

HORRIBLE DISCLOSURES.

The Foreign Office has received a despatch from Sir H. St. George Ord, the Governor-General of Penang, detailing the results of an expedition to the Nicobar Islands, to rescue some European women and children captured by the natives, and to punish them for the numerous murders of crews of vessels which unfortunately attempted to trade with the natives. The despatch, which is very voluminous, is addressed to his Grace the Duke of Buckingham, and is dated, "Government House, Penang, August 20, 1867." It appears that the last act of atrocity was committed on a Liverpool merchant vessel, called the Futtay Islam, trading to Nicobar Islands, when she was attacked by the natives, and 21 out of 24 of her crew were murdered. This and many other massacres left to a determination on the part of the Governor to punish the natives, but the Nicobar Islands being just without the limits of the China station, the senior naval officer did not feel justified in permitting one of her Majesty's ships to proceed on a duty beyond its limits. Subsequently the Government of India acquiesced, but prior to an expedition being sent the Governor despatched Captain Bedingfield, R.N., in command of her Majesty's ship Wasp, to proceed to the coast, accompanied with proper interpreters, to make all the inquiries respecting the reported atrocities. That officer proceeded, and learnt beyond doubt of the greatness of these murders, but that white women and children were held in captivity by the natives, and were exposed to the greatest brutality. The Governor thereupon resolved on despatching her Majesty's ships Satellite and Wasp, to endeavour to rescue any captives and punish the perpetrators of the outrages, and to take such steps as would impress upon the natives generally the danger of continuing their piratical attacks, and thus to insure, for a time at least, and until more permanent measures could be adopted, the safety of passing and trading ships. The despatch thus proceeds:—

"The ships returned to Penang about ten days since, and the substance of the reports, which will be sent in detail to the Admiralty, is as follows:— They first visited the island of Great Nicobar, where they discovered ample evidence of the islanders having been the authors of the attack on the Futtay Islam. . . . No natives were seen, and no communication could therefore be held with them. The village in which these relics and of other ill-fated vessels were found was then burned to the ground, and a placard, stating why their town had been burnt, was affixed to the trees, for the information of the natives. The expedition then visited the central group, and experienced the greatest difficulty in communicating with the natives, although promised that if they gave up any captives they should not be molested. They were too conscious of their misdeeds to be willing to trust themselves in the power of the ship. Through one of the natives, who was in the expedition, it was ascertained beyond a doubt that a white woman and her two children had been a few months before alive on the island. The unhappy lady, as she is believed to have been, is supposed to have been the wife of some person on board one of the ships seized by the savages about two years since. She was delivered of a child almost immediately after her capture, and, after suffering the most terrible indignities, been passed from one to the other of the head men, as their fancy dictated. On its becoming known that she had been seen by

the merchant captain before alluded to, it was considered dangerous to allow her to live, and after an ineffectual attempt to poison her and her two children, they were mercifully released from further suffering by being taken into the jungle and knocked on the head. The principal actor in this tragedy unfortunately evaded capture, and had got away to the island of Katcheivo, where, from its inaccessible character, he was safe from pursuit. He is said to have carried with him a white woman and two children. One of the little children, however, after great exertion was rescued, and is now in my charge. On searching the villages, although they had been very careful to remove as far as possible everything that could give a clue to the detection of particular piracies, enough was found in the way of tools, seamen's chests, cabin fittings, and ship stores to show that a large number of ships had been from time to time plundered by them; and as no wrecks were visible, it is almost certain that these things were obtained from vessels captured and afterwards sunk in deep water, a proceeding which they admitted they always adopted in these cases. Enough was, however, discovered to justify the expedition in inflicting on the natives a severe retribution for their crimes, and the officers and men accordingly proceeded to destroy their houses and canoes, many of which were war canoes 70ft. long; the cocoa-nut trees, with the produce of which they carried on their trade, were, in compliance with the Governor-General's suggestion, spared. After completing their work at the central group as far as was considered necessary, the man Johnson (the native who had accompanied the expedition) was put ashore, a promise being held out that if he disclosed all he knew his property would be spared. He was entrusted by Captain Bedingfield with a book, in which was written in English and Malay a notification that the natives of the islands had been guilty of acts of piracy, plundering vessels, murdering their crews, and carrying off white women and children, who, after the vilest treatment, were murdered as well as entering the details of the result of the expedition; that the book was left with Johnson to be shown to captains of men-of-war and merchant vessels visiting the island, and who were requested to write in it the particulars of each ship's visit. The utmost efforts of the expedition failed to discover any trace of the names of the four ships which, by the admission of these people, they had captured and plundered; it is satisfactory to know they have been released from their terrible sufferings by death, and although there are possibly still some more persons in captivity, they are probably of a class not much above that of the natives themselves, and therefore their condition is not one of extreme hardship. I deem it of great importance to the future security of passing and trading ships that these islands should be frequently visited by men of war. If her Majesty's Government should be pleased of my hoisting the British flag on these islands, I believe it would be attended with the best results, and would probably lead to the early settlement by people desirous of turning to account the prolific soil, &c.— I have, &c.,

(Signed)

"H. ST. GEORGE ORD."