THE RAJA OF SARAWAK.

AN ACCOUNT OF SIR JAMES BROOKE, K.C.B., LL.D.,
GIVEN CHIEFLY THROUGH LETTERS
AND JOURNALS.

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THE RAJA OF SARÁWAK.

CHAPTER XIX.

1849, 1850.

The fever contracted at Labuan was followed in most cases by ague, and the Raja suffered so severely from this that Mr. McDougall urged him to go for a change of air to Penang.

Through letters written early in December, 1849, before he left Sarawak in pursuance of this advice, we learn something of other troubles.

"This detestable fever has turned into ague, which none of us manage to throw off, and which recurs on the least exposure, fatigue, or bodily derangement. We have likewise been hard worked, never having been a month in one place during the last year, and I have suffered from much anxiety of mind, from what I cannot but consider as a petty opposition from high local authorities, and the mean calumnies of the press.

"You must not think, my dear Charley" (he is writing to his nephew, Charles Johnson), "that I now take these things much to heart. At first they told upon me; they appeared so infamous, so mean, so base, that they excited the scorn and indignation which every generous mind must feel; but this has passed, and I look forward with calmness to anything which may occur, and I have that firm self-reliance which can..."
only be derived from pure motives and upright actions. At the same time, I am not the least inclined to become a martyr, and I always mean to speak out and hit hard, when it is worth my while, and can be of use to the public service.”

(To Mr. Templer.)—“I will not say anything of my future intentions, but you may rest assured that I will judge coolly and act decidedly; and, as Burke or somebody else says, ‘it may so happen that a departure from the ordinary rules of prudence is sometimes the highest order of prudence.’ It appears as if every cause of anxiety had been heaped upon me during the last year. Some are past, others passing, and I shall fight through my difficulties if I recover health. I hope the Government will give me an efficient support. I always have and shall always fear lukewarmness; and support we must have, or the sooner the Government undoes all that has been done the better. We do not want much, but what little we have must be properly dispensed, active, and certain. If it is not so, the Government is wasting its money and sacrificing me, for you will readily see, unless I am really supported I am clogged in my proceedings. I will not have a repetition of Sir Stamford Raffles’ fruitless labours revived in my person.”

From Labuan, which it was necessary for him to visit first, and where he found himself detained, he wrote (Jan. 8, 1850) to Mrs. Johnson—

“This great evil [piracy] appears to be drawing to a close; and all along I have been so resolute to crush it that I have risked life, given money, sacrificed health, and borne with malicious tongues, to effect a great object. I have all along known the extent of the mischief, and the utter folly of expecting to do by preaching what could be only done by force. You might as well preach the Emperor of Russia out of his ambition, or stop a predatory horde of Tartars with a tract, as turn these pirates from their love of plunder and blood (renown they call it) by gentle means. Now I can afford to be merciful without sacrificing the innocent to the guilty; and you, my sister, know that by nature I am neither
harsh nor cruel, nor likely to misuse the power I possess by over-severity. I am convinced that men, however strong their impressions of justice and mercy may be intuitively, rise in their notions and apprehensions of these qualities by practice on a large scale, and become less apt to confound them. I really hope I improve, and perceive more clearly what is due to my fellow-creatures, and that I have nerve and firmness to do now what I should have shrunk from a dozen years ago. I hope, too, that I improve in being more regardless of the consequences which may accrue to myself from acting rightly, and less inclined to follow my bent of adulterating justice by a mixture of spurious compassion. Justice should be tempered by mercy, but should never be warped by it. My time has been fully occupied since my return, by bringing up arrears of business which ought not to have been allowed to accumulate. For many days I was ten, and sometimes twelve, hours in office, and so weak and worn out as to be obliged to go to bed directly afterwards. The worst business I have had is a public inquiry on the conduct of the Lieutenant-Governor during my absence. Such an inquiry is painful at all times, and doubly painful when the object is an old friend."

We must turn now to the "malicious tongues" here alluded to, and trace the origin of an attack that, with an acrimony hardly credible, was from this time made on the Raja.

It has been already shown that his relations with Mr. Henry Wise were occasionally uneasy. Mr. Templar's distrust was early aroused, but the Raja, by nature unsuspicious, and feeling under obligations to Mr. Wise for exertions in his behalf, continued to bear with him, and heard unmoved that, while outwardly loud in his praise, he was stating privately that his opinion of him had entirely changed.

