

## RAJAH BROOKE AND HIS CLAIMS.

We can no longer remain silent respecting this new agitation of the Sarawak question, when we see merchants that trade with all the world, and manufacturers who manufacture for all the world, displaying an ignorance of the subject, while pressing it on the Government, that would insure their being plucked at a middle-class examination. This ignorance is a comprehensive one, for it is geographical, political, and commercial, while in quality it is of the sort which Lord Macaulay distinguishes by the epithet "sordid." All this we proceed to show.

The demand made on the State, on behalf of Sir James Brooke, in petitions to parliament, by orators at public meetings, and by writers on his behalf, amounts simply to the modest request that the nation should undertake the protectorate of the Bornean principality of Sarawak, and reimburse Sir James Brooke for all that he has expended on it for the last seventeen years. We shall first state the grounds on which the recommendation is made to the Legislature, and then furnish the necessary refutation.

It is confidently asserted that Sarawak is conveniently situated for a commercial emporium, that it commands one side of the maritime coast of the China Sea, that it is conveniently situated for the protection of British commerce against public enemies and pirates, and finally, that it is a convenient post to facilitate the laying down of an electric cable between the Straits of Malacca and China.

Now, from the shortest, easiest, and most frequented route from India and Western Asia to China, Sarawak is removed by a good 350 miles; by the highway from Europe to China it is 300 miles out of the way; and, by the longest and least frequented route between the Western and Eastern world, so far as the China Sea is concerned, it is out of the way by 200 miles. The place is out of the usual beat of navigation, it has no rich neighbourhood, it has, as we shall presently show, little to export of its own, and the majority of its consumers are half-naked savages. How, then, can it be conveniently situated for a commercial emporium? By what miracle is it to be converted into a Tyre or a Singapore?

Sarawak is said to be so happily placed by nature as to command the southern side of the China Sea. For this there is need of another miracle, because the sea to be thus commanded, reckoning it from the Straits of Malacca to the sea of Japan, is 2,000 miles in length, or equal to the breadth of the Atlantic Ocean, and because nearly at the southern extremity of this mighty length, and in a nook, is

situated Sarawak, the so-called commanding position. The same China Sea opposite to Sarawak is 600 miles broad, but if we reckon the Gulf of Siam, which is a portion of it, the breadth is a good 1,000 miles.

We have next the assertion to deal with, that Sarawak is conveniently situated for the protection, of British commerce from pirates, &c. &c. We have just shown that the place is out of the way of the routes of trade, and consequently out of the cruising-ground of pirates. The most dangerous pirates of the Archipelago are at present the Chinese, and the nearest point to Sarawak that they have ever been known to approach is 500 miles distant from it. They naturally keep to the northern side of the China Sea, where there is something to be got, and as naturally avoid the southern side, where lie out of the way Sarawak and poverty. The next most dangerous pirates of the Archipelago are certain corsairs of the southern islands of the Philippine Archipelago, and these do occasionally visit the north-western side of Borneo, but far more frequently the richer islands of Java, Celebes, the Moluccas, and Philippines, their route to which is by a navigation 700 miles distant from Sarawak, their native country being at a like distance.

The assertion respecting the convenience of Sarawak for laying an electric cable between Singapore and Hongkong is one of the most unaccountable extravagances. The cable, of course, will be laid by the directest route, and the mad engineer who would carry it by the route of Sarawak would go some 400 miles out of his way, and make his wires as long as those that now span the Atlantic. It is not likely that any company will be disposed to incur the risk and expense of 400 superfluous miles of cable to oblige Sarawak.

The advocates of the protectorate and reimbursement assure us that Sarawak is a land of eminent fertility and abounding in rich tropical productions, but they do not name even one of these products. Neither shall we, for the valid reason that none such exist except in the brains of ignorant writers, orators, and petitioners. The principality of Sarawak does not exceed in extent the West Riding, and with slender exceptions it is one huge, continuous, and often impenetrable forest, which is the common character of the unwieldy island to which it belongs, and of which it forms about the one-hundred-and-twentieth part! The majority of its 30,000 inhabitants are savages; the only industrious part of the population were the Chinese, who having rebelled against the authority of Sir James Brooke, were either slaughtered or expelled. Sarawak is among the rudest parts of the rudest of all the great islands of the Malay Archipelago, and the only one of them in which a considerable amount of indigenous civilisation has never sprang up. In every one of the other large islands letters have been invented immemorially, but the native Borneans have neither invented letters themselves, nor adopted those of their betters, and yet they are as near of kin in point of race to the civilised inhabitants of Java, Samatra, and Celebes, as Scandinavians are to Germans. A stubborn and sterile soil, and a land covered with a forest unconquerable by savages, are the true causes of the backwardness of Borneo compared with the other great islands, and even with several of the small. Sir James Brooke himself informs us that within fifty square miles of the territory of Sarawak, twenty tribes speaking as many languages are to be found, an evidence of barbarism not to be matched in any part of the world unless in the deep tropical forests of South America.

But let us see what really are the products of Sarawak after seventeen years of the government of Sir James Brooke, assuredly the most skilful and efficient that Borneo ever possessed. It exports no corn, no cotton, no sugar, no indigo, no coffee, no pepper, no cloves, no nutmegs, no areca, no gambir, all the staples of other parts of the Archipelago. The natives of the more fertile islands, without the help of Europeans, export pepper and coffee in large quantities, with many minor productions. Even remote parts of Borneo itself export articles unknown to Sarawak and its neighbourhood, such as camphor, benzoin, and black pepper.

The staple exports of Sarawak, as far as we have been able to find them out, are crude sago and bee's-wax. Sago is the pith of a palm which grows almost spontaneously in marshes and in marshes only, and which therefore, no doubt, is well suited to Sarawak. But the subjects of Sir James Brooke lack the skill to make it fit for the use of civilised man, and the crude article, a hundred pounds' worth of which would load a large ship, has to be sent by a voyage of 300 miles to Singapore, there, in small quantity, to be converted by the Chinese into the then valuable articles pearl and flower sago. The wax of the Indian Archipelago is everywhere the produce of wild bees, and wild bees abound most where there is most wild forest. The "harrying" of wild bee-hives, as they call it in Scotland, is a branch of industry well suited to the Dyaks of Sir James Brooke, as it is to the still ruder native Australians.

The forests of Sarawak have been vaunted, as producing an ample supply of useful and ornamental timber. There is no foundation for the boast. No doubt there is, as we have just said, not only an abundance, but a superabundance of trees, but among them, neither oak, nor teak, nor fir, nor any other wood whatsoever, fit for durable ship-building. Its fancy woods and dye woods might as well be sought in the clouds that overhang it.

We shall probably have some additional remarks to make upon this subject, which has been by no means exhausted by what we have said above.