

THE  
UNITED SERVICE  
JOURNAL

AND

*Naval and Military Magazine.*

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1837. PART I.

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LONDON:  
HENRY COLBURN, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH-STREET.  
SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

## THE MALAY PIRATES,

WITH A SKETCH OF THEIR SYSTEM AND TERRITORY.

[THE increasing audacity and mischievous power of the Malay Pirates, more particularly evinced in recent outrages which the British flag has been called upon to chastise and repress, have suggested a few observations and incidents descriptive of the character and courses of this singular people, derived from a practical acquaintance with their habits and country. We may be further tempted to offer some suggestions towards a remedy of this nuisance, by the colonization of the islands of the Eastern Archipelago.]

It is a saying—trite indeed, but not the less true—that the finest regions of the earth are in the possession of barbarians, who are incapable of appreciating or improving the splendid gifts of Nature. The rugged North is now the centre of civilization, and the wonders which human industry can achieve are displayed on a soil comparatively barren, but the genial climates of the South have had their day; and all history proves, that the arts and sciences which contribute to the dignity and happiness of mankind are independent of locality.

Take a map of Eastern Asia, and beginning with the beautiful Peninsula of Malacca, let your eye range over the magnificent assemblage of islands known by the name of the Eastern Archipelago; ranging from 8° of North latitude to near 15° South, and from the longitude of Sunda Straits to the Philippines.

Among them are numbered several islands of the first magnitude, as Sumatra, Java, Amboyna, and Borneo; the last being considerably larger than Great Britain. This extensive tract of territory, comprehending a superficies equal to one-third of Europe, is known to be one of the most productive and fertile spots in the universe. In addition to every ordinary production of the torrid zone, the cotton-tree and coffee, the nutmeg, cinnamon, pepper, and all the family of spices, here attain their highest perfection. The forests abound with every variety of timber found in other tropical countries; such as teak, satin-wood, ebony, red-wood, and the like. Nor is the earth without her mineral treasures of iron, gold, and precious stones. And who are the happy possessors of this magnificent portion of the globe? Hordes of naked savages, who are actual cannibals, thinly people the interior and the most unfrequented parts of the coasts; and with the exception of a handful of Europeans, the rest is occupied by Malays.

Every one, at all acquainted with Indian affairs, has heard of these formidable pirates. The number of vessels which they have contrived to master by force or stratagem, attests their spirit of enterprise; the wholesale butchery of all Europeans, whom shipwreck or any other accident may have thrown into their power, proves their brutal ferocity; and many a combat, in which even the arms and disciplines of Europe have gained a dear-bought victory, gives evidence to their unconquerable valour. The local governments are obliged to use the utmost severity and vigilance to control those in their immediate neighbourhood; but the great body of the Malay nation is unsubdued and irreclaimable:

even a domesticated Malay is like a wild beast half-tamed—his appetite for blood and violence is excited at the slightest provocation.

Yet with all this there is something highly romantic, and even interesting, in their national character. They are not wholly illiterate, being in possession of letters; as Mahometans, they are of course acquainted with the Koran. They show great ingenuity in several mechanical arts peculiar to themselves; especially in the construction of arms, and the high-wrought temper and finish of those formidable crosses; in some of their principal settlements they carry on a considerable commerce, and can boast of wealthy merchants among them. Yet, in spite of all this, a propensity to war and violence is the ruling passion of the nation; and in many particulars, they strikingly remind us of our northern forefathers, the sea-kings of the olden time. These last are said to have embarked in wicker boats, covered with hides, and boldly trusting to such chances as the winds and waves might offer, to have rendered themselves the terror of the narrow sea by many a daring exploit. The Romans were to them what the European is to the Malay—intruders, conquerors, tyrants! They knew no nice distinction, but attacked indiscriminately every thing which bore an affinity to the Roman name. Some generous qualities gave occasional lustre to their rude valour, and poetry has not scrupled to record them as heroes. The posterity of these savages (as perhaps a Roman might have styled them) are at the present day a people great in war, and renowned for every art and science that can ornament or humanize society. In the Malay, we observe the unsparing ferocity of the Norseman, accompanied, however, with the same chivalrous valour; and the countries he inhabits present as favourable a situation for a mighty empire as any in the known world.

