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OUR RESIDENTS AMONG THE MALAYS.

THE significance of the disturbances in Perak can hardly be appreciated without a comprehensive knowledge of the relations which have subsisted for some years past between the Straits Government and the States of the Malay Peninsula. Correspondence between the Colonial Office and the Straits Government on this subject, extending from the summer of 1872 to the spring of the present year, has lately been published, and contains, though in a somewhat confused form, all the information which is needed; but it is unnecessary to say that, until the news of Mr. Birch's murder arrived, this correspondence found no readers. Nevertheless, the story it tells is, even in itself, curious and interesting.

On the 27th of July, 1872, the traders of our province of Malacca who were concerned in the trade with the neighbouring native State of Salangore drew up a petition, the prayer of which was supported by the Singapore Chamber of Commerce, calling on the Straits Government to protect trading interests against the piracy and other evil consequences of the disturbed State of Salangore. Sir Harry Ord, then Governor of the Straits Settlements, promptly replied that it was "the policy of her Majesty's Government not to interfere in the affairs of these (native) countries, unless where it becomes necessary for suppression of piracy or the punishment of aggression on our people and territories;" and that "if traders, prompted by the prospect of large gains, choose to run the risk of placing their persons and property in the jeopardy which they are aware attends them in these countries under present circumstances, it is impossible for Government to be answerable for their protection or that of their property." This decision gave much offence to the Singapore Chamber of Commerce, who protested that if such a policy were adopted, "all confidence in British protection would be lost, a serious check would be given to mercantile enterprise, and the influence of the British Government, which should be paramount in the Malayan Peninsula, materially impaired." Nevertheless, the policy concisely defined by Sir H. Ord was approved by Lord Kimberley (December 28, 1872). It was, in fact, the policy which had become traditional as long as the Straits Settlements

remained attached to the Indian Government, and had been maintained unchanged by the Colonial Office. The mercantile community, however, repudiated this policy with energy, and to their influence we may attribute the novel attitude in which we find ourselves at present placed towards Perak and the adjacent territories. Taking this conflict of opinion between the Government and the Singapore merchants as a convenient starting-point, we are able to trace the gradual progress of a new policy down to the murder of Mr. Birch.

In October, 1872, Mr. Campbell, Acting Lieutenant-Governor of Penang, sent a remarkable despatch to Sir H. Ord. He gave some particulars of the disturbances in Perak, where the succession to the supreme power was disputed, and in Laroot, the northern and substantially independent portion of Perak, where the Chinese who work the tin-mines had taken sides for and against the native chief. Mr. Campbell argued that unless this state of things were brought to an end the Chinese troubles might spread disastrously to Penang; and he concluded that "a Resident or political officer" ought to be appointed. The policy, he admitted, of the Colonial Office was "averse to the acquisition of new territory," but he believed that an exception might be made in the Malay States. "Our merchants and our people generally would rejoice to see Perak under our Government;" and a "representative Chinaman" had said to Mr. Campbell, "when the British flag is seen over Perak or Laroot, every Chinaman will go down on his knees and bless God." For the time, however, these suggestions received no attention. Sir H. Ord was fully occupied in suppressing, with the aid of the naval squadron, the piratical proceedings which had disturbed the coast since the succession dispute in Perak and the quarrel of the Laroot chief with the Chinese miners. The feeling in the Settlements in favour of a change of policy grew more urgent, and in July, 1873, Sir H. Ord transmitted to Lord Kimberley another petition signed by 248 "Chinese merchants and traders, British subjects and inhabitants of Singapore, Penang, and Malacca," demanding "a moral intervention" and "a determined attitude" towards the native States. This petition Sir H. Ord, on the eve of his retirement, declared to be "deserving of every consideration."

