

### THE BORNEO PIRATES.

F. T. Labuan, writing from Sarawak on the 27th of May, gives the following account of an encounter with Borneo pirates:—

On the 13th of this month I accompanied my dear friend Mr. J. Brooke Brooke, now the Rajah Muda of Sarawak, on an expedition to Bintulu, a river and country halfway between this and Labuan, which has by a late treaty with the Sultan of Brunai been handed over to the Sarawak Government. It is a rich and fertile district inhabited by Milaneses, Kayans, and Bacatans, who, owing to the unjust and cruel mismanagement of their former Malay rulers on shore, and the continual dread of pirates on the coast, have been kept from doing anything for the development of their beautiful and capable country. Brooke's object was to establish a Resident there, to build a fort, and leave a small garrison at the mouth of the river to give confidence to the people, and to bring them down from the interior to live near the coast and carry on a trade in the valuable articles with which their country abounds, such as the tree-camphor, so valued by the Chinese, gutta serena, the best rattans on the side Borneo, vegetable tallow, sago, &c., and there is also coal reported to be cropping out in several places.

After arranging about building and placing the fort we went up on Tuesday and examined one seam of coal, which was about 25 miles up the river. It proved a good bright, quick burning coal, but it was three feet in thickness in one place, and only one foot six inches in another. After viewing the coal we returned in the steamer to the mouth of the river on Wednesday evening.

About four o'clock on Thursday morning I was awoke by a man halting the ship and the sentry warning him off; I recognised the voice of one of the Sarawak Nakhodas, Hadjoe Matasin, and I called the Datu Bandar, our chief Malay magistrate (who had come with us to inaugurate the Sarawak Government at Bintulu), to pass him up on deck and see what he wanted; he immediately came below with a letter to the Rajah Muda from Mr. Helms, the Borneo Company's manager, whom on our way up to Bintulu we left at Muka (60 miles S. W.); it is the river which furnishes the Sarawak and Singapore factories with raw sago, and produces enough to supply the wants of Mr. Helms wrote word that there was a force of six Ilianus vessels anchored off Muka, threatening the town at the mouth of the river, while their armed boats were plundering and picking up the people along the coast. This news effectively roused us all. The Rajah Muda ordered steam to be got up, and called the little Jolly Bachelor (the gunboat anchored astern of us) to three of her long guns and prepare for fighting. We landed the Chinese carpenters and coolies brought from Sarawak to build the fort, and as soon as daylight and tide had made we steamed out over the bar, took the Jolly and Brooke's gig in tow, and steered down the coast towards Muka. Meanwhile we made ready for action, as we felt that when we fell in with the pirates they would fight resolutely, and that our force was very small to cope with them. Their vessels are well armed, very fast, and carry at least 100 men each. The Rainbow is a small, strongly-built iron screw boat, of 80 tons register, 35-horse power engine, carrying two 3-pounders mounted on poop and fore-castle. We had also a 12 and 4 pounder on board, with their ammunition (the 12-pounder was disabled after a few rounds), which we had brought up for the fort, together with 25 of the Sarawak Fort men, ten of whom we kept to strengthen our own crew, the other eight we turned over to the gunboat to reinforce her. She carried two brass pieces, and two small swivels on her taffrail. The steamer's crew had only six available muskets, and no other arms but their knives and handspikes; they were stationed at the fore-castle and poop guns. The fort men worked their own guns and handspikes, and were armed with Wilkinson's excellent rifle carbines and swords. There were eight Europeans in all, including Captain Hewat, Mr. Moore, engineer; Mr. Jackson, mate; the Rajah Muda, Mr. May, Mr. Stuart Johnson, Mr. Walters, a Borneo Company employee, and myself, and with us we had the Datu Bandar of Sarawak, Pangeran Matasin of Muka, and Hadjoe Matasin, good and true men. We all had our own rifles and smooth bore, and were to do our best to silence the enemy's guns and prevent them boarding. Mr. Walters was to give his aid to the engineer's crew in handling the hot-water hose. As there was no landward, Brooke had some planks hung over the iron poop rail, and lined them with the cabin mattresses to save our legs from shot and shrapnel. The same was done on the bridge for the captain's protection, and turned out to be a very wise precaution, which saved many of us on the poop from ugly hits.

