CHAPTER V

JAMES BROOKE AND THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT

By August 1845, through the united efforts of Raja Brooke and the Royal Navy, all local obstacles to the creation of a British colony on the north-west coast of Borneo had been removed. A pro-British government was in power at Brunei, the Sultan had announced his willingness to cede the necessary territory, and the Malay and Dyak pirates along the coast had not yet recovered from the devastating attacks of Keppel and Sir Thomas Cochrane. But no one could tell how long this favourable situation would last. Although British influence at Brunei had been greatly strengthened by the expulsion of Pengeran Usop and by the destruction of Sharif 'Usman's stronghold at Marudu Bay, a powerful opposition party still existed at the Sultan's court. The members of this party had long been reaping huge profits as the leading entrepreneurs of the local piracy and slave trade, and they rightly foresaw that a continuance of the recent British attacks would destroy their livelihood entirely. From Brooke's point of view, therefore, it was vital that the British Government should come to a decision on the question of a colony in Borneo before it was too late, before another Brunei palace revolution placed power in the hands of those who might not only persuade the Sultan to withdraw the offer of Labuan but might also compel him to denounce all past agreements to co-operate with Great Britain in the suppression of piracy and the promotion of trade.

The British Government, however, had no intention of being hurried into a new colonizing venture on the coast of Borneo. Their slowness was no doubt partly due to the easy pace at which bureaucracy moved in those days, but it was also caused by the large number of Government Departments that had to be consulted. Both the Admiralty and the Foreign Office had already had a finger in the pie: the Admiralty had issued instructions to Belcher to report on Sarawak and had ordered Bethune to search for a site for a naval station, and the Foreign Office had appointed the White Raja as their Confidential Agent in Borneo. But neither the Treasury, which would have to supply the
money, nor the Colonial Office, which would have to do most of the work, had yet given their consent to any plan for the creation of a new Crown Colony.

The Admiralty’s interest in Borneo was primarily strategic, and was the direct result of increasing British naval responsibilities in the Far East. The abolition of the East India Company’s monopoly of trade with China in 1834, and the rise in the volume of the China trade generally after the opening of the ‘treaty ports’ in 1842, had greatly complicated the Royal Navy’s task of protecting British merchant shipping east of Singapore. During the Napoleonic Wars Great Britain had acquired an extensive chain of naval bases covering the main sea routes to India and the East up to and including the Straits of Malacca. Ascension Island, the Cape of Good Hope, the Mauritius, Chagos, and Seychelles groups, Ceylon with its fine harbour at Trincomalee, and the Maldive, Laccadive and Andaman Islands were all either captured during the war or ceded to Great Britain at the peace treaty. But between Singapore and the China Coast there was a gap of nearly fifteen hundred miles without a single friendly port; along the whole length of this important maritime highway there was no base from which the Royal Navy could operate against Chinese or Malay pirates, and no harbour of refuge in which merchant shipping could shelter from the typhoons of the South China Sea. The absence of naval facilities in these waters had been of much less consequence when the East India Company’s monopoly was in force, and when (as, for example, during the Napoleonic Wars) China-bound East Indiamen had been herded together in annual convoys which often did not touch land between the Cape of Good Hope and Canton. Under the convoy system, naval protection had been provided by a warship sailing in company with the merchantmen for the whole voyage, and numerous naval bases had not then been so necessary. But by the 1840’s the China convoys had disappeared, and British ships were trading independently to China in ever-increasing numbers from England, India, Singapore, and elsewhere, without any restrictions on their movements. To protect them, locally-based naval patrols were needed, and these in turn required more naval stations. The acquisition of Hong Kong in 1842 helped to solve the problem, but the fifteen hundred mile gap between Singapore and the China Coast still remained. The Admiralty

256 Ships sailing independently, like the country ships of India, were expected, and were sufficiently well armed, to look after themselves.
therefore turned their attention to the north-west coast of Borneo, which was situated conveniently between the two.