In September, 1873, we find Lord Kimberley writing to the newly appointed Governor of the Straits Settlements, Sir Andrew Clarke, to call attention to "the anarchy which prevails and appears to be increasing in parts of the Peninsula, and the consequent injury to trade and British interests generally." Of course, Lord Kimberley intimated, the Home Government "had no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of the Malay States;" but yet Sir A. Clarke was especially requested "to consider whether it would be advisable to appoint a British officer to reside in any of the States"—at the cost, as was explicitly mentioned, of the Straits Government. Such was the position of the Colonial Office when Sir A. Clarke went out to Singapore. In January, 1874, the new Governor wrote that "the country had relapsed into even worse than its former state of anarchy and confusion." The conflict of the Chinese factions in Laroot continued, both parties receiving reinforcements of junks and men from China. The Malay rulers of Perak were powerless, the war of succession still dividing the population. It was even rumoured that the Laroot factions contemplated memorializing the Chinese Government "to interfere by sending them Mandarins and a force to occupy Perak." Negotiations, however, opened informally by Sir A. Clark, resulted in the submission of the Chinese disputes to his arbitration. But the Governor came to the conclusion that no satisfactory settlement could be reached except by closing the quarrel about the Perak succession. Accordingly, on the 14th of January, 1874, he summoned all the chiefs, both Malays and Chinese, to meet him at the Dindings. With remakable rapidity, the Governor leaped to a conclusion conflicting in some respects with those formed by his predecessor as to the claims and capacities of the competitors for the Perak sultanship and the Laroot chiefship, and as quickly he proceeded to carry his views into effect. On January 20 a treaty was signed by eight of the principal chiefs and State officers of Perak, including both the claimants of the sovereignty—Abdullah, who was recognized as rightful ruler by Sir A. Clarke, and Ismail, the acting Sultan, who was allowed to retain a certain honorary independence and dignity. On the same day an agreement with the head men of the Chinese factions at Laroot was concluded. The Treaty of Pulo Pangkor carried out the project for which the merchants had long been contending; the Sultan of Perak agreed to receive "a British Resident, accredited to his Court, whose advice must be asked and acted upon in all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom;" the "Mantri," who had been recognized as Governor of Laroot, was to accept similar guidance from an assistant Resident; and the cost of both establishments was to be a "first charge upon the revenues of Perak." In concluding thus, Sir A. Clarke, as he admitted, went beyond his delegated powers; his action, however, was at once approved by the Singapore Chamber of Commerce, who warmly applauded the Governor's declaration that "the time had arrived when as a nation we shall be neglecting a great and paramount duty if we any longer delay that intervention which the cause of civilization and good order now so loudly demand." In September, 1874, Lord Carnarvon wrote "generally approving" of the stipulations entered into with the Perak chiefs, and asking for the names of the officers whom Sir A. Clarke intended to nominate to the Residencies. The Secretary of State added that the Government would look for "the exact fulfilment" by the chiefs "of the pledges now voluntarily given." In November the Governor forwarded a shorthand report of the proceedings in the Executive Council at Singapore, which unanimously endorsed his policy. In December he informed the Colonial Office that he had nominated Mr. Birch, the Colonial Secretary, to the Perak Residency; Captain Speedy as Assistant Resident at Laroot, and Mr. Davidson as Resident at the Court of Salangore, where, however, Mr. Swettenham, whose name has appeared in the recent intelligence from Perak, continued for some months longer to act as Assistant Resident. A report of a very cheerful character from Mr. Swettenham was forwarded to the Colonial Office by the Governor on the 23rd of March last.

The working of these arrangements cannot be regarded as satisfactory. A few weeks ago the present Governor, Sir William Jervois, addressing the Executive Council at Singapore, described the existing situation in despondent language. "While her Majesty's Government," he said, "hold the chiefs responsible for keeping the engagements entered into by them with the British Government, there is scarcely any one of those engagements referred to which has not been violated by them. The Resident's advice 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." The murder of Mr. Birch forms a deplorable sequel to this tale of disappointment. According to a Colonial Office circular published yesterday, the affair had no fanatical aspects. "It appears," says the circular, "that a proclamation had been issued and had been posted throughout Perak on the 1st of November. Mr. Birch on that day telegraphed to Sir W. Jervois that the proclamation had been well received, and that all was quiet in Perak. On the following day, however, a Malay tore down the proclamation posted at Passir Sala, where the Resident was, and on being struck by the interpreter of the Residency, at once stabbed that officer. An affray followed, in which Mr. Birch, who was in his bath, was murdered."