We had not steamed on long before we saw some boats pulling along in shore of us—some had a tripod mast, and these we took to be the sampans of the private squadron prowling along by the mouths of the rivers. We made chase, and Brooke gave them a few shots ahead and astern with his long-ranged Whitworth to bring them to, upon which they heaved their boats and bolted into the jungle. Then several of the Bintulu boats, called "barongs," pulled into shore, and found, to their surprise, that we had been chasing their own friends, with whom they had a good laugh, and warned them against the use of tripod masts in future. After this we steamed about all day and saw nothing more, and anchored off the Bintulu river about sunset.

On Friday morning, before daylight, we started again in search of the sampans, in the same order as the day before, but with no Bintulu boats in company. After a while we saw in the dim light of early dawn what looked like three sampans or palm drifts sailing towards Tanjong Kidong, the point to the north-east of the Bintulu. We steered towards them, and soon made them out to be three large prahus, with their masts struck, bristling with men, who were rowing like the Malacca standers, and punting for shore with all their might, one by one casting off the sampans, which they were towing behind, in order to make better way. There was no mistake that they were the veritable pirates. Hadjoe Matasin, who was absent by their sampans, and fired at when he slipped out of the Muka river to give us the intelligence, recognised the boat that chased him. Brooke asked the Datu Bandar and Pangeran Matasin if they were perfectly certain that these were Ilianus pirates. "Perfectly so, there is not a shadow of doubt," all said. So we took our stations, loaded our guns, and prepared for action. The leading boat had already gained on the other two, and was going nearly as fast as the steamer herself. I never saw fellows pull so. We put on all steam, cast off the Jolly, and tried to get between her and the party, but she beat us, and passed inside of us into shallow water, where we could not follow. Then she opened her fire upon us, which we returned with interest. She, like the others, had no heavy guns, but they all carried three long brass pieces called lalaks, and plenty of rifles and muskets. One of the captives told me afterwards that the long lalaks in the boat he was in took seven men to lift, and that she had 40 muskets and rifles, and that none of the others had less, some more. Our plan of action was to silence the brass guns with our rifles, to shake them at their oars with grape and round shot, until we could run into them without their being strong enough to board us. The steamer was kept loading about within range until the time came to run in; then we got into a good position to put on all steam and give them the stem, which was always admirably and coolly done by Captain Hewat whenever the order was given by the Rajah Muda. The first boat having for the present escaped into shallow water, our attention was turned to the second, from which her consort had evidently tried to divert us. She was now fast nearing the shore, and the chase was most exciting. When the prahu was 200 yards from us she fired her lalaks, and then made a dash for the shore; we opened all the guns we got to bear, and kept on full power until we ran into her, struck her midships, our stem running right over her, and then backed off again. We called out to the slaves and all who were not pirates, or who wished to surrender, to hold on by the wreck until we could take them off, and then steamed away after the remaining vessel. When we came up with her, she was also fast slipping into shore, and we ran into less than two fathoms of water with a rocky bottom under us, before we could strike her, which we did too far forward to sink her, but she was disabled by the collision, and sheered round alongside of us, but did not fight at all. The unwounded pirates jumped overboard, leaving their own wounded, and slaves, and captives, whom we told to remain in the vessel until the boats came to take them off. The first vessel which had escaped, seeing the fate of the others, ran ashore among the rocks, just inside Tanjong Kidong, and the crew and captives all ran into the jungle. The Jolly Bachelor, with Messrs. Paul and Lucas on board, was ordered to stay to look after them, while we saved all we could of the former boats.