A second reason for the Admiralty's interest in Borneo was the discovery of new coal deposits. It had been common knowledge since about 1841 that coal existed near Brunei, and during his visit of October 1844 Sir Edward Belcher was able to confirm rumours that there were further outcrops on Labuan as well. Samples of coal from both places were sent for examination to Sir Henry de la Beche, the Director of the British Ordnance Survey, who reported that they were "of a quality quite equal to our best Newcastle".257 It was questionable whether Borneo coal could be produced at competitive prices, since the Admiralty’s own supplies were being landed at Hong Kong for as little as £ 1-17-0 a ton,258 but there were obvious advantages in having a 'self-supporting’ coal depot in the China Seas. If communications with Great Britain were cut in time of war, for example, coal would have to be brought all the way from Bengal or Australia, the only other sources of supply.

In July 1844 Raja Brooke's campaign for a British colony in Borneo received powerful support from John Crawfurd, a former Resident of Singapore. Prompted by Wise,259 Crawfurd drafted a long memorandum on Brooke's proposal for the information of the Admiralty. "I am of opinion”, he wrote, “that a settlement on the north-west coast of Borneo... would be highly advantageous to this country — as a coal depot for steam-navigation, as a means of suppressing Malayan piracy, as a harbour of refuge for ships disabled in the China Sea and, finally, as a commanding position during a naval war. The island of Labuan has been pointed out for this purpose; and as far as our present limited knowledge of it will allow me to judge, it appears to possess all the necessary qualities for such a settlement".260

Crawfurd's advocacy cleared away any lingering doubts the Admiralty may have had regarding the desirability of a naval station on

258 Cochrane to the Admiralty, April 10th, 1845. (P.P., 1852-3, LXI, p. 301).
259 Wise submitted Crawfurd's name to the British Government, together with those of John Anderson (author of Practical and Commercial Considerations relative to the Malayan Peninsula, 1824), T. C. Robertson, Governor S. G. Bonham, and Dr. Horsfield, as persons qualified to recommend in the matter. Anderson, in particular, gave Wise valuable assistance, even to the extent of 'ghosting' some of his earlier letters to the Admiralty. (Anderson to Aberdeen, July 14th, 1845: F.O. 12/3).
the Borneo coast, and led directly to the dispatch of Captain Drinkwater Bethune the following November. Bethune was instructed to pick out a position with a good anchorage, room for merchant vessels, sufficient depth of water for large ships, and shelter against the prevailing winds. He was also told to make an examination of all known coal-fields in the area and to report where the best quality coal was to be found. Moreover, any locality which satisfied these requirements must be easily defensible and conveniently situated to act as a base from which expeditions might be launched against the pirates. Labuan had been recommended by Brooke and Crawfurd, but other possible sites must be investigated too. Above all, Bethune was "cautiously to avoid all intercourse with those districts settled by the subjects of the King of the Netherlands".

The Colonial and Foreign Offices were kept informed of these developments, and by the end of 1844 both had agreed with the Admiralty that a naval station on the Borneo coast was "indispensably necessary". The Treasury, too, had been induced to accept this view. But neither the Colonial Secretary, Lord Stanley, nor the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Aberdeen, were prepared to go farther. A naval station was the most they would agree to. They could see no justification for a full-scale colonial establishment in Borneo, with a governor, appropriate administrative services, and a military garrison. What was required, they felt, was a settlement more on the model of Ascension Island, a naval base in the South Atlantic which was exclusively under the Admiralty's jurisdiction, and ranked as one of Her Majesty's ships. For this reason the Colonial Office were involved only incidentally in the earlier inter-departmental discussions regarding Labuan, but the Foreign Office, who had to keep an eye on the activities of other nations in the Far East as well as safeguard Great Britain's general strategic interests there, were much more in-

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261 F.O. 12/4.
263 Aberdeen to Brooke, November 1st, 1844. (F.O. 12/2).
265 In September 1845 Lord Aberdeen mentioned in conversation with Baron Dedel, the Dutch Ambassador in London, that the British Government were thinking of placing "a ship's company" on Labuan. (Dedel to Baud, September 23rd, 1845, Private: Buit. Zaken, No. 3133). Ascension Island remained under Admiralty supervision until 1922, when it became a dependency of St. Helena.
timely concerned. The nation which was most likely to object to an increase in British influence in Borneo, and whose counter-claims Her Majesty’s Government had to be ready to combat, was, of course, the Netherlands.

