

BORNEO PIRATES AND THEIR VICTIMS.

The atrocities of the Borneo pirates form the subject of a long letter, addressed to the *Times*, by the Bishop of Labuan. In May last, the Bishop accompanied Mr J. Brooke Brooke, now the Rajah Mudab, of Sarawak, on an expedition to Bintulu, a river and country half way between Sarawak and Labuan, which has by a late treaty with the Sultan of Bruuai been handed over to the Sarawak Government. News was soon brought that six piratical vessels were 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. The armed steamer *Rainbow*, with a small gunboat, called the *Jolly Bachelor*, at once proceeded in search of the piratical craft. At last they sighted three prahus:—

“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. We put on all steam, cast off the *Jolly*, and tried to get between her and the point, 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 swivels, called *lelahs*, and plenty of rifles and muskets. 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 dodging 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. 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 *lelahs*, and then made a dash for the shore; we opened all the guns we got to bear, and kept on at 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, and the crew and captives all ran into the jungle. The *Jolly Bachelor* was ordered to stay to look after them, while we saved all we could of the former boats. Among those we saved, many were wounded, some with our fire, others with the fearful cuts of the heavy Illanun swords and Sooloo 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 were soon full of work with the wounded, friends and foes alike, arresting 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 Sooloo 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 Illanun 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, hoisted sail, and opened out into line with their broadsides towards us, to rake us if we came up. Our plan was, as before, to shake them first, and 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 *lelahs* upon us sometime before we commenced firing. We had one man killed and two severely wounded in no time. 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 backing, 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 rupees. The pirates fought to the last, and then 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. Few comparatively were drowned, being mostly all good swimmers. All those who were not lashed to the vessels, or killed by the Illanuns, escaped. 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 Trigannu. 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.”

The liberated slaves gave a painful account of the atrocities committed upon them by the pirates:—

“It is a marvel how these poor captives live at 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 salt water the Illanuns 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 prahus, 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 mandoor, or foreman, over them, who is furnished with a rattan to keep them at their work; and if he does not do this effectually, he is “krisped” 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. We had picked up 165 people, and, 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 *Milanows* themselves would surely kill all the Illanuns—their most dreaded and hated foes. In every pirate vessel there are from 40 to 50 Illanuns—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 them, two women. We saved in all nine women, with six children. Of the Illanuns, we captured 32, 10 of them boys. Some have since died 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. 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 our fire, when we gave them the stem, and cut her down.”

The Bishop highly compliments the courage and discipline of the natives on board the steamer and gunboats, and speaks of the deadly certainty of his own rifle. He adds:—

“We have had the details of the capture of two large vessels, one a Singapore prahu trading to Trigannu, the other a Dutch top of 150 tons, on the coast of Borneo to the mouth of Pontianak. This latter was taken in conjunction with five other Illanun pirate vessels, which had come down from the northward (they themselves were coming up from the southward). The new comers informed them there was a large merchant vessel in sight, and proposed to them to join in the attack, which they did. She had a valuable cargo, worth 10,000 dols., which they plundered. They killed everybody on board, except one Chinaman, whom we re-captured. After plundering the top the whole eleven pirate prahus were seen and chased by a Dutch war steamer, near Pulo-Bawang, south of Pontianak. They pulled away from her into a bay, ran their vessels on shore, hauled them up as far as could, and then screened them with branches of trees and bushes. The steamer was anchored close outside of them for a whole day without seeing them, and when night came they slipped away and went off to Corimata, where they committed great ravages. I see by the last Singapore paper that we have here, there is some account of the doings of these same prahus. It is stated ‘that in one place they carried off a native prince and his followers, besides 200 other natives.’ The Boyan captives tell us that in one morning their armed sampans laid in ambush near their fishing stakes, and surprised and carried off seventy-five of their people, among them two of their Hadjees, whom we re-captured. Living here, one his constantly hearing of their daring and atrocious deeds, and there is hardly a respectable Malay in Sarawak who in years past has not suffered from them, either in his town family or in that of his near relatives.”