

Topics of the Day.

THE EXPEDITION TO SUNGHIE UJONG.

The Malay States of Sunghie Ujong and Rumbow have been from time immemorial a fruitful source of solicitude to this Government. Lying as they do on the very borders of our province of Nanning and Malacca, their very proximity brings more prominently forward any troubles that may be agitating their territory, and affects the more directly our commerce in that Settlement, which is far from inconsiderable; for Sunghie Ujong is rich in tin, and its ruler, the Datu Klana, encourages the immigration of Chinese and the working of the mines in his territory. In Rumbow, on the contrary, there is not a single tin mine open; a want of enterprise attributed by some to the apathy of its ruler the Datu Purba, by others to the absence of tin in that part, and by others again to a Malay legend which warns the ruler of Rumbow from searching for tin in his own country, but which, unfortunately, does not prohibit him from seeking it elsewhere.

Now, the whole of the tin from the mines of Sunghie Ujong finds its way down to the coast by the river Linghie, a stream which, navigable for tongkangs for some fifteen miles from its mouth, narrows rapidly afterwards, and is only accessible to sampans as it passes near the mines. And it is this narrow stream that here forms the geographical boundary between Sunghie Ujong and Rumbow. *Hinc ille lachryma.* Rumbow, unproductive of tin, hungrily eyes from its left bank the rich freights of metal that pass down from the territory of its neighbour on the opposite bank; until some roving freebooter of a chief, driven perhaps by our cruisers from his piratical stronghold near the sea, or having perhaps finished some petty war which has furnished him and his followers with booty for some years, bethinks himself of the Linghie river and straightway settles himself down on the Rumbow side, declares himself a partisan of Datu Purba the ruler of Rumbow, builds himself a stockade, and exacts rice from the boats going up the river and a heavy impost on the tin going down.

Such has lately been the condition of affairs in these states. One Hadji Mahmet, a kinsman of the Datu Purba, was established in a strong stockade at a place on the Linghie River called Bukit Tiga, and had for the last eighteen months been the terror of all the passing Traders—who had no alternative but to pay the forced contributions exacted by him. To make assurance doubly sure, a second stockade was constructed some few hundred yards down the river, the owner of which, one Datu Dagan, worked in concert with the Hadji Mahmet. No boats were allowed to pass without paying—not even those of British subjects,—and the tin trade from Sunghie Ujong to Malacca was at length utterly paralysed. Numberless were the petitions from the luckless traders, and numberless the remonstrances addressed by the Government to the Rajahs. Datu Klana protested that he was willing to do all in his power to restore order, but that he was powerless to cope with the owners of the stockades unless our government would restore to him the breech-loading guns and rifles which had been detained, with their ammunition. The Datu Purba on the other hand maintained that the blackmail levied by him was his by right.

Accordingly H. E. the Governor summoned the Datu Klana and the Datu Purba to a conference at Qualla Linghie on Saturday, the 2nd May, and arrived at the mouth of the river Linghie in H. M. S. *Charybdis* on the day appointed. The Datu Klana and his chiefs made their appearance at the rendezvous, but Datu Purba pleaded sickness as an excuse for his non-attendance. In order to give him every opportunity, the rendezvous was postponed for a day or two, and changed to Sempang, which was nearer the Datu Purba's residence. But he still pleaded sickness as an excuse, and shifting his ground denied any complicity with the stockades at Bukit Tiga. This answer arrived on Sunday, and

at daylight on Monday, the 4th May, His Excellency the Governor went on board the *Pluto* and proceeded up the river as far as Sempang, towing the boats of H. M. S. *Charybdis*, and followed by H. M. S. *Arion*. At 1.30 p. m., H. E., accompanied by Capt. T. E. Smith R. N. (H. M. S. *Charybdis*); the Hon'ble Capt. Shaw; the Hon'ble Mr. Braddell; Commander Powlett R. N. (H. M. S. *Arion*) &c.; proceeded still higher up the river in a steam launch, having in tow three Tongkangs full of the Datu Klana's arms and ammunition, from which the embargo had been removed. This convoy was followed by the boats of H. M. S. *Charybdis* and *Arion*, manned and armed, in tow of the steam cutter of the *Charybdis*.