The Dutch Government first became aware of the existence of James Brooke when an article describing his projected visit to the Far East appeared in a Paris journal.\textsuperscript{266} The implication of this article (published in October 1838 in the \textit{Gazette de France}) was that the voyage of the Royalist marked the beginning of a British campaign to seize control of the whole of Borneo. From Singapore, the \textit{Gazette} complained, Brooke would be able “easily to undertake excursions to the various parts of the great island of Borneo, possession of which the English have long coveted. Already masters of New Holland, once they have taken possession of Borneo they will announce that everything between the two belongs to them by droit d’enclave. Who will be able to hinder them? The wonder is that they have not declared themselves masters of all Polynesia. But that will come…”\textsuperscript{267} Soon afterwards the \textit{United Service Journal}, disclosing that Rear-Admiral Sir Frederick Maitland had sailed from Singapore with six warships to bring pressure on China in the current opium dispute, announced that once the Admiral had completed his duties in China, he “purposed going to Borneo to arrange another important mercantile affair with the Dutch and British merchants”\textsuperscript{268} Both these reports were wildly inaccurate, but the Dutch were not to know this at the time, and accepted them as indications of a re-awakening British imperialism in the Indian Archipelago. So far as Brooke’s expedition was concerned, however, their apprehensions were temporarily allayed when the Colonial Minister pointed out that the British Government were hardly likely to be behind an enterprise involving only one small schooner of 140 tons burden.\textsuperscript{269}

When Brooke arrived in the East in mid-1839, therefore, his explanation that he was merely a private individual with no govern-

\textsuperscript{266} J. C. Baud to the Minister of the Colonies, November 10th, 1838, No. 399. (\textit{Buit. Zaken}, No. 3133).
\textsuperscript{267} ‘Ethnographie et géographie: exploration de l’archipel asiatique: établissement des Anglais à Bornéo’, \textit{Gazette de France}, October 28th, 1838. At this time an Anglo-French dispute over Tahiti was causing bitter feelings on both sides of the Channel.
\textsuperscript{269} Minister of the Colonies to the King, November 23rd, 1838. (\textit{Kol.}, 1838, No. 499, Secret).
ment connections of any kind, and no object other than the pursuit of knowledge, was readily accepted in Batavia. Governor-General de Eerens granted permission for the Royalist to use ports in the Netherlands Indies without paying harbour dues, and recommended her owner to the good offices of Dutch officials. But some of Brooke’s actions during a visit he paid to Celebes in 1840 revived Dutch suspicions as to his possible secret motives. On one occasion he gave a quantity of muskets and gunpowder to a Bugis chief who was in revolt against the Netherlands Indian Government. On another he tried to open a communication with the Raja of Bone, and this attempt failed, according to information received in Batavia, only because the Raja remained faithful to the obligations he owed to his Dutch overlords. These incidents persuaded the Netherlands Indian Government that Brooke’s real aims were not “private and scientific” as had previously been supposed, but “official and political”.

When news of the occurrences in Celebes reached The Hague, the Colonial Minister, J. C. Baud, asked his colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to find out whether or not the British Government were actively supporting Brooke. This request was passed to Baron Dedel, the Dutch Ambassador in London, who reported that he could see no cause for anxiety, since an English friend had positively assured him that Brooke had not been entrusted “with any political or commercial scheme whatever”. The Dutch Government’s apprehensions were consequently quietened once again.

