

THE MALAY OUTBREAK.

ONE difficulty is succeeding another in the East with unpleasant rapidity. Scarcely are we extricated—if, indeed, we are yet extricated—from our Chinese trouble, than the intelligence reaches us of the murder of Mr. BIRCH at Perak, and the news of last evening from Penang comes to give a still darker aspect to affairs in that region. We are told that “the Rajah of LILLA has ordered the districts of Larut, Salangore, and Perak to take up arms; that the Malays are ejecting the Chinese inhabitants who are friendly to the English, and are recruiting their forces in the outlying districts,” and that “a religious war is expected.” It is difficult to overrate the importance of this last information, supposing it to be well founded. Of itself it is sufficient to convert a trifling difficulty into a most serious one. At present, however, there is room for hope that the alarm of a religious war is groundless, and it would be wise at all events to refrain from apprehensions which the next report may show to have been exaggerated. Coming, as this news does, contemporaneously with still more unfavourable accounts from the Herzegovina, and the confirmation given by the *Times* correspondent to the rumour that a massacre of the Christians at Mostar was actually planned a short while ago by the Bashi-Bazouks, it is likely both to gain more credit and to arouse a deeper feeling of uneasiness. But it is too soon to believe the worst on this subject and to conclude that what was thought a mere casual outbreak of Malay savagery has been the letting out of the waters of Mahommedan fanaticism.

But that the news is on the face of it improbable, or that, if premature, it is not likely to be realized, is more than we can affirm. Those who have longest observed and who best know the Mahommedan races of the East speak with one voice as to the extent and force of the religious revival which has taken place among them; and we cannot shut our eyes to their evidence on such a matter merely because it would be more pleasant to disbelieve it. That Mahommedan zeal, and with it of course Mahommedan fanaticism, is on the increase is indeed a thing brought home to us by so many signs as to be no longer questionable, and it would be extremely hazardous to act as though the chance of a religious war in the Straits Settlements, or indeed in any other part of our Mahommedan dominions, might be left altogether out of account. Wars of religion are generally unexpected when they do occur, both because they are the result of forces incalculable, or only very roughly calculable, by ordinary political tests; and because, further, they frequently set at defiance all the motives and considerations upon which politicians are wont to rely as influencing the course of human affairs. To the religious fanatic any moment may seem an opportunity, and no obstacle may appear sufficient to deter. He is not one either to bide his time or to count the cost; and, therefore, no arguments drawn from the hopelessness of his enterprise can in any case have much weight. It is to be remembered, on the other hand, that this very circumstance of the incalculable character of a religious war leads those who are in the near neighbourhood of its possible scene to anticipate its outbreak in their fears. We have in our favour, too, the important statement that two of the Malay States—Johore and Quedah—are friendly; a circumstance which at first sight seems strongly to negative the theory that religious fanaticism, a factor operating equally upon all the States alike, is at the bottom of these disturbances. It may turn out, as the *Times* suggests, that local jealousies, the animosities of rival Malay pretenders, and the commercial quarrels amongst themselves of the Chinese workers of the tin mines, have been the cause of the whole trouble. As to that we shall probably soon know the truth; but one thing seems to be clear—that, whatever the origin of the outbreak, it is considered sufficiently serious by English military and naval authorities to justify immediate action. One thousand men with artillery are reported to be on their way from India, and two gunboats are expected from China. With these reinforcements our troops, it may be expected, will soon make up lost ground, and the repulse of a few days ago is not likely to be repeated. Should the outbreak prove only to be the partial and comparatively unimportant affair it was at first considered, we shall probably not have to wait long for its suppression. Should it definitely declare itself in the more serious

sense which is now feared, we shall at least have spared no effort to take it in time. On the whole, we may still hope that the former view of the matter was and remains the correct one, and that we have only a race insurrection and not a religious war to deal with. In the former case it will be some slight comfort to reflect that in quelling the outbreak we shall be at the same time “avenging the death of our representative and vindicating the supremacy of the flag.” War with a savage race is always a wretched and inglorious business, but it is just one degree better to find ourselves engaged in it in self-defence than to have to undertake it in cold blood as a measure of punishment following upon fruitless attempts at obtaining peaceful redress.

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