It is not intended here to attempt any lengthy detail of the habits and history of this singular people; but, as the author happened some years ago to be placed in a situation to see much of their manners and customs, to present for the information and amusement of the general reader an outline of their general character, which may, at least, serve as a stimulus to some one more capable of doing justice to the subject.

The difference in some families of the human race from each other, in outward form and natural properties, is so marked and striking, that it seems necessary to conclude, that the miraculous separation at Babel was accompanied by more distinctions than that of language. Certainly, a bull-dog does not differ more essentially in shape and quality from a greyhound than a Hindoo from a Malay. The symmetrical features, olive hue, the slender limbs and often elegant tournure of the former are in direct contrast with the broad face and coarse lineaments, the bull-neck, short stature, muscular limbs, and glaring yellow hue of the latter. The slightest acquaintance will show that their disposition and natural qualities are in equal opposition.

As to their domestic habits, they are such as might be expected in a rude people; their houses present the appearance of an English shed—oblong erections, supported by four or more stout posts. The space beneath is left quite open on all sides; and as it offers a shelter from the sun and rain, is devoted to cooking and other household purposes. They never exceed one story, and are formed of bamboo, which grows

to an extraordinary size and solidity in these islands. The upper works of their proas, and even the huge mainsail, are formed of the same elastic material. These vessels are, for the most part, from forty to fifty feet in length, with rather more than a proportionate width of beam; some are considerably larger. The bottom is almost flat, and, with the exception of a small plank deck, or platform, which will seldom afford firm footing to more than ten or a dozen men, the rest of the space is occupied by the cabin, in which the men and cargo are promiscuously stowed. This room is of an upright oblong form, and its roof considerably higher than the gunwale of the boat; it is a sort of basket-work made of the cane above mentioned, and as their sharp lances can easily penetrate the interstices, it is a matter of no little danger to mount the same should it be necessary to get at the mainsail. They have only this one sail, which, in the eye of a European, appears disproportionately large, but carries them along at a wonderful rate with the wind aft or free; the thin laths of split bamboo of which it is composed are impervious to the wet, sufficiently light, and as they fall together or are disengaged like a Venetian blind, they afford great facility in reefing and furling, or spreading the entire sail when the occasion requires it. Beating to windward with such bulky machines is out of the question. Their only chance of safety when chased is to run before the wind. Their appearance is literally that of floating hen-coops.

The favourite dishes of the Malays are a pilau in the Turkish fashion, and curried meats of every description permitted by their religion. One of them, the prawn-curry, is in high goût with our Indian epicures. It has been said that their religion is Mahometan, however they came by it. Of course they profess to abjure wine and spirits; yet, like most of their sect, they will drink wine, when it is offered them, to an immoderate excess, and are very partial to sweet liqueurs, such as cherry-brandy, &c. One thing, however, is remarkable, that the debauch, once over, seldom leaves a hankering for a repetition. Unlike the barbarians of colder climates, they seem to possess a happy indifference to fermented liquors, except on some grand occasion. Their medium of intoxication is opium, which they both chew and smoke; sometimes they carry this propensity to such a degree, as to become as mischievous as so many wild beasts. When a Malay, in any of our colonies, has received an insult or an injury which his proud spirit scorns to put up with or survive—though sure to be knocked on the head like a mad dog, or perhaps blown off a gun—he first determines to enjoy the gratification of a deadly revenge. As a preliminary, he will chew *bang* (as the sailors call it), that is, a preparation of opium, until his spirits are wrought up to the requisite indifference to danger. He is then mad; but there is method in his madness, for he will proceed to the execution of his purpose with all the art and subtlety of a fox—of the tenacity of a bloodhound. An instance of this sort occurred some years ago at Be-nevolen. A gentleman, resident in the town, had taken a liking to a Malay girl, and, as is the custom of the country, had bought her of her mother for a stated sum. These alliances are considered all over the East as an inferior sort of marriage, and such a contract implied no disgrace to either party. It so happened that a servant of the same gentleman, himself a Malay, married the sister. After a time, Mr. P—

