

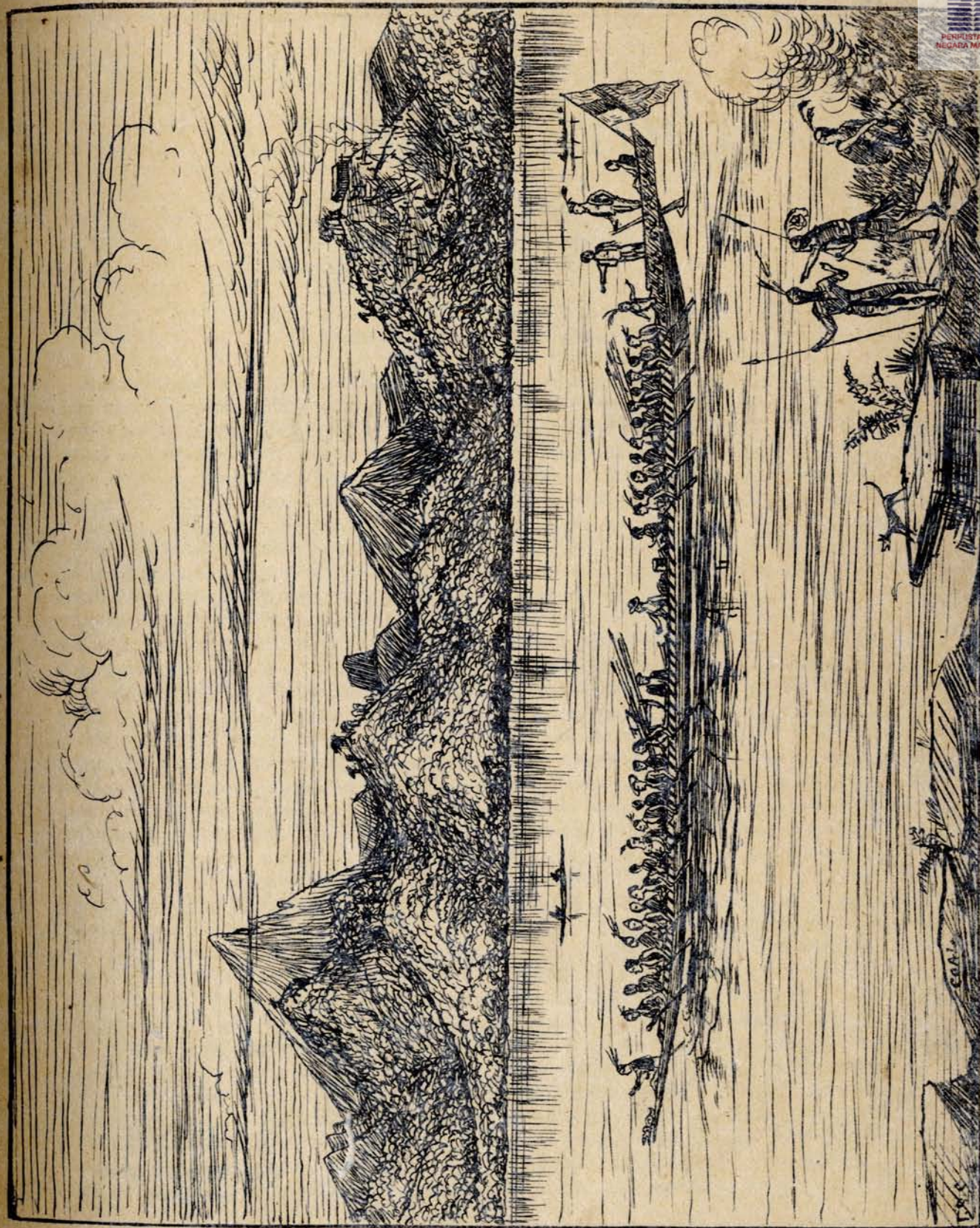
# FRASER'S STORY

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Paddling down the river Wanchuan about Cavetiger

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14 AUG 1998  
Perpustakaan Negara  
Malaysia

# A PIRATE STORY.

*"Nor holy bell, nor pastoral bleat,  
 In former days within the vale;  
 Flapp'd in the bay the pirates' sheet,  
 Curses were in the gale;  
 Rich goods lay on the sand, and murder'd men;  
 Pirate and wrecker kept the revels then."*

DANA.

