burned, and that the Chinese were in full retreat towards Sambas. This took us by surprise, but our force got upon their trail on the 13th, and, after three days' desultory fighting, drove them across the frontier with great slaughter, the enemy, however, making a desperate resistance in defence of the women and children, and the efforts of our people not being able to break them. Had 24 hours' delay intervened to allow a concerted attack we should have had them all; but as it is we may be thankful, for a mere remnant of the body of Chinese men has escaped, and the capture of the women and children was not to be desired. Even now, however, this wretched mass, driven to the further side of the Sambas river, must suffer great loss, and may altogether perish in the wild jungle for want of food and from exposure. Thus the punishment has been almost as sudden, and far more sharp, than the treachery and first success of this miscreant body. A thousand and more have been killed in different places, their flourishing settlements destroyed, and not a roof-tree to cover their dastard heads in the country. The numbers starved in their flight, by being lost in the jungle,

it is difficult to reckon, but it must be considerable, and out of a population of 4,000 or 5,000, certainly not more than 2,000 have escaped, and half this number is composed of women and children. The punishment has been severe. The Chinese will play no further treachery here, and in future we shall prevent their being associated in companies, disavow them, and reduce them to a daily obedience to the laws and a strict surveillance. Sarawak has now passed through the ordeal that Hong Kong is passing through and Singapore has yet to meet. The country is secure, the authority of government has been vindicated; the principles on which it is based proved to be right by the fidelity and ardour of its native population. Our guns have been recovered with a proportion of our musketry, and the principal loss falls on myself, on Crookshank, and Middleton. For myself, I may say that I never knew the small value of worldly goods till I lost them. I do not pretend to any sentimental cant over my noble library, my costly plate, or all the decorations and tokens of honour which were once showered upon me and have been lost even more suddenly than they were acquired. Man's happiness consists not in such things, and he destroys the chances of finding it if he persuades himself that it does.

"Now a word more as to the causes of these events. Wherever there is a Chinaman there is the conceit of supremacy and the desire of dominion. When associated in bodies, as in Sambas formerly, and thence in Sarawak before my arrival, this lust of rule grows stronger. The stringent proceedings of the Dutch have recently thrown many desperate characters into Sarawak, and the miserably feeble government of Singapore, with its toleration of secret societies, has strengthened the Chinese Kungsi here, and given it advisers aware of the state of British affairs and policy. Without such advisers the idea of encouraging trade while murdering the officers of government would never have entered the head of any of the rude Chinese here, and without the means of livelihood from without and the support of the European community, so mad a project could hardly have been undertaken. To upset the government by the murder of its principal officers and heads, and to establish other Englishmen to carry on the trade, was the suggestion of Chinese of Singapore, well acquainted with the isolated position of Sarawak, and possessed with the idea that the murder of Sarawak officers and the Sarawak Rajah would be a matter of supreme indifference to the British nation, provided that trade was continued and cottons sold. It was a high compliment to my government that, murdering me with the intention of obtaining power, these stupidly clever Chinese desired as little change as possible. They forgot the native element, and hence their destruction has come. It was a grand superstructure, cleverly devised by men acquainted with English policy and mode of proceeding, but miserably based as regards the feelings and the ferocity of the native population. I think I have told you that one of Tien Te's followers—i.e. a follower of the rebel and Hué leader in China—has since been ascertained to have arrived in the country. It is probable that he was the great Singapore mover and agent, and to all these causes to encourage the attempt to acquire power and plunder by means of treachery and murder may be added the poverty of the Chinese, owing to the scanty yield of gold during the last eight months. I will only add that to penetrate their designs was impossible, and without a clue to the design and its advisers, their attempt was not conceivable. True, some rumours had been afloat three months before that under guise of a religious procession the Kungsi people were to force the gaoi in order to liberate some prisoners belonging to their body; but the scheme did not then embrace my life, as I was in Singapore. Crookshank took precautions, and on my return I made inquiry into the matter, without eliciting any tangible evidence to warrant me in disturbing the peace of the country. To guard against such a conspiracy is impossible; it slumbers till opportunity occurs.

"We are really not much hurt; our finances will suffer, but will recover, as even now, owing to the speedy and complete destruction of the Kungsi, confidence is not wanting. The loss of the company is trifling. It is fortunate that you will hear of our disaster and its retrieval at the same time; and, for myself, I may say that I am in good health and spirits, and ready to rough it with the best of them. Our ladies behaved with great fortitude and resignation. Charles Johnson, as usual, has been my right hand, and every government servant has declared he will follow its fortunes in evil as well as in good fortune. I have written to retrench every superfluous expense, and I have appropriated my pension from the East India Company to pay the pensions I grant to others. Everything else is superfluous. No books, no papers, no wine, no nothing."