(the gentleman alluded to) became so violently enamoured of the last-named female, and so lost to every moral obligation, that partly by persuasion, and partly by actual force, he procured the woman to cohabit with him. He was a remarkably athletic man, and as he boasted a thorough knowledge of the Malay character, always went armed up to the very teeth. He never walked out without a formidable leaden-headed bludgeon, and loaded pistols in his pockets. These, with a dagger, were deposited under his bed, over which a Turkish scimitar was suspended. The only male servants inside the house were two of the ever-faithful Hindoo race—the cook, and one who might be termed his valet, who slept at the entrance of the bed-room; the less trustworthy servants, among whom was this Malay, lodged in the out-buildings at some distance. We are thus particular, in order to show the art and coolness which the man subsequently displayed in executing his dreadful purpose. This was to destroy both the paramour and the adulteress at one blow. Accordingly, finding his entreaties of no avail, he appeared to acquiesce in an injury which he was unable to prevent. No external sulkiness of demeanour displayed the boiling rage that rankled in his heart. A Malay will smile when he stabs, the better to throw his victim off his guard. The affair occasioned some scandal at first, but in a short time was forgotten by every body except the offended husband. One fatal morning he accosted the valet above mentioned, who had, by some means, lost a gold chain, of which he was not a little proud. He named a person, who, he said, had accidentally found it that very morning, and advised him to lose no time in demanding it. He then himself appeared to go about his ordinary business. His manner was so calm and apparently good-humoured, that the valet had not the slightest suspicion of any sinister purpose. He accordingly set off in all haste, hoping to be back before his master, who was still asleep, should have risen. The moment this man's back was turned the Malay flew to the door—crept stealthily up-stairs to the bedside of his intended victims. First, stabbing his wife, who, however, afterwards recovered, he plunged the reeking creese into the body of P—. The latter had no time to feel for his arms; his only chance was to wrench the weapon from the hand of his assailant. His strength, and the energy of despair, prolonged the conflict for more than half an hour; until, at length, the Malay had the satisfaction of seeing him fall at his feet a lifeless corpse. Had he done no more than this, the Governor declared he would have pardoned him; but he ran a-muck, as the phrase is—stabbed his wife's mother, who happened to meet him as he rushed out of the house; struck at every one that he met; and after being knocked down by a soldier, with the butt-end of his musket, was eventually blown off a gun from Fort-Marlborough.

The assassination of Governor Par, at the same residency, is another and similar instance. This gentleman was generally much beloved by the natives as well as English. He was distinguished for the urbanity of his manners, and the forbearing mildness of his administration; correcting all excesses with a gentle but impartial hand, and consulting, as far as his duty would permit him, the fierce prejudices of the Malays. Being induced, for some necessary purpose, to lay a short embargo on the fishing vessels, he had offended some of the chiefs; but on their

remonstrance had actually withdrawn the embargo. This, however, was not generally known, when on the evening of the same day he retired to his country house, within a short distance of Fort-Marlborough, where he had invited a large party of officers and gentlemen. A guard of sepoy and sentinels, placed in proper situations, were the customary precautions of the place; but no danger was apprehended from any quarter. Yet the Malays had vowed his death—in the midst of the festive scene, two assassins had contrived to introduce themselves into his bed-chamber; on his retiring to rest, they literally cut off his head; and notwithstanding the shrieks and exertions of Mrs. Par, whose conduct on the occasion is represented to have been most heroic, these ruffians actually escaped out of the windows unrecognized, though the alarm and search must have been instantaneous.

Our people had an idea that the desperate fury of the Malay was the effect of intoxication produced by chewing opium. This opinion derived strength from a circumstance universally remarkable, that they seldom showed any signs of hostility when first encountered. Though their proas sometimes carry as many as sixty or seventy men, they would permit our boat's crews to board and take possession with submission, and even with apparent indifference; but the slightest oversight or accident which gave them a chance of success was invariably seized with a promptitude quite inconsistent with the desultory madness of intoxication. The Rattlesnake, sloop-of-war, was nearly captured by the crews of three proas whom she had detained. Captain Toole, as it is well known, was wounded, the first Lieutenant killed, and above forty of the ship's company either killed or wounded. The Malays were destroyed to a man; but though many of them had been on board for a considerable time, it was the accidental explosion of some cartridges in the arm-chest, and a little confusion thereby occasioned, that gave the signal for a general and simultaneous attack on their part.