It is all very well for you fellows, who have recently joined the service, to growl and grumble about discomfort, and a little annoyance of this sort. You live in the days of steam yachts and the piping times of peace. You have good comfortable forts to live in, well armed and defensible against Dyak attack. You have regular communication with the capital, and grumble if your mails are a day or two late, or your supply of wines happens to run out: how different was the state of affairs when I first came to the country!

In Sarawak itself we had to be constantly on the alert against attack, we could not move outside of the Sarawak river unless armed, and on the *qui vive* against pirates; in fact the whole country was in a state of anarchy and confusion.

I am an old man now, but the blood rushes through my veins with the vigor of youth when I recall the stirring scenes I have witnessed since following the fortunes of the Brooke family.

I have seen piracy suppressed on the coast and helped our present Rajah in putting a stop to head-taking ashore. I have fought side by side with Admiral Keppel, Sir Edward Belcher, Sir Thomas Cochrane, Captain Mundy and a host of others, who at various times have co-operated with our world-wide famed Rajah, Sir James Brooke.

I was at the attack of the Sakaran and Sariabas, which raised the outcry against Sir James Brooke by a handful of prejudiced

Exeter Hall people. I remember the disgust I always felt when this question was discussed, I fancied I saw some of these sanctimonious, pompous speakers, take their places on the platform at home, inflated with a sense of their own importance, looking sleek and oily in their comfortable broadcloth, and using their rhapsodical powers in pronouncing a panegyric on the dear peaceable Sakaran and Sariabas. Is it not sickening to fellows like ourselves who know the facts of the case? I verily believe I should not mind going through the imminent peril I am going to tell you about, a second time, if I could have the satisfaction of being in company with a party of these black coated gentlemen who sit at home at ease—but to proceed with my story—

I was with Captain Brooke when we ran down the eight Illanun pirate boats off Bintulu. I have followed the present Rajah in his numerous expeditions into the interior; I was at the storming of Sadok when we had hand to hand fight with our enemies, and I was also with him when he penetrated into the Kayan country: but now, 'Othello's occupation is gone,' and like yourselves I find a life of ease and inaction only develops the Englishmen's natural tendency to growl; but, to illustrate how times have changed, I will give you an account of an adventure which happened to me whilst going from my station to spend Christmas at Kuching, just as we are now, eighteen years ago.

## A PIRATE STORY

In 1856 I was left in charge of a small fort up the Rejang, the Rajah took an affectionate farewell of me in June, and after friendly advice and counsel about the treatment of natives and the general policy to follow, he said, "Now remember my dear boy if ever you feel hipped and low-spirited, directly solitude becomes irksome, come down to Kuching to me at once, and at all events I shall expect you at Christmas and the New year to witness the races and join in the festivities." I remember as if it were only yesterday the utterly miserable feeling I experienced when the gunboat dropped down the river and was at last hid from sight behind the furthestmost point. It would be months before I should see a white face again or hear my mother tongue—perhaps never! shut in a block house surrounded by treacherous foes, a hundred and fifty miles from my friends in Kuching, and the intervening country swarming with enemies, both in the river and at sea, almost precluding the possibility of making a safe journey with the means at my disposal, my only reliable friends being the ten Dyaks and Malays I brought from Sarawak, truly my prospects were not of the brightest. But I was young and low spirits vanished in a few days, besides, I had plenty of occupation in trying to ingratiate myself with the surrounding tribes, it was not long before I picked up a smattering of their language and soon had the satisfaction of making friends by the usual method of drinking blood with those in the vicinity of the fort.

