

HOW SIR JAMES BROOKE BECAME  
RAJAH OF SARAWAK.

The following communication, which we extract from the *Friend of India*, of the 13th of August, is interesting:—

Sarawak was formerly a dependency of Bruni, or Borneo proper, but that empire having fallen into decay it became actually, though not nominally, independent. The discovery, however, of some very rich antimony mines there induced the Sultan of Bruni to attempt to reassert his authority over the province, and for this purpose he sent down his uncle, the Rajah Muda Hassim, with a force of Bruni Malays, who seized the mines and attempted to work them by means of the forced labour of the Sarawak Malays and Dyaks. To this high-handed proceeding the latter naturally objected, and hence arose those hostilities which were being carried on when Brooke visited Sarawak. The war languished in the wretched manner you describe. Each party built a series of small forts throughout the country, but each was afraid to close with the other, and as no cultivation could be carried on the country was fast becoming depopulated and deserted. When Brooke, after visiting Muda Hassim, was on the point of leaving Sarawak to extend his cruise among the other islands of the Archipelago, the latter begged him to stay and help him to put down the insurrection, promising that, if he did so, he would make him governor of the province on condition that he paid tribute to Bruni. Brooke, knowing that a promise given by an Asiatic Sovereign under such circumstances was of no value, neither accepted nor rejected it. He replied to Muda Hassim—"I will not take advantage of your present distress, but I will assist you to put down the rebels on condition that you rule the country under my advice. I will then show you that you can both work the mines profitably and also pay those who work them. As to my being Rajah we can speak of that afterwards." To this proposition Muda Hassim agreed, and Brooke, having joined the Rajah's forces with 12 Europeans and two six-pounders, captured one small fort from the rebels after another; and having driven them all into their large stockade, compelled them to surrender at discretion. At his intercession, though not without considerable difficulty, their lives were spared and the honour of their families preserved, and the rebels became ever after his staunchest and most devoted adherents.

Having thus pacified the country, Brooke bought a trading schooner at Singapore and loaded her with such goods as would sell among the natives. These he gave to Muda Hassim to enable him to commence working the mines by hired labour, and he was to receive in exchange such an amount of antimony as would repay his expenditure. This by the way was the foundation of the epithet "Trader" with which his enemies long loved to taunt him. Muda Hassim took the goods, but never paid the antimony. Other vessels from Singapore arrived, and to them the antimony was sold, while to Brooke's remonstrances such answers were given as showed him plainly that he was being fooled. At the same time the oppression of the Land Dyaks, whose interests Brooke had so much at heart, was again begun, and begun chiefly with the view of annoying him and embroiling him with the piratical Sea Dyaks. His chief enemy was Makota, who was not, as you say, a rebel chief, but a Bruni Malay and Muda Hassim's Prime Minister, and whose hostility was excited by the influence which Brooke had acquired with the Rajah. Brooke, however, was not the man to be either fooled or bullied; and reports of an attempt by Makota to poison either him or his interpreter brought matters to a crisis. He anchored his yacht opposite the palace, on which he brought her six six-pounders to bear, and arming his boat's crew—he had but 16 Europeans in all—went ashore and asked for an audience. He then in a long speech related to Muda Hassim all that he had done in the country, all the promises that had been made to him and broken, and concluded somewhat as follows—"Now I ask you either to make me a Rajah as you promised, or to repay me for the goods I have given you. If you will do neither, I will attack you in order to repay myself. I will rob you even of your blanket, and," glancing significantly at Makota, who was standing by, "I will punish those who have injured me." Bold words these to an Oriental sovereign in his own court!

Muda Hassim probably feared an attack from the redoubted white man and his 16 comrades, but whether he did or did not there were sufficient reasons why he should yield. He knew that if Brooke left Sarawak matters would soon become as they were before his arrival; he could not or would not pay him for the goods, and he thought he would get cheaply off by giving him the empty title of Rajah. He accordingly replied with the most bland politeness—"I am extremely sorry that my good friend Mr Brooke should be angry, and I shall comply with his request with the greatest pleasure." A document constituting Brooke a Rajah was accordingly then and there executed, and next day he was hailed by a salute of 21 guns Rajah of Sarawak. He was, however, only one of a council of whom Muda Hassim was chief. His power, consequently, was very limited, but such as it was he used it on the side of right. He prevailed on Muda Hassim to put down "head-hunting" among the Sarawak Dyaks, and he was able, though only with very great difficulty, to protect the weaker tribes of Dyaks from those who had been in the habit of plundering them. His position, however, was very precarious, he being, in fact, "the leader of the Opposition" to whom the Sarawak Malays and Dyaks looked for protection against their oppressors.

At this time the piracies that were being committed in the China Sea attracted the attention of the English Government; a number of men-of-war were sent to the coast of Borneo, and a treaty to put down piracy was made with the Sultan of Bruni. In negotiating this treaty Brooke was of great service. He was, in fact, the real though not the ostensible negotiator, and in one of the visits to Bruni which he made while the negotiations were pending he prevailed upon the Sultan to withdraw Muda Hassim and the Bruni Malays from Sarawak, and to appoint himself sole Rajah and feudatory under the Court of Bruni. Thus it was that he became Rajah of Sarawak.

My chief authority for the above facts is Sir James Brooke himself. He made no mystery of the manner in which he became Rajah. I was there four years, and knew him intimately.

A. HONSBURGH,  
Chaplain of the Derajat, and late  
Missionary in Sarawak.