During the last war H. M. S. Belliqueux, of sixty-four guns, detained three proas under the suspicion of their being pirates. They made no resistance, and were already within half-a-cable's length of the ship, when unfortunately she let go her anchor: in an instant the Malays of one of the proas rose. Before a gun could be brought to bear, a Lieutenant (Turner) and eight men were killed and the rest wounded, and obliged to jump overboard and swim for their lives. In the meantime the proa's large mainsail had been hoisted, which soon carried her out of reach of the ship's guns, as well as the launch, the only boat that could be sent in chase. As this last was armed with a carronade, and the wind was light, a great many Malays were supposed to have been brought down by her fire. But notwithstanding the exasperation of our men, and their eager efforts to overtake her, she finally escaped. The other two proas attempted the same thing, but without success.

The valour of the Malays is a genuine innate quality, and requires no other stimulus than that which makes any other people warlike; and it is probable that what we consider horrible outrages are celebrated among themselves as acts of heroism and just retaliation. We treat them altogether as inferior beings, cut down their wood, and take possession, without much ceremony, of any part of what they conceive *their* terri-

tory which happens to suit our purpose. Their armed vessels are often a sort of secret letters of marque, ready for war or trade as occasion may offer; but some are *bonâ fide* traders, who assert the necessity of carrying arms for their own protection. We invariably burn, sink, or destroy all that are found with arms on board.

Their history is involved in fable: yet a tradition prevails among them that Juhan Sha, after various conflicts with the Emperors of Hindoostan, finally fixed his throne as first Sultan of the Malays at Achin, in the northern extremity of Sumatra; from whence the Malays have spread themselves over the sea-coasts of all these islands, as far as the Philippines. This migration of the nation into these parts is stated in their annals to have occurred in the year of the Mahometan era 601; about the beginning of the 13th century. They certainly resemble the Tartars more than any of their neighbours; and if the tradition be unfounded it is difficult to account for their being Mahometans.

The opinions on this subject, however, are various; and many are of opinion that the whole of the inhabitants of these islands are one people, and indigenous; and that the piratical tribes, who have given such atrocious celebrity to the name of Malay, are really of the same stock with the Battas, Laws, Dyaks, Papuans, Javanese, and other inhabitants of the interior, who are sunk into the very lowest depths of human ignorance and barbarism.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the whole of these islands were once under the dominion of China, when they must have flourished in great prosperity. The ruins of temples and other public buildings of stone and marble, many of which have inscriptions in the Chinese language, attest the former flourishing condition of Borneo; and the first European visitors bear testimony to a high degree of civilization; the city so called, now a nest of wretched pirates, was, not more than a hundred years ago, populous and wealthy.

The Chinese are very numerous in all the islands: they are the principal artificers and shop-keepers; and their peaceful habits and orderly demeanour form a fine contrast with the lazy apathy and ferocious turbulence of the Malay.

As to the laws and institutions of the Malays of the coast (for the people of the interior are pagans and cannibals), they are said to be the worst parts of Mahometanism, mixed up with certain heathen superstitions peculiar to themselves; they practise circumcision, and are believers in witchcraft; they purchase their wives—often at an enormous price—the poorest seldom giving less than sixty dollars; this frequently reduces them to slavery. If they are unable to discharge the debt, the insolvent debtor is compelled to work for the creditor till he can pay. They have fines for theft and even murder; a custom which seems universal among barbarous nations: but in most cases the punishment depends on the power of the injured party to exact it. As to their government—they acknowledge certain supreme heads under the name of Sultans, Rajahs, Kings, &c.; but the power of these rulers is extremely limited, and mostly confined to the precincts of their own locality. Every village has its chieftain, and these seldom agree in any common object, but are perpetually at war with each other; and the justice they distribute among their followers depends on their own

caprice: but plunder and bloodshed seems the invariable object of every Malay. We honour them with high-sounding titles; but it is difficult to conceive a greater caricature of royalty than a Malay sovereign in his wooden palace or barn, naked, except round the waist, squatted on a mat, and bargaining with all the eagerness of a Smithfield drover, or Jew huckster, to cheat you if possible out of a few dollars in the purchase of stock, fowls, or vegetables.

