

SIR JAMES BROOKE AND BORNEO.

(FROM THE ECONOMIST.)

Exactly sixteen years ago, on the 1st August 1842, the deed was signed by the Sultan of Borneo which appointed Sir James Brooke Rajah of Sarawak, and it is surely no inconsiderable testimony to the efficiency of his rule during the short period that we now find the first merchants and shipowners, both of London and Manchester, eagerly assuring the British Government that on the confirmation of the influence he has now acquired in Borneo, and its cordial recognition and support by England, depends in great measure the future prosperity of our trade with the great Eastern Archipelago, as well as our moral influence with the East. It is well known, moreover, not only that our commerce is deeply interested in the question, but that the desire of the Government of the Netherlands to step in before us is very great. Even in 1846 the representative of that country commented to Lord Aberdeen in no friendly spirit on Sir James Brooke's proceedings, and was eager that he should be disavowed by Great Britain,—so detrimental was the Liberal commercial policy he had pursued in Sarawak to the working of the narrow Dutch tariffs in other parts of the same island and in the neighbouring settlements. Lord Aberdeen very properly declined at that time to admit the construction attempted to be put by the Government of the Netherlands on the treaty of 1824. Indeed it was proposed to prove that we had voluntarily and for ever resigned the right to establish any British settlement on the enormous island of Borneo, although Borneo was never named in the article of the treaty referred to. And now should the English Government refuse the prayer of our London and Manchester merchants, and decline to accord British protection to the State of Sarawak, there will be but one course open to the Rajah,—to secure the protection of the Dutch Government instead, which would be most eagerly granted. The prosperity and the progress of the State depends wholly on the suppression of piracy in the neighbourhood, and this cannot be done without the co-operation of ships of war. And though under the energetic control of Sir James Brooke the State has hitherto secured its independence and surmounted the great peril caused by the Chinese insurrection two years ago,—yet his administration cannot last for ever, and he is naturally anxious to leave it on such a footing that its tranquillity and progress may be secured by the protection of some European power. Under these circumstances, it is, we think, plain what the duty of the English Government is. One of its own subjects has ruled the State for sixteen years, and succeeded in developing many of its great natural resources. The country is rich in metals,—gold, and antimony especially, and it is believed that, like the neighbouring colony of Labuan, it is also rich, in some parts, in coal. The trade, say our merchants, already amounts to 1,000,000 dollars annually, and is capable of large and immediate increase. But all depends on the countenance to be afforded by our Government. Without that the swarming pirates of those seas cannot be held in check, and while they are active the country must be depressed and poor. Again, no country but England would have the same influence in a State which has been brought into prosperity under the rule of an Englishman. In short, the commercial arguments tend all in one direction. But the commercial arguments by no means exhaust the question. We look upon the State of Sarawak as one of the most interesting and hopeful experiments of recent years, in the way of accomplishing that most difficult task, the bringing European influences to bear on Oriental races. It is admitted on all hands, as well by the partisans of the East India Company as by the partisans of Mr Bright, that the great defect of our relations with India consists in the fact that we have, whether involuntarily or culpably, rather attempted to administer our civilisation as a sort of medicine to the natives of India, than aided them to civilise themselves. The East India Company say, probably with truth, that they have enlisted native agency into their service as far as it was possible to trust it, while their accusers tell them, probably with equal truth, that no nation can be truly raised in the scale of civilisation by a merely superinduced system of foreign supervision. They can only raise themselves, and efficient help can only be extended to them in proportion as they are willing or even eager to avail themselves of it. The truth probably is, that in India, as in almost all other cases of Oriental civilisation, there was a special difficulty. The natives had long ago attained a very considerable degree of culture and knowledge, but had lost—apparently in that great chasm which grew up rapidly between the higher and lower classes—all the principle of progress or vitality. The Hindoo civilisation, like the Chinese, had ossified, as it were, at a certain point, while the principle of life and growth had departed. It would have been far easier to have given efficient help at an earlier stage than at that which they had reached—help not enough to supersede their own co-operation, but enough to give encouragement and hope. The Hindoos were too far advanced in intellectual culture to learn humbly and gradually, and yet they were too deficient in moral qualities to be fit for any sort of self-government. Rajah Brooke had an easier task when once he had gained his position in the little State of Sarawak; and he well understood what it was,—namely, to use his own words, to aid “the development of native countries by native agency.” The very fact that he could only work with native materials was in his favour. It was impossible for him to get on too fast, and force the complex culture of European nations on Dyaks just emerging from the lowest forms of savage life. His experiment was a humbler one, but for that very reason, we believe, more likely to succeed,—not the attempt to inspire an effete Eastern civilisation with new life, by infusing into it the laws and science of the West, but to foster, by his own influence and that of his few personal attendants, the growth of the best elements he could find in the existing life of the wild races amongst whom he had settled. Peaceful habits, a regard for law, a sense of the responsibilities of the State, and finally commercial integrity and commercial enterprise, as the necessary conditions at once of wider intelligence and of honourable industry, were what he proposed to himself to foster in the natives of Borneo. Nor has his attempt been fruitless. He had not been four years in Borneo before his mediation between angry native chiefs was almost always successful, before he had done much to protect the

