

THE WAR IN THE MALAY PENINSULA

"THIS great peninsula," says the *Spectator*, "is a splendid mountain range, with a narrow plain at each side of its base, stretching from British Burmah, almost straight south for 600 miles. It is nowhere 200 miles across, but its total area is almost as large as that of England, and it is probably the richest mineral region in the world. It has no navigable rivers, it is covered with hill and jungle, and it is inhabited by Negrito aborigines whom we know nothing about, and perhaps two hundred thousand Mohammedan Malays, decent people enough in ordinary times, faithful, truthful, and brave, and said by those who know them to be witty and clever, but, when excited, they hold life, and more especially your life, as worth just nothing at all. In this peninsula—a narrow Italy—we hold a minute Sicily called Singapore, and have made it the bonded warehouse of Further Asia, and filled it with Chinese; a Naples called Malacca, with a good deal of planting industry around it; and a Leghorn called Penang, like Singapore an island, but with a territory on the mainland. We possess also, in direct sovereignty, Province Wellesley (say Tuscany), and over the whole territory west of the Malayan Apennines an ill-defined suzerainty or treaty-right of interfering when convenient. This suzerainty is pretty effective in some districts, but between Penang and Malacca it is very loose and ineffective. The Malays there are always quarrelsome and sometimes dangerous, fighting generally round some pretender or other, and Sir Andrew Clarke was thought to have done a good work when, in 1874, he finally settled that Abdoollah should be considered Chief, and be responsible for order. The settlement seems to have been a wise one, for Perak prospered, but unfortunately there was a strong party which objected to order, which held that Infidels were a great deal too much considered, and which had heard that in Acheen the Faithful were warring the Infidels fairly out. The defeated pretender to Perak, Sultan Ismail, availed himself of this feeling, called on the fanatics as well as his personal partisans, and, it is suspected, arranged for a religious war. The first hint of discontent was the murder of the British representative, the Resident, Mr. Birch. The news of the murder travelled at once to the 'Governor of the Straits Settlements,' and that officer, though he had only 400 soldiers, and a most troublesome population to govern, sent an expedition at once to recover the Residency. It was recovered at once, but either Sir W. Jervois, or the officer in command, ordered or sanctioned an expedition up the Perak to attack a stockade raised by the insurgents. They were repulsed, as English troops have been again and again when trying the same experiment in New Zealand, and lost three officers and ten men killed and wounded, and probably a longer list of natives. Europeans never sustain the smallest defeat without the population arriving at the conviction that it is safe to rise, and, in the present instance, three petty chieftains have called on their followers to aid Sultan Ismail, and there is reason to fear that his appeal to all Mohammedans to rise for the faith may meet with a widely extended response."

The circumstances which led to the existing outbreak are thus stated by *The Times*: "Early in 1874, Sir Andrew Clarke, in consequence of piracies, convened a meeting of chiefs, and concluded a Convention, whereby Residents were placed at Perak, Larut, and other districts. Mr. Birch was appointed at Perak. There were two claimants to the throne on Sultan Ali's death—the Rajah Muda Abdoollah, and Ismail. Ismail acted as Sultan, and kept the regalia, but Abdoollah is the rightful heir. Sir Andrew Clarke upheld Abdoollah. The chiefs did not carry out the Convention. A second Proclamation was therefore issued, with Abdoollah's consent, ratifying the former treaty, and appointing British officers as Queen's Commissioners to govern the country. This Proclamation had been posted throughout Perak on 1st November, and was,