These, however, are matters of mere curiosity; but the Malay depredations are a serious injury to our commerce; they raise the rate of insurance and the expense of equipment, by compelling the merchants to arm their vessels; and the savage murders with which they are accompanied are so shocking to humanity, as well as to every British feeling, that we are astonished that a nation possessing such gigantic power in the immediate neighbourhood should not long ago have extirpated such a nest of brutal marauders by some decisive effort. The little water that their flat-bottomed boats draw; the infinite number of bays, creeks, and rivers, which in such an immeasurable line of coast afford them easy shelter; the absolute impunity with which their attacks are overlooked, confining the danger to the mere attempt; the difficulty of distinguishing the actual offenders where all are so much alike; the love of plunder and hatred of Europeans, in which, however they differ on other subjects, they all agree:—these and many other considerations give courage to the Malay, and make it a matter of impossibility for the few cruisers who are employed in these seas to give any effectual protection to the trade. Colonization to the extent of erecting a line of forts along the most important coasts would go a great way in checking the evil; and what a splendid theatre would these beautiful islands afford for English industry, assisted by the immense powers of modern arts and discoveries. The climate would be an obstacle, but certainly not an insuperable one. Some parts are unhealthy to European constitutions; but in others the present settlers enjoy as good health as in England. When the East India Company had the exclusive privilege, colonization, except in partial instances, was prohibited. Now that the whole of this immense portion of the globe has been laid open to English enterprise and English industry, what is to prevent an experiment which offers so many flattering advantages? Travellers are often at a loss to describe the scenes which frequently present the appearance of an earthly Paradise—groves of every various fruit and timber, containing many trees peculiar to the soil, stud the plains, and wave even on the mountain tops. The plains, intersected by numerous rivers, which rush in every picturesque form from the mountains, are often spread into meadows of immeasurable extent. They are enamelled with every tropical herb or plant which European art has converted to purposes of use or luxury. Gold, silver, copper, tin, and diamonds are the internal treasures of the earth.

This rich country, the wealthiest in natural productions that perhaps is to be found in the whole world, is in many parts quite uninhabited, or thinly peopled by straggling hordes of savages in the interior; whilst the sea-coast is principally in the hands of a nation, lawless, fierce, and brutal; whose bloody outrages have long called for retributive justice, and who can never be trained to habits of peace and industry but by the strong hand of power.

The eastern seas are infested, and the unhappy mariner, who by shipwreck or other accidents falls into their power, is ruthlessly murdered. Their perfidy is such that no treaty can be relied upon—they have been known to assassinate an invited guest at their own table; and such is their audacity, and so universal is the spirit of piracy among them, that should even a line-of-battle ship, much more a large Indiaman, meet with a serious accident in those seas, she will be surrounded in an incalculably short space of time by hundreds of proas, waiting the first favourable opportunity to plunder the wreck and butcher the crew.

This is so notorious that it is quite unnecessary to point out any particular instance. The practice is so universal that it cannot be charged to any desperate set of individuals, but belongs to the entire Malay nation. As the vulture, when far beyond the reach of human vision, sees or scents his prey, and darts upon it from unknown regions of the sky—so let a ship ground, and though half an hour before not a proa was to be seen, yet the moment her distress becomes apparent she will be surrounded by a fleet of them, prowling like wolves round a sheep-fold. Are not the interests of humanity concerned, as well as those of British merchants, to suppress or even to extirpate such a race?

The temperature of these fine islands, notwithstanding their proximity to the sun, is refreshed and rendered more temperate by the sea breezes, which blow constantly during the day; yet, though in many instances Englishmen have been known to domiciliate and accommodate themselves to the climate, so far as to work in the fields, still it would be necessary to employ Kaffirs for that purpose when a sufficient number of the ever-industrious, peaceable, and intelligent Chinese could not be procured. These last are perhaps the only people through whose labour the benefits of British colonization would be rendered effectual.

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#### THE MEMORY OF SIR JOHN MOORE.

Aye! trumpets have rung out their jubilee  
 O'er many a field by Britons proudly swept;  
 And graves been dug as thine, while Victory  
 Above the rite her stately vigil kept;  
 Sorrow hath well'd from out a nation's heart  
 Copious and deep, o'er many a prostrate son;  
 And foes may well have hasted to impart  
 A requiem, Chieftain! since thine own was won.  
 But memories wait by thy Galician mound  
 As by none else—Dejection's proudest train;  
 And spirits once beneath thy conduct bound  
 Wing them abroad, to share that lofty pain:  
 Yet, gladdening o'er thy praise of distant clime  
 And thy renown, still brightening on through time.

M.