The tribes up river refused all overtures to be friendly and continually harassed me by nightly attacks. These attacks, however, only ended in their throwing one or two spears into the fort, as a few shots from my fortmen soon dispersed them. But why go over this part of the story, you all know how these tribes have become friends by degrees, suffice it to say, I managed to pass the time pleasantly enough; tuba fish-

ing, deer-stalking, &c., until Christmas was drawing near.

Not having heard from Sarawak for some months, I decided on going down. I called together my friendly Dyaks and told them of my intention; they immediately placed one of their long war canoes at my disposal, and forty-five fellows under Apai Balong, (the Tuah of a long house near the fort) volunteered to accompany me. Apai Balong came originally from Saribas, he had been an arrant pirate and one of our bitterest enemies, but by some means or other I had won his confidence and believed in him. Subsequent events, proved he was worthy of the trust. He is dead now poor fellow, but he was a staunch ally of ours for many years. Placing my corporal in charge of the fort we set out, on the 21st of December, on our journey. We got to the mouth of the river without any adventure and started across the bay for the Moratabas entrance of the Sarawak river.

The sea being smooth we left the mouth of the Rejang before daylight hoping to get across (the distance is about fifty-five miles) before dark. Having been pent up in the jungle in a fort for nearly six months, I well remember the joyous exhilarating feeling of freedom I experienced on putting to sea. We had a glorious sunrise that morning which is still vivid in my memory: far away to the east the rosy light shot up into the sky, and now as the sovereign of day approached the color increased to blood red surrounded by dull heavy clouds on each side, enhancing the effect of the bright light which illuminated the sky between: in the track of light the color was ever changing; the beautiful pale-blue sky formed a back ground, across which fleecy clouds floated tinged with golden edges, some presenting a burnished or bronze-like appearance, others a bright rosy hue: at last the whole of the sky resembled a sea of gold, when the sun rose in all his glory and the

## A PIRATE HISTORY.

scene vanished like a beautiful vision.

The soft land breeze filled the sail which we had hoisted in our canoe, the men pulled with a will and everything looked favorable to our making a short and pleasant passage across. You all know however, how capricious the sea is on our coast. About ten o'clock, when we were out of sight of land, on looking to the northward we noticed a remarkable phenomenon—a black cloud rose and stretched across the horizon from N. E. to N. W. assuming the shape of an arch with three fleecy clouds forming a perfect semicircle and overlapping each other like the heavy folds of a curtain: inside the curtain the clouds became steel-blue, athwart which constant flashes of lightning played, and the distant rumblings of thunder told of the storm raging in the magic circle: overhead was fair and the bright blue sky with light fleecy clouds gave a most striking effect to the scene.

We had only just stowed our sail when we saw the circle break up and the black clouds approach us with a rushing noise. The squall broke on us and the sea was soon lashed into fury, we were driven before the wind with great violence and in danger every minute of being engulfed. Our craft was not a good seaboat, and the crew being unaccustomed to the sea, gave way to despair. It was a very anxious time for me, but after driving in this manner for nearly four hours it commenced to clear up, and I was glad to find we were off Satang Island. The sea went down as speedily as it got up and I encouraged my men, who, with the prospect of getting ashore, soon rallied.

We pulled around the Island, which is rocky, until we found a horse-shoe shaped spit of sand in a bay on the southern side. We landed, and during the afternoon which turned out fine, dried our clothes and soon forgot our troubles in fishing and collecting turtles' eggs, with which the Island abounds. We determined on starting the

following morning for the Santubong entrance, which is only ten miles from the Island. It was a moonlight night, but natives like a fire, a discussion arose as to the advisability of lighting one, Apai Balong saying, "One never knows when Illanun pirates may appear, and our light may be the means of attracting their attention." On my assurance that the Illanun would not venture so near the mouth of the Sarawak river after the many severe lessons they had received at our hands, they agreed to light the fire, and their fears being at rest, they soon busied themselves in cooking. It was not long before the evening meal was finished, and they were stretched around the fire in comfortable 'bichara' so essential to a Dyak's happiness.

