

THE outbreak of Malay passion against British power in the petty principality of Perak has made in some quarters an impression deeper than more important events have sometimes been known to produce. There were two reasons why it should strongly affect public feeling. In the first place, the intelligence came emphasised with the announcement of the violent death of a valuable public servant; and, secondly, the outburst was as mysterious as it was sudden. No reason was assigned why the Malays should have turned savagely upon Mr. BIRCH, and then laid siege to the British Residency. When, however, it was found that not only had they done so, but that Malay chiefs were collecting forces, it was natural to suppose that some widely-diffused sentiment was at the bottom of the movement, and one of the telegrams supplied the missing element in the statement that "a religious war was expected." There was nothing whatever incredible in such a report taken by itself, and the contingency of a religious war is one not to be lost sight of. At the same time the suggestion of such a war has gained acceptance, chiefly because no other explanation is at hand, and if it can be shown that the Malays have rushed to arms in defence of some lower interests than those which are proposed to the faithful in the Koran, we may lay aside the apprehension of a religious war until some special token of it presents itself. The outbreak at Perak is explicable on purely mundane principles. We have put a bridle on passions unaccustomed to be controlled, and for the moment those passions have gained the mastery. Only a month ago, as it now appears, Sir WILLIAM DRUMMOND JERVOIS, who has succeeded Sir ANDREW CLARK as Governor of the Straits Settlements, stated in his address to the Council that the relations between Mr. BIRCH and the chiefs with whom he had to do as Resident at Perak were wholly unsatisfactory. He said there was scarcely one of the engagements entered into by those chiefs with the British Government which had not been violated on their part. The Resident's advice was disregarded, and it was added, "the result is eminently unsatisfactory to all concerned." This is the state of things out of which the murder of Mr. BIRCH and the subsequent attack upon the Residency have arisen, and a reference to the occurrences referred to by Sir WILLIAM JERVOIS will furnish reasons for hoping that after all the revolt may be kept within manageable limits.

Four Malay States have been mentioned in the telegrams as within the compass of the movement against us—Perak, with its dependency of Larut, Salangore, Johore, and Queddah. But the two last-mentioned are expressly stated to be friendly to us. It was from the Rajah of JOHORE that Sir STAMFORD RAFFLES obtained the sovereignty and fee simple of the island of Singapore in 1819. We hear nothing of hostile movements against us in Salangore, and thus, so far, we have only to do with Perak. This little State, however, has given us much trouble, although the Governors of the Straits Settlements have until recently observed a policy of non-intervention, from which only the continual wars of the native rulers, and the imminent danger that they would involve the populations ruled by us in their strife, induced the late Governor, Sir ANDREW CLARK, to depart. Ever since we have had anything to do with the Malay States, they have represented, on a miniature scale, the confusion, rapine, and bloodshed which prevailed in India when we made our advent there as a political and military Power. The number of persons with more or less pretension to rule is altogether out of proportion to the population or wealth of the territory, and hence incessant wars. Perak was peculiarly exposed to these contentions of civil pretenders on account of its valuable tin mines, which were as much an object of attraction to Malay chiefs as, until lately, the power of raising loans in

London was to the generals in South American Republics aspiring to become Presidents by a revolution. The worst of it is that when a Malay State has at length come under the rule of a Sultan or Rajah, its troubles are not over; for that ruler is surrounded by chiefs who hold his authority very cheap, and exercise, according to custom, many of the rights which in civilized countries pertain to sovereignty. For a long time past a Perak chief, known as the Mantri of Larut—the province which lies near to the British province of Wellesley—has had a quarrel with his Sultan, and has tried to throw off his allegiance. The exactions of this person upon the Chinese, and his crafty conduct in selling the same rights twice over to different parties, brought on a war of Chinese factions which in its consequences troubled the peace of Penang. About the same time, through the death of the Sultan of PERAK, a war of succession broke out, and in the general suspension of authority piracy flourished. The Chinese quarrel was composed by the British Governor, who also offered to mediate between the Perak chiefs. The Rajah ABDOLAH, who had been recognised as his successor by the former Sultan, was seated on the throne in pursuance of an agreement made in a council of chiefs, at which Sir ANDREW CLARK was present, and a number of necessary questions were determined. Among other things, it was agreed that British Residents should be appointed both at Perak and at Larut, and it was hoped that thus peace might be maintained. But Sultan ISMAIL, the rival of ABDOLAH, would not give up his pretensions, and many of the Perak chiefs have taken his side. We had committed ourselves to the rule of ABDOLAH, and it was to his residence at Baturabet that our handful of troops retired after the unsuccessful attack on the stockade on the river above the scene of Mr. BIRCH's murder.

It is thus made pretty clear how the outbreak of which Mr. BIRCH's murder was the signal was caused. It was political, so far as such a qualification is applicable to the quarrels of a number of barbarous chiefs. Government in this Malay country, as in some others, is before all things an affair of spoil and plunder. Even this, however, is not the worst that might have happened. If Malays will fight, it is better that they should do so for tin mines and similar sources of wealth than that they should engage in a war of religion. The fact that Queddah and Johore are friendly to us is a sign that as yet the war has not assumed that character. The truth seems to be that the Malay chiefs of Perak have found the restraint we have attempted to put upon them intolerable. When a British Resident was placed at Perak, it was part of the arrangement that his "advice must be asked and acted upon in all questions other than those affecting Malay religion and customs." This is the scheme which, before the murder of Mr. BIRCH, had been officially declared to have broken down. "The Resident's advice," said Sir WILLIAM JERVOIS in the speech we have already referred to, "is disregarded, and he must either passively look on while acts are committed which he disapproves but cannot control, or he must assume to himself a power which is inconsistent with his position as adviser, thus practically taking upon himself the government of the State so far as the opposition of rajahs and chiefs will permit him to do so." A month had not passed after these words were spoken when the British Resident at Perak was foully murdered; the chiefs probably perceiving that an attempt was about to be made to bring them under something like responsibility for the maintenance of order. Our immediate duty is happily clear. We must show the populations around our settlements that no temporary successes will avail to secure impunity to those who have committed this great crime. Already troops and seamen are on their way

to Penang from China and India; and, were it necessary, the fleet which assembled at Bombay in honour of the Prince of WALES would contribute a powerful force for the assertion of our power. It is not, however, probable that any very large number of men will be required for this purpose. The picture which has been drawn of a stubborn resistance to our advance, such as the Dutch have encountered on the part of the Atchinese, does not represent the expectations of those who best know the country and people. The Malays are a warlike race, but they are not important as a political or military power, and are, perhaps, on the whole, less dangerous in the field than in civil life. Whatever their power, however, it must this time be effectually broken. Our interests in the neighbourhood of Perak are too great to allow us to permit turbulent Malay chiefs to bring our authority into question. A new etymology of Singapore has been offered within these few days, according to which it means "the little shop." If such is the interpretation now current in the Straits, it is time to revive an older derivation, according to which Singhapura signified "the Lion's Town." A grave question, however, lies in the background, whether we shall assume the government of Perak when we have reduced its chiefs to subjection. There are plenty among us who would settle this question off-hand, and for whom it is a doctrine beyond discussion that the British Empire is to be enlarged at all times, in all places, and by all means. Lord CAERNARVON has lately shown that that is not the view he takes of British duties or British interests, and if he approves of any further extension of our government to Malay territory it will probably be not because such an annexation is desirable on its own account, but because events have made it inevitable.