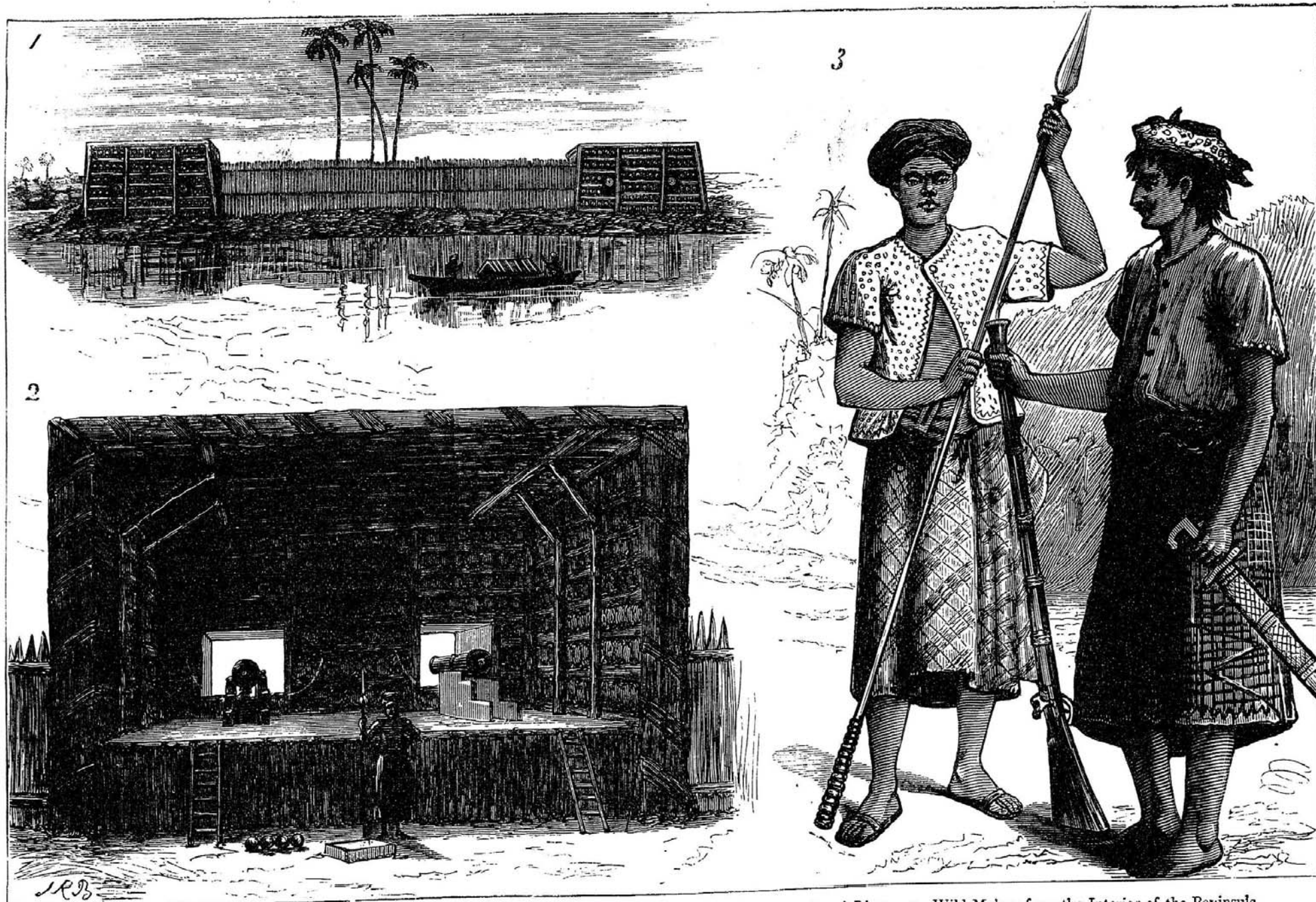
apparently, quietly received. On the following day, however, a Malay tore down the Proclamation posted at Passir Sala, where the Resident was, and, on being struck by the interpreter of the Residency, at once stabbed that officer. An affray followed, in which Mr. Birch, who was in his bath, was murdered. His body was afterwards found mutilated in the river. The force sent to punish the perpetrators of this outrage consisted of Captain Innes, R.E., Lieuts. Booth and Elliott, with sixty men of the 10th, Lieut. Abbott, R.N., sixty Sikhs, and fifty police and Malays with rockets. On the 6th November they marched through the jungle against the Maharajah Lela, in whose village the murder was committed, and who was found occupying a stockaded position. After an hour and a half's fighting, the European troops charged the stockade; in this charge Captain Innes was killed, and Lieuts. Booth and Elliott were wounded, and it was considered necessary to order a retreat, which was effected in an orderly manner, and not before the enemy had abandoned the stockade."

Mr. Edmund H. Watts, late Collector of Land Revenue, Malacca, sends us two drawings of the interior and exterior of a Malay stockade, concerning which he writes thus:—"A Malay stockade is usually built of logs of heavy timber laid in alternate courses to a thickness of several feet. A stockade, in fact, is no despicable obstacle to an European force, although its guns are placed in embrasures too narrow to admit of an all round fire. Malays fight well behind defences, and there can be no doubt but that they will give us much trouble in the 'little war' which now appears imminent, especially as they have announced their intention of making it a 'jihad' and of fighting in their white bajus, the signal for a contest to the death. They are armed with muskets, swords, and spears, and with the inevitable 'kris,' the national weapon of the Malays."—Our portrait of Captain Birch is copied by permission from a photograph in possession of a personal friend. He had occupied several important positions in the East. In a letter to *The Times*, "One of his friends" speaks thus of him: "Mr. Birch was originally in the Navy, but did not serve very long in it. He entered the Ceylon Civil Service afterwards, and served in that island with marked distinction till 1870, when he was promoted to the Colonial Secretaryship of the Straits Settlements. Most of his life was passed in Ceylon, where he will always be remembered as one of the most energetic and active civilians in the service of that colony. His last appointment there was Government Agent of the Eastern Province, the affairs of which he administered with conspicuous ability. No man understood the native character better; no one was more respected; no one more feared. When he left the Eastern Province for Singapore he was conducted to the wharf at Trincomalee by the whole native population, who with tears and groans bewailed his departure. He was remarkable for his zeal and energy."

We may add that Captain William Innes, who lost his life in the attack on the stockade, was Assistant Colonial Engineer, Straits Settlements. He obtained his commission as lieutenant in the Corps of Royal Engineers in 1858, and served for some time at Dover, Halifax, and Portland. He became captain in 1871, and soon afterwards was placed on the temporary reserved list, and proceeded to China. He was an officer of great intelligence, ability, and zeal, combined with sound judgment, and his past career gave high promise for the future.



MR. J. W. W. BIRCH, THE BRITISH RESIDENT AT PERAK
Assassinated by the Malays, Nov. 2, 1875



1. Exterior of Malay Stockade at Sempang, Lingi River.—2. Interior of Malay Stockade at Sempang, Lingi River.—3. Wild Malays from the Interior of the Peninsula.