

HIGH WATER AT BELFAST—TIDE DAT.
 Monday. 11h. 45m. Evening. 12h. 0m.

The Belfast News-Letter.

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BELFAST:
 MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1875.

No one who remembers the circumstances which heralded in the last General Election will have forgotten the woful war which was waged between Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone in reference to the Straits of Malacca. Mr. Disraeli opened the campaign by a paragraph in his address to his constituents, in which he said that "by an act of folly or of ignorance rarely repeated by the present Ministry (that is, Mr. Gladstone's Administration) relinquished a treaty which secured us the freedom of the Straits of Malacca for our trade with China and Japan," and he added that they at the same time entered into those equivocal and entangling engagements on the West Coast of Africa which involved us in the Ashantee war. The fact that we are now hastening troops and war vessels to those very Straits of Malacca recalls the controversy, and one is obliged to say that, unfortunately, Mr. Disraeli proved to be a true prophet when he said that the time would arrive when the public would hear more of this. Directly, perhaps, it is not possible to trace the threatened war in Perak to the treaty we entered into with the Dutch in reference to Sumatra, but indirectly, and not at all remotely, the connection is obvious. The Dutch have ever since been engaged in a war with the Achenese for the possession of the northern part of the Island of Sumatra, which, but for Mr. Gladstone's famous treaty, they could not have taken possession of under any circumstances. As it happens, the Dutch have been getting rather the worst of it up to the present, though we hope and believe they will in the long run be successful. The influence of these events has been felt in the Malay Peninsula, and it is thought at Perak that if the Achenese can defeat the Dutch the Malays may drive out the English without difficulty. That the engagements we entered into with the Dutch on that occasion led in the most direct way to the Ashantee war no one has ever denied. It is to be devoutly hoped that they will not indirectly lead to a war perhaps as costly in South-Eastern Asia.

The Straits of Malacca form one of the most important of ocean highways in that part of the world, for they are the great means of communication between the Indian Ocean and the North Pacific, by means of which the products of India and Europe are exchanged for those among other countries of China and Japan. English interests are largely bound up with the prosperity of the Straits settlements, which consist of Penang, or the Prince of Wales' Island, Malacca, and Singapore. The latter is an island not above twenty-five miles long by fourteen or fifteen wide, lying to the extreme south of the Malay Peninsula and separated from it by a channel hardly a mile wide. Its commercial position is superb. Its imports amount to some seven or eight millions in the year, and its exports are of about equal value. Although the trade of Penang is not so extensive its own products are more valuable, and it is regarded as a most beautiful station. The history of the island so far as regards its connection with England is curious, and is told in a recent letter to the *Times*. An Englishman who was in the military service of the East India Company—Captain Light—married the daughter of a potentate in the Malay Peninsula, known as the King of Ouedah. He received with her as a portion this island of Penang, and afterwards sold it to the East India Company. The son of this Captain Light and of the native Princess, his wife, entered the navy, but, about the beginning of the Peninsular War, left the service, and joined the staff of the Duke of Wellington, under whom he served until the war ended at Waterloo. Colonel Light, as he then was, afterwards returned to his old profession, commanded a ship of war for the Pasha of Egypt, and subsequently went out as Surveyor-General of South Australia, where he was the founder of a colony. Malacca, the other British Settlement in the Straits, has also a most salubrious climate, is favourably situated for trade, and in its neighbourhood are rich tin mines, which are being developed by Chinese labour.

Now, it is obvious that England must not only defend the British interests which have been assailed in Perak, but must road to the native princes such a lesson as may prevent any repetition of the outrages which have happened. What we know is that the British Resident

at the Court, if it may be so called, of Perak has been murdered without any provocation—murdered treacherously in his bath. It is manifest that this was not done from any motives of private vengeance, for the next step taken was to besiege the British Residency at Perak; and circumstances occurred which lead to the belief that all the native Rajahs were implicated. British officers and soldiers were slain and wounded in resisting the fierce attack made upon them; and the latest news was that the Sultan of Perak was collecting large forces of Malays for the purpose, if possible, of expelling the British. Perak is upon the Malayan Peninsula, almost opposite Penang, and immediately north of the peninsular province or dependency of Wellesley, which is attached to Penang. In all probability, if the natives should assemble in such force as was at first apprehended, many valuable English lives may be lost before our reinforcements arrive. Of course, the ultimate result is not difficult to foresee. The English forces, naval and military, will with little difficulty overcome the half savage Malays; but then comes the question whether we shall be content with a barren victory. If the Sultan Ismael and his Rajahs and people treacherously murder our officials and make war on our people, may it not become advisable to deprive them of the means of further mischief? If the Province of Perak will not content itself to remain at peace with us, may it not become not merely our interest but our duty to expel the Sultan and his Rajahs, and annex their territory to the settlements which are already ours? It would certainly be for the interest of civilization if this should be the result of the war which is forced upon us; and we are clearly entitled to seize Perak and to hold it until indemnified for all the costs of the war, as well as for the murder of Mr. Birch and any others who have treacherously fallen. It is, no doubt, greatly against modern notions to enlarge our possessions, and we are not among those who would advocate any attempt causelessly to seize and annex the dominions of a neighbour. But is there not sufficient cause here? Without provocation the British Representative at Perak is murdered, and the Residency besieged. This is a direct attack upon England, and it must, as a matter of necessity, be avenged. We think that we should get very material guarantees that such a thing should not occur again; and by deposing the Sultan, punishing the murderers, and annexing the country, we should read a lesson to other Princes on the Peninsula which they would not readily forget. Moreover, we owe a duty to the vast number of Chinese who have come to the Peninsula chiefly under British auspices, and who are among the most industrious people in the world. Perak, as it happens, is a country rich in mineral wealth, and productive in various ways. The climate is extremely good; and, as we have already an establishment at Penang, it would not be any great additional expense to England even if we found ourselves obliged to enlarge the borders of the British Empire by annexing the territory of the Sultan of Perak.