I sat enjoying their talk of former head-taking expeditions, of which they are still proud, and listened whilst they fought their battles over again; at last they dropped off to sleep one by one, and I lit a pipe and strolled down the beach. I well remember sitting on a huge rock enjoying my tobacco. It was a lovely moonlight night, the gentle land breeze softly sighed through the Casuarina trees which fringe the shore, the tiny plashing waves broke with a low rippling murmur on the sands, which shone with glittering whiteness in the bright moonlight, the distant hum of the insect-world could be heard in the jungle, and seemed in keeping with the calm still scene. As I sat and smoked, a feeling of calm serenity stole over me, and my mind drifting into a train of pleasant thoughts was busy thinking of home scenes and home friends, when I was startled from my reverie by the plash of paddles; on looking in the direction of the sound I saw a lot of boats rounding the point; I ran back and aroused my followers in a great haste, when Apai Balong immediately recognised the boats as Illanuns, "Illanuns! Illanuns!" now cried the terrified Dyaks, rushing to their arms. I called

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Balong and asked his advice as to what course we should pursue. We saw ten boats standing into the bay. We could see we were discovered by our fire as they were pulling hard in our direction. To escape by boat was impossible. To attempt to fight was folly, as we were considerably outnumbered: we therefore soon determined on flight, snatching up my rifle I plunged into the jungle, just as the shouts of the Illanuns told that we were seen. Immediately behind the sand spit the Island rises almost perpendicularly, we scrambled up pell mell as we soon heard the yells of our enemies in pursuit.

After about half an hours hard climbing we came to a precipitous rock, to ascend which seemed impossible; after searching for some time, we found a rift in the rock; up this we clambered for about a hundred yards, when we found ourselves on a small table-land covered with vegetation. Here, we determined to take our stand, as, with my rifle and large boulders close at hand, we could easily defend the rift. Our pursuers were at last quiet, concluding, I imagined, that there was no hurry, escape from the Island being impossible, they could hunt us down like sheep at their leisure.

Little sleep visited our eyelids that night. Morning at last broke, and discovered our conjectures were right, the table-land was only accessible through the rift. We immediately set about collecting large boulders and stones. I was armed with a breech-loading rifle and sword, fortunately I had a hundred rounds of ammunition: Apai Balong had an old flint musket; these constituted our armory. My Dyak followers all had their spears and parangs, and we determined to sell our lives dearly, as we knew captivity meant torture and a lingering death.

After making our preparations we remained in ambush, and although we could not easily be seen, we got a clear view over

the ledge of rock of what went on below. About eight o'clock we saw a party of about a hundred men following our tract as relentlessly as bloodhounds. On discovering that we had climbed up the rift, they stopped and seemed to hold a council of war; I could see them distinctly; they were naked to the waist, all of them wore short trousers, they were short, but stout, and of great muscular development; they had high cheek bones, flat noses, sirih-stained lips, and bloodshot eyes and looked a formidable band of ruffians. No wonder these people have spread terror along the coast, they neither give nor take quarter; when they were run down off Bintulu by the *S. S. Rainbow*, I saw several of them refuse to be taken on board a boat lowered to save them; one man I noticed particularly, he was knocked out of his boat, and, although desperately wounded, he retained possession of his rifle, he managed to struggle on to a floating log, and with a last effort, raised his weapon and fired at us, then fell over and sunk to rise no more.

Fortunately for us on this occasion they had no fire-arms, their weapons being spears and a broad parang resembling a huge fish-slice in shape. Presently, they commenced to move towards the rift, which was so narrow that only two at a time could enter—When they were a few yards up I gave the signal, and all the Dyaks rose with a yell and hurled large boulders on our assailants. I took deliberate aim at the leader, and had the satisfaction of seeing him roll back on his companions; they gave a yell of defiance, but were evidently taken aback at discovering we were armed with fire-arms; just then, Apai Balong blazed off his old flint-musket, without doing any damage, but they no longer hesitated about retreating, thinking, no doubt, we were all armed with rifles. As they retired with their dead and wounded, I gave them a parting shot, but I determined not to waste ammunition on wild