

THE EXPEDITION OF THE *WASP* AND THE
SATELLITE.

Considerable light was thrown upon the dark mystery surrounding the fate of missing ships by a tale told at Penang in October, 1866, by three men, who succeeded, alone and unassisted, in bringing the brig *Futteh Islam* into Penang harbour. What they said was substantially this. The *Futteh Islam* sailed from Penang in August 1866, bound for Rangoon. She was forced, through stress of weather, to take shelter on her way, and put into Nangkawri, a harbour in the island of Trinket, one of the Nicobar group. The Nicobar Islands are in the Bay of Bengal, and lie south-east of the Andaman Isles, between the Andamans and Sumatra. The brig, with a crew of twenty-four, all told, anchored about a quarter of a mile from the shore, and the natives came off in their canoes, apparently with the object of trading. They brought cocoa-nuts, poultry, and vegetables, to exchange against cloth, knives, tobacco, and spirits; and they conducted themselves with the utmost propriety—for them—till the fourth day after the brig's arrival. On the fourth day, some thirty men came off in canoes, and lay alongside, while the chief went on board to converse with the master. After a short time spent in this way, the chief looked over the side, and called for some one to give him fire for his pipe. Fire was brought in a thick bamboo, which was handed to the chief, who lighted his pipe, and then, taking the master unaware, knocked him down with the cane. This was a signal for the men in the canoes to rush on board with clubs and spears, and to commence an indiscriminate slaughter of the brig's crew. Three men succeeded in escaping to the hold, where they hid themselves behind mats and wood; and when they judged, from the cessation of the noise above, that the ruffians had quitted the ship, they stole out at evening, and found themselves alone in a ransacked ship, of which the decks were covered with blood, though the bodies of the slain had been apparently flung overboard. Whether it was the intention of the islanders to return and finish their destructive work, did not appear; but the three survivors of the crew managed, as night came on, to slip the cable and put to sea. After eight days of anxious navigation, the three brought the *Futteh Islam* into Penang harbour, and told the grim story of their comrades' fate. This, coupled with strange rumours which had come up from time to time respecting nefarious acts done at the Nicobars, determined the authorities at Penang to clear up the mystery. In June 1867, H.M.S. *Wasp* was sent to Nicobar to make inquiries. Coming to Trinket, where the men of the brig were murdered, she found two vessels at anchor, engaged in trade with the natives. From the master of one of these, Captain Bedingfield, of the *Wasp*, learned that about eight months before he had seen a white woman a captive among the people; and that six years ago, the wife of a murdered captain of a vessel had been maltreated, and finally put to death. Several other instances of piracy, coupled with murder, were stated; and from what Captain Bedingfield heard, he was led to believe that there were yet living among the Nicobarians white women who had been taken out of ships which had been destroyed after the murder of their crews. He returned to Penang for assistance; and on the 19th of July, 1867, the *Wasp* left again with the *Satellite*, Captain Edey, for Nicobar. On the morning of July 22, the ships made Great Nicobar, and anchored near the village of Trinket, which was seen, pleasantly situated, extending along the shores of a bay, the houses large and built on piles, with cocoa-nuts and palm-trees and thick jungle in the rear. On the beach was a large number of war canoes. The object of the commanders was to obtain intelligence of the men of the *Futteh Islam*, or of any other captives; to obtain compensation for past wrongs, and a guarantee against violence in the future. Knowing the treacherous character of the people, it would never have done to land without such a force as might overawe them. A considerable body of seamen and marines were therefore landed under the command of Captains Bedingfield and Edey; and as soon as this was done, the natives fled to the jungle, leaving no one to give information. The invaders marched into the village, and found fearful confirmation for all previous suspicions as to the character and habits of the Nicobarians. In the houses were large quantities of ships' gear, sailors' chests, tool-boxes, sofas, cushions, fittings of ships, nautical instruments, and arms. Selections were