Something, however, that touched Brooke more nearly than personal abuse could ever do at length occurred.

The Sarawak antimony mines had been leased through Mr. Wise, in the face of his instructions, to parties with insufficient capital, and, in consequence, uninterrupted opera-
tions were impossible; added to which, ill-considered and contradictory orders perplexed and injured the native workers. While at Singapore, on his way to Sarawak in 1848, the Raja learned that instructions had been received at Kuching from Mr. Wise, in connection with this business, which he foresaw could but do harm to all parties concerned; he therefore took upon himself to suspend them, and wrote accordingly to Mr. Wise. In this letter, dated Singapore, August 26, 1848, he points out the mischief that had already fallen on the native traders, and which, if the instructions in question were carried out, would again ensue, even to the ruin of some. "Will their distress," he asks, "be alleviated by the consideration that it was my influence which induced them to renew an employment subject to sudden and capricious changes? No. They will consider it as amounting to a breach of faith, and I must explain to them, that if I have been the innocent cause of their misfortune once, I will never be so again."

Taking this matter in connection with the apparent impossibility of coming to any understanding with Mr. Wise as to the principle of his management, or of obtaining any clear insight into pecuniary affairs that appeared to grow more complex the more earnestly simplicity was desired, he tells his agent that he feels "as much in the dark as ever," and then says—

"I now propose to arrive at a clear and final understanding of my position. I must go over the matter again, and allow Mr. Cameron * to judge for me what is best to be done; for I have no leisure to attend to the details, and my ignorance of technicalities and forms precludes my arriving at a proper conclusion on the subject. You will oblige me, therefore, by furnishing Mr. Cameron with every particular respecting my affairs, and showing the agreement or lease granted by me to Mr. Melville and Mr. Street. I have already told Mr. Cameron all that I know of the matter, and have made him acquainted with my views and wishes.

* The Raja's legal adviser, J. C. Cameron, Esq., of the firm of Cameron and Booty, Raymond Buildings, Gray's Inn.
"I wish a final settlement of my accounts; I wish to know who are responsible for the balance you allow to be due; I wish to know who are the lessees, and what is the proper and legal interpretation of the lease they hold under me for the next three years.

"You will be pleased personally to explain these matters to Mr. Cameron, as, besides saving you a good deal of trouble, you will then have a gentleman to deal with well acquainted with business, and in whom I have the greatest confidence. I trust everything may be explained, and my mind relieved from the doubts which have lately oppressed it, in consequence of the, to me, apparently intricate nature of the accounts.... I have little more to say. I trust that you will fully explain to Mr. Cameron the entire subject I have written on, and that the explanation may be satisfactory and conclusive; nothing will give me greater pleasure. Your expressions have caused some distrust, easily to be removed, and I shall await with patience, and a mind ready to judge with candour. I am aware of the value of your services. I sincerely wish to retain the same high opinion of you I have ever held, and to be convinced that my pecuniary interests have not suffered in your keeping. I have been long aware of your inimical feeling towards myself, and of your suspicion that I am seeking an occasion to discard you; but it is not so. Your opinion cannot influence my conduct; it cannot make me forgetful of what is due to you for your services; and, after a satisfactory explanation, I shall be happy to see you attain the object of your ambition. I repeat "again, I wish to act with justice and with candour.—Believe me, etc."

The object of Mr. Wise's ambition was the success of the Eastern Archipelago Company, of which he was the managing director. The Raja's refusal to join this company had long been a sore point with his agent. In the early days of the connection Sir James had, as we have seen, been willing to go into a kind of partnership, but in proportion as the bait grew tempting he shrank from it, and it was not from want of outspokenness that Mr. Wise continued to hope against hope.
When entering somewhat later into this matter with Mr. Henry Drummond, M.P. for West Surrey, the Raja says—

"On the 1st March, 1846, after alluding to the proposed company by means of which I was to become 'one of the wealthiest commoners in England,' I wrote as follows—

"'You may rightly reap an advantage from this or any other enterprise of a similar nature, but so essentially different is the position in which I am placed that I could not do so without the loss of reputation, not only in the opinion of the world, but likewise in my own estimation. I am pledged to the good government of Sarawak, and I am bound not to risk the welfare of this people for any motive, whether of cupidity or of ambition. I repeat again, I can in no wise participate in profits which may arise out of the formation of a company, or any other project which may be started in England, for it is incumbent on me to remain independent.'