Several of our crew recognised friends and acquaintances among those we saved, and the joyous, thankful look of the captives, when they came aboard and found themselves among friends, was, indeed, a compensation for the awful work we had been engaged in. Many were wounded, some with our fire, others with the fearful cuts of the Ilianus swords and Salaco knives of the pirates, who, when they found they could not get away, commenced murdering their captives, and only our running them down put a stop to their dire work of spite and despair. Very few of the pirates who were not wounded surrendered. They are marvellous swimmers; they took their arms into the water with them, and fought with our men in the boats when they were trying to pick up the captives. My hands and those of Mr. Walters, who was a very kind and able assistant, were soon full of work with the wounded, friends, and foes alike, extracting hemorrhage, extracting balls, and closing frightful sword or chopper wounds, such,

perhaps, as are hardly ever seen in civilised warfare. One man was brought up with the top of his skull as cleanly lifted up by the blow of a Salaco knife as if it had been done *secundum artem* by an adept at *post mortem*, who wished to have a peep at the dura mater *in situ*; it was like the lid of a box partly open, and required considerable force to shut it and to get it into its right place again. He had also two heavy cuts on his back. The man is still alive, and seems likely to recover. Another poor fellow could not be got up the ladder, because a long-handled, three-pronged, barbed Ilianus spear was sticking in his back, which I had to cut out to liberate him.

We soon learnt from the captives, among whom were two women and four Sarawak Chinese traders, that the other three pirate vessels had gone out to sea, and were to wait there until those we had just secured rejoined them; so, when we had saved all the people we could, we steamed out to sea in search of them. After an hour or so the look-out at the masthead reported three vessels in sight, right ahead. At this time it was quite a calm, and when we came near enough to see them from the deck we saw them sweep up to the central vessel and lay themselves side by side, with their bows at us, as if they meant to engage us in that position. However, as we went on towards them, the sea breeze sprang up, so they changed their tactics, heeled sail, and opened out into line with their broadsides towards us to rake us as we came up. Our plan was, as before, to shake them first and then run them down in detail. Brooke did not give the order to fire until we came within 250 yards of them, and they opened their lalaks upon us some time before we commenced firing. This was a different affair from the last, for in that the pirates bent all their energies to escape into shallow water in-hoars of us, and therefore made a bad fight of it. Here there was no chance of escape; and they coolly did their best to fight us, and to take us too, which they even seem to have thought possible. Indeed, they told the captives they would soon take so small and low a craft as we were, for they would board us and "amok"—i.e., kill—everybody. They fired bravely, and did not attempt to get away, even when we got our guns to bear upon them; but as we steamed round to get our stem fairly at the sternmost vessel they seemed to think we were retreating, and pelted us with their shots more sharply than ever, directing their chief attention to us on the poop, where we had one man killed and two severely wounded in no time, and we should have suffered more if the temporary bulwark of planks, &c., had not stopped their balls. After the first prahu was run down I had to go below to attend to our own wounded as they came in, but I plainly felt the concussion as we went into the others. One of the vessels was cut right in two; the steamer went straight on without heaving, and she sank the other, one-half on either side of us. She was the largest, and had a very valuable cargo, and much gold and bags of Dutch rapeseed. The pirates fought to the last, and those would not surrender, but jumped into the sea with their arms; and the poor captives who were all made fast below as we came up to engage them, were doubtless glad when our stem opened the sides of their ships, and thus let them out of prison. Fear, comparatively, were drowned, being mostly all good swimmers. All those who were not lashed to the vessels, or killed by the Ilianus, escaped.