Brooke himself, meanwhile, had returned to Borneo from Celebes, and had begun ‘meddling’, as contemporary Dutch accounts phrased it, in the Sarawak civil war. The Assistant-Resident of Sambas imme-

270 Governor-General to the Minister of the Colonies, February 8th, 1841, No. 2, Secret. (Buit. Zaken, No. 3133.) Brooke to Aberdeen, March 10th, 1846. (F.O. 12/4.) Dedel to Aberdeen, March 20th, 1846. (C.O. 144/1.)
271 Governor of Makassar to the Governor-General, April 30th, 1840, No. 181*. (Kol. 1841, No. 66, Secret.) Dedel to Aberdeen, March 20th, 1846. (C.O. 144/1.)
272 Governor-General to the Minister of the Colonies, July 22nd, 1840, No. 24, L* G3. (Kol., 1841, No. 54, Secret).
273 Minister of the Colonies to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, February 6th, 1841. (Kol., 1841, No. 54, Secret).
274 Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Colonies, February 16th, 1841, No. 4, Secret. (Kol., 1841, No. 66, Secret).
275 Letter to Ambassador Dedel of March 25th, 1841. No signature appears on this letter in the form in which it is included in the Dutch records. Dedel stated merely that it came from “a member of the Royal Geographical Society” (under the auspices of which Brooke’s original expedition had been undertaken). (Dedel to Verstolk van Soelen, March 26th, 1841, No. 26: Buit. Zaken, No. 3133).
diately addressed a curt note to him, requesting, in so many words, that he would mind his own business, and allow the inhabitants of Sarawak to mind theirs. This letter is not mentioned anywhere in the White Raja’s journals, private correspondence, or public dispatches. In 1846, moreover, he told Lord Aberdeen that up to that time he had received two letters only from the Dutch authorities in Borneo, one dealing with the escape of some prisoners from Sambas gaol, and the other asking him to help in recovering a debt owed to the Sultan of Sambas by a Chinese kongsi which had migrated to Sarawak. Yet it seems most unlikely that he should not have received a letter of this importance. Its text is as follows:

"Dear Sir,

A report has reached me that you are interfering in the affairs of Sarawak. I sincerely hope the rumour is entirely without foundation. You cannot be ignorant that all meddling in the political affairs or party dissensions at Sarawak by British subjects would be a violation of Article 5 of the Treaty between their Netherlands and British majesties, and I must therefore protest against any interference of the kind, if you have been drawn into the contest now going on among the people of Sarawak.

I trust this notification will be sufficient, and that you will feel the propriety of withdrawing from the scene of contest and leaving the Sarawak people to manage their own affairs.

I am placed under the necessity of informing my Government of the report of your course, in order that it may adopt such measures as may put an end to unjustifiable political interferences.

Accept the assurances of my esteem,

Yours truly,

R. Bloem,
Adst. Resident van Sambas".

But in any case, whether he received this letter or not, Brooke certainly paid no attention to it, and continued on his way undisturbed.

In August 1841 the senior Dutch official in western Borneo com-

276 Brooke to Aberdeen, March 10th, 1846. (F.O. 124).
277 R. Bloem to J. Brooke, November 14th, 1840, No. 98. (Kol., 1842, No. 256/W, Secret. Also reproduced in Emily Hahn, James Brooke of Sarawak, p. 66).
plained to his Government that the English interloper at Sarawak was trading extensively in muskets and gunpowder. Since it was quite impossible, he reminded the Governor-General, to prevent smuggling across the Sambas border, an influx of firearms into Dutch Borneo would almost certainly cause trouble in Sanggau and Sintang, two districts with easy communication with Sarawak by river. A month later the Netherlands Indian Government were further informed that Brooke had been installed as sovereign ruler of Sarawak. This persuaded the Governor-General that a firm stand must be taken if British pretensions in Borneo were to be checked, and he advised Minister Baud that he was planning to establish a Dutch Government post in the Sultanate of Brunei.

