

DESIGNS OF THE DUTCH ON SUMATRA.—By intelligence received within these few days it appears that the expedition from Rhio, which was mentioned in our number of 2d. instant, was not designed to act against *Lingin*,—contrary to the expectations we had been led to form on that subject. It would seem that for the present the Dutch are satisfied with the influence they possess over the Sultan; and there is perhaps good reason to believe that they are, after all, content to let him retain possession of his territories, so long as they can make him an instrument to forward their projects of dominion—for they are not likely to overlook the use they may put him to, in his character of descendant and chief representative of the ancient rulers of Johore. When we state that the object of the expedition in question to *Lingin*, was to obtain from the Sultan his recognition of their right to form a settlement at *Indragiri*, over which the former Sultans of Sumatra laid claim to the rights of sovereignty, the transaction may be considered as a fair sample of the line of policy we refer to, and at the same time it reveals yet more distinctly the plans of the Dutch with regard to Sumatra—a subject which we have so often brought to the notice of our readers. The *Indragiri* River is the first considerable stream on the East Coast of Sumatra to the northward of the *Jambie*, where the Dutch already possess establishments—and is navigable for vessels of considerable burthen further up into the interior than any other river on that coast—and in due process of time the foundation of establishments will follow on the rivers of *Kampar*, *Siac*, *Rakan* and *Delhi*, until every important commercial or political station on the coast is in their possession. This is by no means a merely speculative view of the matter, but is founded upon the fact that it is the admitted intention of the Dutch to establish *Agencies* at the chief ports on the East Coast of Sumatra. What the trade of Singapore has to anticipate from the establishment of an Agent of the Dutch Government at *Indragiri*, and the other places mentioned, let the present state of affairs at *Jambie* suffice to shew. There they have already begun to act upon the system in force at their other outports,—the importation of Cottons and Woollens of British manufacture from Singapore is under total prohibition, & salt from this is subjected to a duty of six Rs per pl., being above 250 per cent upon its cost in this market! Every trading prahu that enters or leaves the port is rigorously searched, and the contents of all packages examined, confiscation and fine being the penalty imposed for every infringement of the regulations. The *Rajah* of *Jambie* for the permission which he gives to ruin the country by these iniquitous measures, receives an annuity of 8,000 Rs a year. This is probably to compensate him for the revenue he is to be formerly derived from the duties on the trade, the right of fixing and levying which he now resigns to the Dutch. Do arrangements of this kind with the native *Rajahs* fall within the compass of the 4th Article of the Treaty of 1824, which provides that “no treaty hereafter made by either of the contracting parties, with any native power in the Eastern Seas, shall contain any article tending either directly or by the imposition of unequal duties to exclude the trade of the other party from the ports of such native power?” Or, what name is to be giving to a compact with a native *rajah*, which, without proceeding upon the footing of the rights of conquest, leaves it at the discretion of one of the contracting parties to impose whatever duties may be thought desirable upon the trade of the other to the ports of the native *rajah*? But, whatever may be the meaning and intention of the clause in question of the Treaty, no one, possessing any interest in this settlement from property or commerce, who reflects that this island has nothing to look for from its internal resources,—that the whole secret of its extensive and prosperous commerce is to be found in its admirable situation with reference to surrounding countries, combined with its total freedom from duties of every description—no one who reflects upon these facts but must witness with alarm, the progress of Dutch power in the richest island of the Archipelago next to Java, and the consequent establishment there of that exclusive commercial system which is still the grand feature of their policy in these seas. With the same system in operation throughout Sumatra, what will it avail that Singapore is a free port?—The natives will not come to buy manufactures here which they dare not carry back with them—or to give their produce in exchange for salt which, with the duty, will cost them higher than the Dutch monopoly price—and so in regard to many other articles. The consequences which such measures are everywhere productive of among the natives are exemplified by the effects which have

attended the recent adoption of them at *Jambie*—where, according to the last accounts, about one half of the trading prahus had been laid up or sold off by their owners, who are driven to seek their livelihood in other channels, and numbers of the population reduced to comparative poverty.

With such consequences before our eyes to the trade of this port, from the existing policy and future projects of our Dutch neighbours in these seas, it is vexatious to reflect that the representations which have gone home from the merchants on the subject should not only have been unattended with any beneficial effect, but that there should seem so little prospect of the attention of the home government being seriously given to the question, for good or for ill. This appears to be the case from the *Report of the East India and China Association* for 1838, just come to hand, and which, after noticing that the long pending matter of the Java Duties had not been brought to a satisfactory issue, proceeds to give the following account of the success of the representations from Singapore concerning the prohibitory enactments at the Dutch outports:—

“A statement of further infractions of the treaty has been lately received by the Committee from the Merchants at Singapore, by which it appears that the duty imposed on Cotton and Woollen Goods, when imported into Netherlands India from places eastward of the Cape of Good Hope, are charged £70 per cent, instead of £35, as formerly; and that a proclamation of the Governor at Batavia of November, 1834, has the effect of impeding the free communication of the natives of the Eastern Archipelago with the Ports of the two Governments, respectively, or of the Subjects of the two Governments with the Ports belonging to Native Powers, contrary to the express stipulations of the Fourth Article of the treaty.

“A Petition to the Crown from Singapore, embracing these points, was forwarded to your Committee, and has been presented to Her Majesty’s Privy Council. A duplicate has been forwarded to the India Board, and a copy has been sent to Lord Palmerston, accompanied with a strong remonstrance from the Committee. A further copy has been sent to the President of the Board of Trade, and they have all been respectively acknowledged; and Sir J. Hobhouse, “assures the Committee that he will not fail to pay due attention to the contents of that document.”

A treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Her Majesty and the King of the Netherlands has since been laid before Parliament, founded upon “a reciprocal abolition of all discriminating and countervailing duties upon Ships and Goods in the Ports of either kingdom in Europe.” And the Committee cannot refrain from stating that it was to them a matter of great disappointment to find no mention of or provision for, putting the trade of Netherlands India on a similar footing; they therefore again addressed a pressing letter to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, recalling his Lordship’s attention to their former representations, and requesting to be informed as to the present state of the negotiation on that subject, to which his Lordship has replied, that he “has not at present any farther information to give upon the subject” (16th Decr).

This account however will, we do not doubt, only stimulate the merchants of Singapore to renewed exertions, and to still more urgent remonstrances.