After grounding several times in the river, the stockade at Bukit Tiga was reached, but on landing was found to be deserted. There were evident signs, however, that the evacuation had been very recent and hurried. The rice was spilt in one or two of the huts and was still damp when the blue jackets entered, and some of the fires were still smouldering, and it has been subsequently ascertained that on that morning there were upwards of 100 armed Malays in the stockade. But hurried though the evacuation had been, it was very complete.—Not a gun or musket was left behind, and the only loot taken was a box full of documents, which turned out to be unimportant, however. The strength of the stockade had of course been greatly overrated, and against the shells and rockets that might have been brought to bear upon it by the man-of-war's boats, no determined resistance could have been made; but the position was nevertheless far from despicable. Perched on a steep little hill some forty feet high, the only access to the stockade was up some very steep and narrow steps, and had there been found on that day some dozen Malays stout-hearted enough to wait to fire even one volley whilst those who first landed were scrambling up the steep slope, the capture would not have been bloodless, and we might have had to deplore the loss of more than one of our high officials. After thoroughly investigating the stockade, the boats crews fired it, and on their way down the river, also burnt the lower stockade, of which mention has already been made. The next morning the boats' crews returned to their ships off Qualla Linghie.

It cannot but be a matter of regret that Datu Purba was prevented from attending the meeting of the Chiefs, be the illness real or feigned which he alleged as an excuse. But it is to be hoped that the Datu Klana of Sunghie Ujong will be able, now that the stockades at Bukit Tiga are destroyed, to protect his own trade in the Linghie river with his breechloaders,—a trade the importance of which may be gathered from the fact that the value of the tin which passed down the river two days after the destruction of the Bukit Tiga stockade amounted to nearly fifty thousand dollars. Of course, this must not be assumed as the rate that daily flows into our markets, but rather represents the accumulation of some three months—but the data will serve to show how thoroughly paralysed our commerce was in this direction, and how absolutely necessary it was that the river should be freed from the black-mail levied by piratical freebooters.

MR. BIRCH'S VISIT TO PERAK.

We extract, below, from the *Penang Gazette* of the 9th instant, a report of Mr. Birch's recent visit to Laroot and Perak, which, though not an official account, is we presume correct in its main particulars. Affairs in Perak are evidently still in a very unsatisfactory state, and our Government has a task before it requiring great tact and prudence. Mr. Birch's mission, whatever its other objects may have been, has not been a success so far as obtaining the submission of the Bindahara goes; he was not even accorded respect from this functionary until the arrival of the Sultan, accompanied by an influential chief who succeeded in inducing the Bindahara to show himself; but even then, he declined to hand over the regalia,

or jewels, whatever they may consist of, which are regarded by the Malays as the necessary insignia of royalty, of which the Bindahara obtained possession when his few adherents declared him Sultan some three years ago, and still retains in his keeping; while Messrs. Birch and Swettenham have been obliged, however the fact may be explained or disguised, to come away without having accomplished anything but their journey, and even the latter part of this was far from encouraging, the natives shewing a most unfriendly spirit. The failure—as the account given by the *Gazette* forces us to conclude—of this mission should not be allowed to pass unnoticed by our Government; the full force of the situation may not be apparent to people abroad, but it is evident that the Malays attach great importance to the possession of the baubles,—and the Bindahara knows full well the value of the prize he holds, and means to keep it if he can. Unable to rule the country himself, he may at least embarrass the rival claimant to the throne, and though he disclaims any ambition to rule, he refuses to relinquish the semblance of authority which the insignia of royalty confer upon him. In effect, he still claims the throne, and refuses to recognize or be bound by the recent treaty concluded with his rival and the chiefs of Perak. It is, indeed, possible that he is holding out in the hope of obtaining a substantial consideration for the relinquishment of his claim; but it is obviously not to be expected that this Government should initiate the principle of subsidizing usurpers in petty Malay principalities; for usurpers are plentiful, and if once the system were begun, we should have no end of trouble from this source. Further, in estimating the amount of a subsidy, the money value of the office to be subsidized is to be considered; and as the Bindahara has never been able to collect his own revenues, the value of his office is of course nothing at all.

As matters stand, our Government has negotiated a treaty which is, so far, practically useless, and evidently the first step necessary, to render it of any value, is to obtain possession of these insignia of royalty which the Bindahara holds. The mission to obtain them by peaceable negotiation has utterly failed, as might have been expected, and some stronger means must be used if the treaty is to amount to anything. If, as the *Gazette* says, it has been ratified by the Home Government, its enforcement at the outset is of paramount importance. In any event, it will never do to allow a petty Malay usurper,—a chief with half-a-dozen influential followers,—quietly and persistently to ignore our authority and influence, and by maintaining an unsupported pretence to the throne, to paralyze the government of a territory on our borders.