This information arrived at The Hague almost simultaneously with a dispatch from London, containing a copy of the Letter from Borneo — the document by which Brooke first offered to cede Sarawak to the British Government. It was no longer possible to doubt the reality of the White Raja's political aims. He had now publicly announced that it was his hope and intention to establish permanent British influence over the north-west coast of Borneo. Yet, on Baud's advice, and contrary to the wishes of the Governor-General, the Dutch home Government made no move to check him. The Colonial Minister's reasoning was as follows: in the first place, since the Government of the Netherlands Indies did not themselves possess any sovereign rights in the Sultanate of Brunei, they would not be justified in attempting to exclude other powers from that part of Borneo; in the second place, existing Dutch settlements on the West and South Coasts were such poor advertisements for the island as a whole that foreign nations were unlikely to want to compete seriously for possession of it. The British, indeed, already controlled most of the trade of Borneo from Singapore. "I think it will be advisable", Baud therefore told King William, "for us to let [Great Britain] have a free hand, and not cause an argument by the creation of a post" in Brunei.

Events were soon to show that James Brooke constituted the greatest threat to Dutch power in Borneo since Sir Stamford Raffles, but,

278 Commissaris-Inspecteur Donker to the Governor-General, July 31st, 1841, No. 310/8, Secret. (Kol., 1842, No. 256/W, Secret).
279 Governor-General to the Minister of the Colonies, November 30th, 1841, No. 578. (Ibid.)
280 Minister of the Colonies to the King, May 19th, 1842, L. A, No. 236, Secret. (Buit. Zaken, No. 3133).
curiously enough, it was not the actions of the White Raja of Sarawak that provoked the first Dutch protests against British interference in the island, but those of another, and less famous, private adventurer.

In February 1844 the Young Queen and the Anna, two British trading brigs chartered in Hong Kong, and commanded by an enterprising Scot named the Hon. Erskine Murray, arrived at Koetei on the East Coast of Borneo. The local Sultan gave a warm welcome to Murray and his companions, and expressed the hope that theirs would be the first of many similar visits by British merchants. But when the leader of the expedition asked permission to take up permanent residence at Koetei in order to protect British trade, his request was peremptorily refused. This should undoubtedly have served as a warning, but Murray very foolishly allowed his ships to be lured up the Mahakam River to Tenggarong, a small town some twenty-five miles from Samarinda. The Sultan immediately set up batteries of guns along the river banks to prevent their escape. Murray threatened to destroy the town if not allowed to proceed, but his bluff failed, and he and his men had to fight their way down to the coast amid a storm of hostile fire. There, when they had almost succeeded in running the gauntlet of the Sultan's guns, they were engaged by a large flotilla of pirates and three members of the expedition, including its commander, were killed.281

Erskine Murray's plan to visit Borneo, like Brooke's, was first brought to the notice of the Dutch Government by a newspaper report. In November 1843 an article appeared in the Friend of China, explaining that the objects of a voyage soon to be undertaken by two British merchant vessels to the coasts of Borneo were colonization and the promotion of trade.282 The Dutch Government naturally deduced from this that Murray was hoping to emulate the achievements of the White Raja of Sarawak.283 From the Dutch point of view, however, the two cases were entirely different. The Sultanate of Koetei, unlike Sarawak, was part of the Netherlands Indies, and when the British