Our decks were soon covered with those we picked up, men of every race and nation in the Archipelago, who had been captured by the pirates in their crews, while they had already lasted seven months. One poor Chinese came swimming alongside waving his tall over his head, and the other captives held up cords round their necks to show they were slaves, lest they should be mistaken for Ilianus, and shot or left to their fate. We soon picked up the poor fellows, and the Chinese came under my hands, being shot through the arm. Many of the pirates we took were badly wounded, some mortally; the greater part were killed or disabled by our fire before we closed. As I was dressing one man, with a shot in the wrist, he addressed me in English, and, having expressed his gratitude for his wonderful deliverance from the pirates, he told me he was a Singapore policeman, and was going to see his friends in Java when he was captured. There were also several other Singaporeans—a mother and daughter, who had a child with her, and two men, British-born subjects, Bencoolen Malays, who were taken in their own boat, trading to Tringganu. The husband of the younger woman and owner of the boat was killed by the pirates, and she, like every woman who falls into their hands, had suffered every outrage, insult, and injury that could befall a woman. One poor creature, who was still suckling a child of two years old, as Malays do, was almost a living skeleton; she was shot through the thigh, and after I had dressed her my kind assistant quietly said of her, "Poor poor thing! She has not meat enough on her bones to bait a rat-trap." It is a marvel how these poor captives live all under the terrible tortures and ill-treatment they endure, sometimes for months, before they reach their destination, and settle down as slaves to the worst of masters—very demons, not men. I asked many of those I was dressing if their wounds hurt them much, and they said, "Yes, they hurt; but nothing hurts us so much as the sea water, which the Ilianus have made us drink; they never gave us fresh, but mixed three parts of fresh water with four of salt, and all they gave us to eat was a handful of rice or sago twice a day."

The captives state that when the pirates take a vessel they kill every one who makes any resistance, plunder and sink their boats or ships, and, when those they spare are first taken aboard their own prahu, they put a rattan or a black rope halter round their necks, beat them with a flat piece of bamboo on the elbows and knees, and the muscles of the arms and legs, so that they cannot use them; to swim or run away. After a while, when sufficiently tamed, they are put to the sweeps and made to row in gangs, with one of their fellow captives as a mandor, or foreman, over them, who is furnished with a rattan to keep them at their work; and if he does not do this effectively he is "krised" and thrown overboard, and another man put in his place. If any of the rowers jump overboard, the pirates have a supply of three-pronged and barbed spears, with long bamboo handles, ready to throw at them. When hit by one of these they can neither swim nor run, and are easily recaptured. They are made to row in relays night and day, and to keep them awake they put cayenne pepper in their eyes, or cut them with their knives and put pepper on their wounds.

Their prahus are essentially rowing craft, long, low, and very sharp, like the old Malacca galleys, with a high fighting deck; their masts and sails are small and insufficient, so as not to be seen at a distance. Those we encountered were seen at Cape Duta on Monday night, and on Friday morning we met them off Bintulu, a distance of 240 miles, having delayed a whole day about Muka on their way, and picked up more than 30 of our people on the coast. We had the happiness of recapturing and landing most of these people on our return to Muka. We found on reckoning up that we had picked up 185 people, and that, perhaps, 150 to 200 had got to land from the vessels we sank near shore. The captives who swam to shore would all be saved by the Rajah's people at Bintulu, who received orders to go after them, while the Milaneses themselves would surely kill all the Ilianus—their most dreaded and hated foe. In every pirate vessel there are from 40 to 50 Ilianus—fighting men, all well armed, each having a rifle or musket besides his native weapons, and from 60 to 70 captives, many of whom were killed by the pirates when they found themselves beaten; among these two women. We saved, in all, nine women, with six children. Seven of the women and four of the children were our own Muka people; and it was indeed most touching to witness the joy and gratitude of them and their relations when we returned them to their friends. Of the Ilianus we captured 32, 10 of them boys. Some have died since of their wounds, the remainder are in irons in the fort here. The boys have been given out by Brooke for five years to respectable people, to train and bring up. I have taken one now in the hospital with three shots in him, whom we hope to cure; he is a fine lad, about 14, the brother of a Salaco Datu, or chief. I shall try to educate and make a Christian of him. Very few of the pirates live to tell the tale; some captives assured us that in the boat they were in there were only two out of the 40 fighting men who had not been killed or wounded by one fire when we gave them the stem and cut her down.