made as samples of what had been found; and then, the people refusing to come back or to afford satisfaction, the village was set on fire and burned, together with the war canoes on the beach. From Trinket, the *Wasp* and *Satellite* proceeded to the harbour of Nankawei. A detachment of Madras native infantry, who had been brought down in the *Satellite*, were landed, and in conjunction with the seamen and marines under Captain Edey, proceeded to take possession of the village of Enounga, from which, as from Trinket, the people all fled. Six men, however, were captured by Captain Edey and sent on board the *Satellite*—dreadful looking savages, with Malay faces, stamped with the mark of every coarse disgusting passion, with flat noses, thick lips, high cheek-bones, and a sullen, cruel expression. A careful examination of these men, and of some others captured by Captain Bedingfield, on the *Wasp's* former visit, led the commanders to the sad conclusion, that all the captives who had been living in the islands had been murdered, with the exception of one little girl, about seven years of age, who had been taken with her mother out of a French ship some little time before. This child was said to be in the keeping of Acheeup, a chief of the island where the ships now were; and it was resolved, at all events, to recover her, and to punish the islanders for their atrocities; for at Enounga, one of the largest of the villages, the expeditionary force found proof positive of a system which must have been carried on for many years—a system of deliberate piracy, by which ships, having been inveigled into the harbours of the islands, had been seized, the men murdered, the women reserved for a worse fate, and the ships themselves taken outside and scuttled, on the principle of dead men telling no tales. But though the ships were gone, there remained those things belonging to them for which the piracy had been committed. At Enounga, and at every village, the houses were stocked with ships' furniture and ships' belongings, many of but little use to the possessors, and some of no use 'to any one but the owner.' At one place was found a copy of *Christopher Tudpole*, on the fly-leaf was written in a woman's hand: 'When shall we meet again? Perhaps never!' and then, with several memoranda of addresses, appeared some caricatures drawn in pencil. On the 23rd of July, the English being in possession of the sea-board, two of the prisoners taken by Captain Edey were sent to Acheeup's encampment to tell him that, unless he gave up the little captive girl he had with him by noon the next day, the villages of the island, with all their contents and all the war-canoes, would be destroyed. In the meantime, a searching examination was made by the captain of the *Wasp* into all that the prisoners knew about the piratical habits of the people; and while these men confessed to having seen the crews of four vessels murdered in Nangkawri harbour alone within two years and a half, they all agreed that there remained now only one stranger, the little girl, captive in the island. All the rest had been murdered. No answer having been sent by Acheeup, the work of destruction commenced. All the villages in Nangkawri except three were burned; and all the war-canoes, some of them being particularly handsome, and seventy-six feet long. One of the villages spared belonged to Acheeup, and it was intended to try still further the effect on him of holding the threat of burning his village *in terrorem* over him. On the 26th of July, therefore, two more of Captain Edey's prisoners were sent to the camp to tell Acheeup that his village would share the fate of the others if the captive girl was not immediately given up. The messengers returned promptly with the child, a half-caste, who, it seems, had been taken out of a French vessel from Karical, her mother having also been captured, abused, and murdered. On the 28th of July, a man called by the sailors 'Sir John Nicolls,' who was a prisoner on board the *Wasp*, jumped overboard, intending to swim for the shore, about a mile distant. Hardly had he gone thirty yards, before an alligator, of which animal the harbours are full, caught hold of him, and with a shriek the man disappeared. Trinket Island, the last of the Nicobars of any importance that remained to be visited—Camorta had been already ravaged—was seized on the last day of July, and Acheeup himself was induced to come on board the *Wasp*, under promise of a safe-conduct to and from the shore. He was a rough, rude specimen of a brutal man, with elephantiasis on both legs and feet, and shewing by externals his fitness to be ruler over his followers, in that he was infinitely more hideous and savage-looking than they. Nothing more could be elicited from him than was already known to the commanders; and after some hours spent on board the man-of-war, he was allowed to depart, in accordance with the promise made to him. The upshot of the whole matter was this: it was established beyond all doubt that a system of murderous piracy had been carried on for years by the people of the Nicobar Islands, and that it was the custom of the pirates to retain their female prisoners, but to murder the males. The only living captive was rescued, and a punishment general and severe was inflicted upon the islanders, as a return for their past atrocities, and as a warning for the future. It was also determined that it is indispensable for the safety of life and commerce that the Nicobar Islands should be included in the regular cruising-ground of one or more of our ships of war. It is even a question whether, in the interests of humanity at large, places which are capable of being made nests of such detestable pirates, should not be annexed and governed by some power capable of keeping them clean.—*Chambers's Journal*.