281 Friend of China, April 20th, 1844. Singapore Free Press, May 23rd, 1844. Hong Kong Register, April 23rd, 1844. See also W. Cave Thomas, Murray's Expedition to Borneo (published 1893), and Marryat, op. cit., p. 45.
282 Friend of China, November 2nd, 1843 (reproduced in the Javasche Courant, December 30th, 1843).
283 Minister of the Colonies to the King, July 27th, 1844, No. 343, Secret. (Buit. Zaken, No. 3133). This may well have been Murray's true aim, though the Government of India expressed the opinion later that he had not been interested in settlement, only in trade. (Secretary to Government, Fort William, to the Secret Committee. November 23rd, 1844: F.O. 12/3).
press began demanding that the Royal Navy should be sent to avenge Murray's death, the Dutch decided that it was time to make a stand. Any British naval action against Koetei, Ambassador Dedel warned the Earl of Aberdeen, would be "a derogation of Netherlands sovereignty". The Foreign Secretary replied that his Department had no official knowledge of the activities of the Hon. Erskine Murray, and that, in any case, Great Britain would take no action which might infringe on Dutch sovereign rights. A small naval expedition was sent to Koetei by the Netherlands Indian Government themselves in March 1844, but Murray's murderers were not brought to justice. Nevertheless, his tragic death did have one important consequence: it obliged the Dutch Government to inquire more closely into the position of the White Raja of Sarawak.

During the six years from 1839 to 1844 Brooke was a private individual with no official backing and no government recognition. It would consequently have been difficult for the Dutch to have framed any charges against him during this period, even supposing they had wished to do so; there was no one to whom they could have addressed their complaints. But when early in 1845 he was appointed British agent in Borneo, and when in August of the same year Admiral Cochrane arrived at Brunei with eight British warships to support him, the Dutch decided, somewhat belatedly, that the Raja of Sarawak had become a menace to the security of their Far Eastern possessions.

At the beginning of December a note was presented to the British Foreign Office by Ambassador Dedel. "It is a matter for regret", it said, "that Mr. Brooke has been placed in the position which he now occupies. In this position, in view of his known prejudice against the Netherlands, he can do much harm". Lord Aberdeen replied with a vigorous defence of Brooke's character and past proceedings, and suggested that if the Dutch authorities in the East had crossed swords with him, this could only be because they had been interfering with his "legitimate objects and pursuits". It had been found necessary for Her Majesty's Government to appoint an agent in Borneo with the duty of assisting the local rajas to suppress piracy, and Mr. Brooke had been the obvious choice for the post.

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284 Dedel to Aberdeen, August 27th, 1844. (C.O. 144/1).
285 Aberdeen to Dedel, November 2nd, 1844. (Buit. Zaken, No. 3133).
286 Dedel to Aberdeen, December 2nd, 1845. (C.O. 144/1).
This explanation did not satisfy the Dutch Government, and Dedel attacked the White Raja again the following March. This time, he said, he was able to offer proof that Brooke was not a fit person to act as British agent in Borneo. The present ruler of Sarawak had shown conclusively during a visit he had paid to Celebes in 1840 that he was anything but favourably disposed towards the Government of the Netherlands. On one occasion he had given "twelve cases of muskets and twenty barrels of gunpowder" to a Bugis chief named Datu Lompulë', who was hostile to the Dutch.288

Asked by Lord Aberdeen to give his own version of this event, Brooke was able to justify his conduct completely. At the time of his visit to Celebes, he explained, he was unaware that the Bugis chief in question was hostile to the Dutch Government, and the "three or four muskets, some cloth, and small quantity of gunpowder" which he had given him had been intended solely as a present. So far from trying to stir up revolt in Celebes, he had advised every native chief he met to refrain from hostilities with all European powers, the Netherlands included.289

A weakness in the Dutch case against Brooke was that the Netherlands Government had made no formal protest against his actions in Celebes at the time when they occurred. The incidents about which Dedel was instructed to complain in 1845 had apparently not been worth bothering about in 1840. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that although there had thus far been little either in Brooke's conduct or in his public pronouncements to which the Dutch could legitimately take exception,290 they were correct in thinking that he cherished no love for them. There is ample evidence of this in his private correspondence. "I can lay open Borneo", he told Henry Wise at the end of 1841. "If, however, we do not take care, the Dutch will have it, and then farewell hope, for Dutch rule, with respect to natives, is a palsy, and death to British manufactures... Is the English lion for ever to crouch beneath the belly of the Dutch frog?" 291 Advising the governor of Sarawak against allowing the Netherlands authorities to gain a footing in Brunei, Brooke gave