"'The truth is' (he continues to Mr. Drummond) "that previously to these projects being started, and the offer made of realizing vast wealth, 'a princely fortune,' by my participation in them, I had never seriously considered the duty which I had to perform towards Sarawak, and, I may add, towards England. Circumstances altered with a rapidity unknown under established Governments. To afford protection to Sarawak, and to save myself from the ruin which threatened, I would, in 1842 or 1843, have made over the Government, which had cost me thousands, to a company for a few shares in the scheme; but in 1846 I would not have done so, for the people were happy, difficulties and dangers had been surmounted, and there was an approach to the permanency which I desired in the state of things. The difficulties of my position, with the change of circumstances, should be borne in mind when a judgment is formed of any particular event, as separated from the general course of my career."

Several letters to Mr. Wise are to be found in the Blue-book "Borneo." They refer chiefly to business matters, but here and there come sentences so characteristic as to be worth preserving. In a long communication from the Raja, dated Sarawak, February 10, 1846, we read—
"In your letter of November you express yourself pleased at receiving my assurance of the high confidence I repose in you, and I could repeat the same sentiments on the present occasion did it not appear to me that you have overlooked that confidence in any person is quite compatible with a difference of opinions and views. I have great confidence in you to carry out my views, or views which have been fully discussed, and to which I have acceded; but I have no confidence in any living being who originates measures for which I am alone responsible, and who carries them into execution without reference to me. . . . If you will act against a man's nature instead of with it, you must expect to fail in your projects!

"I urge you, in conclusion, to make the arrangements I have decided on, reserving any advantage you intended for me for yourself. You may trust to my friendly feeling, and my sincere desire to serve you as far as I can; but I urge you again and again not to commit the mistake of shutting your eyes to my habits and temper. Make use of agents here who know the natives; trust to gradual advancement and prosperity; and, above all, I pray you not to decide on any serious matter without my concurrence.

"No man relinquishes the golden dreams you have held up to my eyes without a sigh; no man would relinquish them excepting from a sense that he was doing right."

The letter from Singapore of August 26, 1848, received by Mr. Wise in the October following, was answered by a refusal on his part to make, or to attempt to make, any explanation whatever. As a natural consequence his agency ceased, and from this time he became the open enemy of one whom, for two years previously, he had abused in private while lauding him, as before, in public. The private abuse dated from 1846, in which year, by a great inadvertence, some letters from the Raja to Mr. Templer fell into his hands. Long letters, not always very legibly written, and on thin paper, take time and patience to decipher, and these were made over by a third party, to whom they had been lent for the verification of some
names and dates, to Mr. Wise, in ignorance or forgetfulness that they contained passages not intended for his eyes. On this becoming known to Mr. Templer, he desired Mr. Wise to return them at once to him, whereon he made answer that, finding himself mentioned unfavourably, he should retain them. Mr. Templer, moved by his own distrust of the man, had endeavoured to sever his connection with the Raja: the letters in question commented on the arguments employed, and allowed certain causes for discontent, while not agreeing that there were sufficient for a rupture.

Only under threat of immediate legal proceedings did Mr. Wise give up the packet. Writing, however, at the time to the Raja, he simply complained that such letters should be shown about; on which Brooke expressed his surprise and concern at the occurrence, and, in writing to Mr. Templer, begged that care might be taken and nothing said or done that would in any way injure his agent. The matter appeared to pass over. The Raja came to England, and was greeted with laudations and congratulations from Mr. Wise, who probably saw in the honours conferred a bright prospect for his own future. To be prepared, however, for the worst, he had had the letters secretly copied before returning them, apparently with the idea that a breach might come between himself and his principal, when they could be turned to account; for these letters were written, as were all Brooke's letters to his friends, not for the eye of the public, but for those who understood him, and to whom therefore there was no need to pick and choose his words. What he thought of the acts of public men, and of the character of the men themselves, that he said, sometimes when the boy-like element was uppermost, with a boy-like disregard of conventional terms. Had Mr. Wise dared to publish them as a whole, they would have injured only himself; but, through the medium of The Straits Times, at Singapore, sentences torn from their context, and playful allusions to the peculiarities of public men, were brought forward at times most likely to cause personal irritation against the Raja, and in articles where language of