

POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH ATCHIN.

THE success or non-success of the Dutch attempt to subdue the north of Sumatra is not a matter to which England can be wholly indifferent. Apart from the commercial interests of our possessions in the Straits of Malacca, which may or may not be affected by the result of the war in Atchin, we have to consider the possible loss of credit and influence which may ensue when the Malay rajahs and chiefs on the Peninsula learn to attach their proper value to English protestations of peace and friendship, and, warned by the history of the Dutch attack on the Atchinese, a people believing themselves to have a defensive alliance with Great Britain, begin to regard their own treaties with us from an English point of view. We have on a former occasion pointed out that in relinquishing all interference with the island of Sumatra in favour of the Dutch in 1824 we did not altogether lose sight of our treaty obligations with the Sultan of Atchin. If the latter knows, as he very probably does, the nature of that treaty, he most likely knows that confidence was expressed on behalf of the British Government that the Dutch would not molest him. Is his knowledge of contemporary history sufficiently extended to enable him to form an accurate notion of the process by which we have recently repudiated any confidence of the kind? In other words, is he aware that his treaty rights were bartered away to the Dutch in the beginning of last year as part of the consideration for the transfer to us of the Dutch West African settlements on the coast of Guinea? A convention signed at the Hague in November, 1871 (ratifications exchanged February, 1872), after reciting the mutual desire of her Majesty Queen Victoria and the King of the Netherlands to consolidate more and more, in the spirit of the treaty of the 17th of March, 1824, the friendship between their respective countries, and consequently also to remove all occasion of misunderstanding in their mutual relations on the island of Sumatra, proceeds to declare in the following paragraph the manner in which our promises to Atchin are to be observed: "Her Britannic Majesty desists from all objections against the extension of the Netherland dominion in any part of the island of Sumatra, and consequently from the reserve in that respect contained in the notes exchanged by the Netherland and British Plenipotentiaries at the conclusion of the treaty of the 17th of March, 1824." This gives us a perfect insight into the understanding arrived at with Holland on the Sumatra question, but it leaves us entirely ignorant as to the part taken in the

negotiations by the person most interested—namely, the Sultan of Atchia. He was plainly entitled to be informed that we desired our treaty with him to be at an end, and that he must look elsewhere for allies. We do not wish rashly to assume that this was not notified to him. We have a colonial governor in the Straits of Malacca who might, if instructed to do so, have made the necessary intimation, always provided that the iron rules of routine do not prevent a colonial functionary from performing duties which obviously belong to an employé of the Foreign Office. On the other hand, it is quite possible that, though we have had friendly relations with the Sultans of Atchin since the days of Queen Elizabeth, the right of that country to any consideration at our hands is not admitted in Downing-street, even if its exact geographical position be understood there. We have alluded to this subject not with any unfriendly feeling towards the Dutch. Java and Sumatra are to them what India and Burmah are to us; let them conquer, annex, and govern if they can do so. It would ill become the rulers of Oude and the appropriators of the Punjaub to attempt to impose any limit on the Eastern conquests of any other European nation where British interests are not directly threatened. Nevertheless, it would seem that but for the Convention which we have quoted England would have been bound in honour to raise her voice to prevent a wanton attack on the independence of a friendly native ally. That England has disavowed any intention of the kind was doubtless one of the chief points insisted on by the President of Batavia in his attempt by diplomatic pressure to induce the Sultan of Atchin to submit to the Dutch demands, and hence no doubt the complaints of England's bad faith of which we have heard. The Sultan will perhaps be somewhat consoled to learn that the result of the creditable piece of negotiation to which we have alluded is not altogether satisfactory to the British, but that the colony of Elmina, on the West Coast of Africa, which was made over to us by the Dutch with a flourish of trumpets early last year, is already giving us trouble.