288 Dedel to Aberdeen, March 2oth, 1846. (C.O. 144/1).
289 This letter was based on a dispatch from the Governor of Makassar to the Governor-General of April 3oth, 1840, No. 181. (Kol., 1841, No. 66, Secret).
290 I.e. up to 1846, in which year the first volumes of Brooke's private journals, which did contain a few anti-Dutch sentiments, were published by Captain Keppel.
291 Brooke to Wise, December 10th, 1841. (C.O. 144/1).
warning that “it was easy to let them come, but... he would find it
difficult to get rid of them ever after, and that the most fatal conse-
quences might ensue to his country”. 292 And lastly, describing the evils
of Malay piracy to his friend, John Templer, Brooke declared that
“those idiots, the Dutch... encourage this vile traffic because it prevents
the natives smuggling, and because it injures the trade of Singapore”. 293

By the end of 1845 it had become clear to the Netherlands Govern-
ment that, as a result of Raja Brooke’s prolonged advocacy, an attempt
to found a British colony in Borneo would probably not be long delayed.
Three years earlier, the Dutch Minister of the Colonies had viewed
this prospect almost with equanimity. 294 But since then he and his
advisers had been receiving reports of greatly increased British naval
activity along the north-west coast of the island, of an attempt by a
British subject to found a colony in Dutch sovereign territory at Koetei
and, finally, of the British Government’s grant of virtual protection
to the Raja of Sarawak. Consequently, when Dedel made his complaint
to Lord Aberdeen about Brooke’s appointment as British agent, he
also warned Her Majesty’s Government that they were prohibited from
colonizing Borneo under the terms of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824.
Both contracting parties, he pointed out, had then expressly declared
that they would never allow their territorial ambitions in the Indian
Archipelago to come into conflict again. “The tendency, the spirit, the
principal aim of the Treaty”, Dedel urged, had been “to separate the
possessions of the two powers in the East Indies for all time to come”. 295

Aberdeen immediately replied that his Government were quite unable
to accept any such interpretation of the Treaty of 1824. It must
surely be obvious to the Dutch Government, he said, that in those
parts of the Archipelago which the Treaty did not specify as forbidden
ground to one or other of the contracting parties, the power of both
to establish colonies or make agreements with native princes remained
unimpaired. “Had it been intended”, he went on, “that the provisions
of Article XII of the Treaty, which lays down the limits within which
Her Majesty’s Government are precluded from forming establishments
or concluding treaties with the native chiefs, should be applicable to

292 Brooke to Templer, August 20th, 1839. (Letters, i, p. 68).
293 Brooke to Templer, December 1st, 1841. (Ibid., i, p. 138).
The Dutch were certainly jealous of Singapore, but Brooke’s suggestion that
they were not playing their full part in the struggle against the pirates was
grotesquely inaccurate.
294 See p. 101 above.
295 Dedel to Aberdeen, December 2nd, 1845. (C.O. 144/1).
Borneo, that country would assuredly have been named... Her Majesty's Government cannot admit that the expression used in Article XII with reference to any other islands south of the Straits of Singapore can apply to Borneo".286

To this line of argument, however, Dedel quickly produced an answer. It was certainly true, he said in a note of March 20th the next year, that Borneo had not been mentioned in the Treaty, but this had simply been because that island had not then been a "theatre of common occupation". Other islands where Netherlands sovereignty was exclusively established had not been mentioned either. In 1824 it was only in Sumatra and Singapore that rival agents of the two Governments were disputing "territorial possession or political ascendancy", and the stipulations of the Treaty had therefore been confined to them. The vital point for present consideration was that the agreement of 1824 had been based on an assumption that both parties were sincerely determined to make "a reciprocal renunciation of all territorial community" in the Indies. That they had indeed done so could be proved by reference to the supplementary note which the British plenipotentiaries had addressed to the Government of the Netherlands at the conclusion of the negotiations. On that occasion Canning and Wynn had formally placed on record that the object of the Treaty was "to avoid a collision of interests" between the two countries.287