weaker and defenceless tribes of Dyaks against the systematic serfdom into which they had fallen, to ensure to even the meanest labourer his rights, to secure the warm admiration and co-operation of the many neighbouring Rajahs who joined him in his firm resistance to the dastardly policy of the Sultan, and to develop the commerce of a district which, till he was at its head, had no commerce at all. The town of Sarawak itself, which, on Sir James (then Mr) Brooke's arrival in 1842 had scarcely a population of 1500, most of them dependants on the native princes, numbered in 1846 at least 12,000. The trade grew so rapidly that a river which was never visited at all on the English Rajah's first elevation to power, was within a year and a-half the resort of about 16 trading vessels a month. Rice, the staple commodity of life in the interior, was, directly on the establishment of a firm Government, produced in quantities considerable enough for export—500 tons being exported from this little State in the very first season. And all this was effected without any European aid, except that of one or two faithful friends and servants—Sir James Brooke's policy having always been to train the native races to the arts of Government and civilisation, not to destroy their self-respect by habitual subordination to the management of foreigners. His military force, his civil officers, the whole machinery of his little Government, have, in fact, been constituted out of the Malay materials ready to his hand. And, in asking of the present Government of Great Britain that they will accord their formal protection to this really great experiment, we ask no more than the Government of 1847, and, indeed, the previous Government had, in fact, virtually conceded, though what subsequent Governments have since, unfortunately, withdrawn. Even under Sir Robert Peel's Administration the Government of the Straits ordered war steamers to co-operate with Sir James Brooke in the suppression of piracy—and, under the Administration of Lord John Russell, Sir James Brooke was not only received with marked favour, but appointed Governor of Labuan in addition to the office he already held as Consul-General for Great Britain in Borneo. Again, Sarawak was allowed, we believe by the Conservative Government of 1852, to hoist a flag of its own—a measure intended to give “a recognised permanency” to that state, and to foster a “spirit of national pride” among the natives. It is clear, therefore, that an English protectorate is no policy of innovation, and equally clear that if it is not accorded, another Government must reap all the honour and advantage of the noblest Oriental enterprise achieved by any British subject within the present generation. If, too, we may judge by the general Indian policy of the Netherlands, it will be but ill-inclined to carry out the liberal and wise commercial system initiated by Sir James Brooke, and still less the generous and cordial policy towards all the neighbouring native States which has deservedly gained him so wide a popularity. We do not hesitate to say that England will neglect a clear and visible duty, and a duty more fruitful of result, if measured by the highest considerations, than the support of hundreds of isolated missions in the East, if she withhold her protection from the thriving little settlement where Malays and Dyaks are learning to appreciate and cultivate unity, industry, and good faith, from Englishmen, far too few to oppress, but not too few to train them.