The Hon'ble J. W. W. Birch, who along with Mr. Swettenham has been engaged on a special mission in Perak for the last three weeks, arrived here on Sunday last. Mr. Birch proceeded first to Laroot, from whence he crossed over to the Perak River by land. The road he had to traverse led through a rough mountain gorge, which forms the only means of communication between the villages in the district of Perak and Laroot respectively. The object of the mission, we understand, was to get possession of the Regalia or crown jewels, &c. of Perak, which, at the present moment, are in the keeping of the Rajah Bindaharah, who our readers will recollect was declared Sultan of Perak about three years ago, in direct violation of the hereditary rights of the Rajah Muda, the Prince who has since been declared Sultan through the intervention of Sir Andrew Clarke. The negotiation carried on by Mr. Birch in order to obtain the Regalia for the rightful Sultan of the country, are described as having been of a very tedious and baffling character. The Bindahara, as soon as he learned of the approach of the British Officers, ran away into the jungles and hid himself, and after sundry delays and every kind of opposition on the part of his supporters, (who are stated to be men of straw, without means, or the smallest amount of influence among the inhabitants of the country) all hopes of meeting him were given up, and the arrival of the Sultan Abdullah, who was to be accompanied by the Laksamana, a Chief who appears to be a leading spirit and the only enlightened one among those of Perak, had to be waited for. After a delay of three or four days, the Sultan arrived, and through the instrumentality of the men of his retinue, the Bindahara was induced to show himself. He is described as a man of small intellect, being nothing more than a

craven and miserable tool in the hands of his needy followers. Several interviews were held with this man, and he promised to offer no opposition to the Regalia being handed over to the Sultan Abdullah; he would not however deliver them over to Mr. Birch on the plea that it was contrary to custom to remove them from the place where they were generally kept, unless the Sultan himself appeared in person and took them. He furthermore frequently affirmed that he never had any ambition to be Sultan, nor did he ever court the appointment to the throne; he had, however been elected sovereign, and felt that having to relinquish the Sultanate was highly derogatory to his dignity; he therefore expressed a desire for time to be granted him in order that he might become reconciled to his lot and also have an opportunity of making his peace with the present Sultan Abdullah. Taking all things into consideration, and considering that he had not the means at hand to enforce his demands, Mr. Birch came to the conclusion, that situated as he was, he had no alternative left him but to comply with these requests, and consequently returned to Penang by the Perak river. Towards the last few days of his stay in the country, the inhabitants of the villages became very inhospitable, so much so indeed, that ordinary provisions, such as rice, could not be purchased from them, as the Chiefs had forbidden the sale of any articles to the *Orang Puteh*, and every thing that could be done, was done, to make Mr. Birch and his party feel that they were not looked upon with any friendly eyes. Orders had been sent round from Laroot for a boat to proceed up the Perak River to meet and bring the party down to the Dindings, but as it did not turn up when looked for, a raft had to be purchased for the purpose. The river is about 150 miles long, and is navigable for boats of 5 feet draft at all times of the year. The banks are very high and the rise during the freshes arising from the monsoon rains is about 30 feet. A very strong current has to be contended with in going up at all times of the year. The country is remarkably populous, and abounds in Campongs of fruit and other trees. Paddy is grown in sufficient quantities to meet the requirements of the population which is estimated at upwards of 200,000. The people themselves are very ignorant and hold themselves in no small estimation. In answer to a question as to how long he thought it would take the British to conquer the Perak country, an intelligent Malay replied "that he had heard the British nation was great on the sea, but on land they were of small account, and he was of opinion that they would never be able to conquer his country." The intercourse between the different villages appears to be very limited. Men living fifty miles up know nothing of those who inhabit the entrance to the River, and as each chief levies black mail on every thing that goes up or down the river, there is a pretty heavy tax laid on all exports and imports, and parties going up without goods on which black mail can be levied, are quietly sent back about their business. The Treaty with Perak has, we rejoice to hear, been ratified by H. M.'s Government, and we trust the day is not far distant when the power of our rule will be felt throughout this fine country. This land has been allowed to lie fallow too long. It is a disgrace to us that the people inhabiting it are in a state of semi-barbarism, considering that they have been virtually under our protection even since we relieved Siam of her sway over them. Sir Andrew Clarke has a splendid field for the display of his talents as an Administrator, and we are confident that he will be equal to the occasion in every respect. The treaty with the Perak chiefs having been entered into, it only remains for him to make the parties to it understand that they must abide by its provisions; this they must be taught at all hazards; by force if necessary.

THE RAINFALL.

We have to acknowledge receipt from Dr. Randell of a Report on the Meteorological observations taken during the year 1873, with tables showing comparative annual abstracts of the observations and of the rainfall, extending over a period of five years, from 1869 to 1873 inclusive. The report,—which we give in full below, appending thereto the summaries at foot of the tables of abstracts,—calls the attention of Government to the fact that there has been a marked decrease in the rainfall since 1870; but it should be remembered that the decrease has been gradual, and that the figures representing the total amount of rainfall do not afford a fair criterion from which to form an opinion. The wettest months, as pointed out by Dr. Randell, are usually from September to December, but it may be remembered by many that in 1869, the rains, commencing in the latter part of November, continued almost without intermission until the early part of February, 1870; the total amount of rain that fell during those four months, estimated from five different points of observation, reached the enormous figure of 54.95