In thus appealing to the spirit rather than to the letter of the Treaty of 1824, the Dutch Government were trying to make the most of a case which, it was privately admitted in The Hague, was not entirely convincing. During 1845 the Council of Ministers had conducted an investigation into Dutch rights in northern Borneo, and had come to the definite, if reluctant, conclusion that nothing in the Treaty prohibited the British from founding colonies there. "The Treaty of 1824", they reported to the King, "cannot be said to lay down a parallel of latitude to the south of which England may not establish herself... The idea of a continuous geographical line delineating a southern limit of British influence in the Archipelago is therefore unfounded".288

286 Aberdeen to Dedel, December 10th, 1845. (Ibid.)
287 Dedel to Aberdeen, March 20th, 1846. (Ibid.)
288 Earlier in the same year Minister Baud had expressed a contrary opinion. (See p. 63 above). Since then, however, he had apparently been won over by the arguments of the Council of Ministers, for the latter concluded their report to the King with the remark: "All this is the unanimous opinion of the Council, and also of the Minister of the Colonies". (Council of Ministers
The result was that, although the Dutch were unwilling to give Great Britain *carte blanche* in Borneo, Dedel’s note of March 1846 did contain one important concession. The Netherlands, he assured Lord Aberdeen, did not believe that it was necessary to exclude British influence from the area entirely. “The cession of Labuan to Great Britain”, he said, “and the establishment of a naval station in that island are not susceptible to the same objections by the Netherlands Government, the latter not having extended its sovereignty to that part of Brunei which is situated opposite Labuan, and not expecting that such a step can lead to collisions, at any rate for the time being”.\(^{299}\) In making this concession, the Dutch were following out the logic of their assertion that one of the chief objects of the 1824 Treaty had been to guard against ‘territorial community’ in the Indian Archipelago. They obviously could not expect the British Government to agree to this interpretation, and at the same time to refrain from occupying Labuan, which was not part of the mainland of Borneo and was not, in any case, south of Singapore Straits.\(^{300}\)

Once again, however, the British Foreign Secretary replied that he could not accept the arguments put forward by the Ambassador of the Netherlands. “After the most mature consideration”, he declared, “Her Majesty’s Government have decided that there is nothing in the Treaty of 1824 to prevent the formation of British settlements in the districts of the Archipelago from which Great Britain is not in terms excluded by the Treaty... Her Majesty’s Government have no present intention of availing themselves of this circumstance for the purpose of establishing a colony of the crown, [but] they still cannot allow it for a moment to be supposed that they in any way acknowledge the obligation in no case to take such a step even if rendered expedient or necessary by circumstances the occurrence of which they at present do not anticipate”.\(^{301}\) In simpler language — Lord Aberdeen’s meaning is nearly obliterated by diplomatic circumlocution — the British Government were saying that although they did not at the moment intend to colonize Borneo, they reserved the right to do so.

to the King, November 12th, 1845, Very Secret, L\(^*\) B\(^{40}\): ‘Diverse stukken over Borneo’, *Kol.*, 1845, No. 442, Very Secret).

\(^{299}\) Dedel to Aberdeen, March 20th, 1846. (C.O. 144/1).

\(^{300}\) Minister of the Colonies to the Governor-General, June 10th, 1846. (*Kol.*, 1846, No. 164/Y, Secret).

\(^{301}\) Aberdeen to Dedel, May 4th, 1846. (C.O. 144/1).
This exchange of letters marks the end of the first round in what ultimately proved to be an extremely tedious contest. For the time being the two Governments agreed to differ on the question of present and future British rights in Borneo. Forty years later Dedel's and Aberdeen's successors were still arguing about what precisely George Canning and Minister Falck had had in mind when they drew up the twelfth article of the Treaty of 1824.