

THE PARTITION OF BRUNEI

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THE POLITICAL MAP OF SOUTHEAST ASIA WAS DETERMINED largely by imperialist interests and considerations of the last century. In most instances boundaries and demarcations of territories were terminal results of international rivalries involving two or more European powers, with infrequent consideration of the interests of indigenous states. In at least one area this principle does not apply, wholly. The boundaries of the states of eastern Malaysia, formerly British Borneo, are the result not so much of international rivalry as of the rivalry between Englishmen. This rivalry was centered, in the latter half of the 19th century, in commercial circles in Borneo and England, and in the highest ministries of government in Whitehall.

The details of this long contest between English gentlemen and their respective Bornean allies are obscure and little known by Asian historians for little research has been done on the area. Possibly fewer than half a dozen historians have looked at the relevant documents of the Colonial and Foreign Offices which contain the intriguing story of the formative period of the three states which are involved, Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak. Even fewer of these researchers have recorded and analysed in sufficient scholarly fashion the mass of correspondence, memoranda and minutes which tell of the decisions and agreements reached after lengthy and not infrequently heated controversy among the personalities who played roles in this bit of history.

Until the 1840's the future area of British Borneo was the nominal domain of the Sultan of Brunei. Brunei was by the 19th century one of those decaying Malay-Moslem states of Southeast Asia about which the historian Lennox Mills noted:

The rule of the Malays was as weak as it was cruel and oppressive; individually brave, they were unable to prevent their state from crumbling to pieces before their eyes. . . The Malay nobles appear to have divided their time between intrigue and dissipation at Brunei Town, and the oppression of their Dayak subjects. . .¹

¹ L.A. Mills, *British Malaya 1824-67*, Singapore, 1925 (republished by the Malay Branch Royal Asiatic Society, Singapore, 1960), p. 284.

The Sultan was unable to rule effectively beyond Brunei Town although there existed some respect for his title and leadership.

During the half century between 1840 and 1890 the domain of the sultan of Brunei shrank to one thirty-third its former size until it comprised nothing more than a tiny enclave surrounded by Sarawak and North Borneo, new states which between them nibbled away the sultan's territory until he could claim to be the sovereign of some 2,500 square miles of jungle, rivers and swampland.

It is the carving-up of the carcass of Brunei by Sarawak, North Borneo and the Colonial and Foreign Offices in London with which this paper will deal.

It would be well initially to remind ourselves of the reasons for Britain's interest in Borneo in the 19th century. Whereas in the 18th century Britain had some commercial hopes for Borneo, as witness the establishment of an East India Company factory at Balambangan Island off the northern tip of Borneo, by the 19th century Britain's chief interest was strategic: to protect her commercial routes to China. In her attempts to protect her lines of empire through the South China Sea there were two major considerations which moved policy makers in London. Firstly, the location of suitable naval stations along the eastern flank of the sea, and secondly, the assumption of political control over such areas along the western and northern coasts of Borneo as would prevent those areas from falling to a European rival.

The degree of political control over coastal areas which was thought necessary to deter a potential rival depended to a great extent upon the nature of the rivalry. As long as relatively weak rivals such as Spain and the Dutch were the closest neighbors, in the Philippines and Indonesia respectively, the possession of the offshore island of Labuan and a consular treaty with the sultan of Brunei was thought sufficient. But as France moved into a colonial position on the opposite shores of the South China Sea at Saigon in 1860, and as the whole imperialist activity increased in tempo during the latter decades of the century, with Germans and Americans appearing ever more frequently in Southeast Asian waters, Britain moved to strengthen her political position in Borneo. She moved successively from reliance upon the weak colony of Labuan and the treaty with Brunei, to a declaration of a sphere-of-influence and, in 1888 to the status of protective power over northwest Borneo. After 1888 British Borneo was a part of the British empire for all practical purposes although enjoying a large measure of internal autonomy.

The degree of political control over the coast also depended upon the nature of colonial policy emanating from London. While "little Englanders" of the Manchester school dominated policy making, as they did during most of the century until the 1870's, there was considerable reluctance to become

overly involved in the politics of indigenous states, and certainly an abhorrence of an involvement which might lead to an assumption of administrative responsibilities in those states. Such involvement would undoubtedly be a drain on the treasury and would thus tend to negate the whole purpose of the British empire which was commercial profit, so thought the champions of the Manchester school.²

It was not then a rapid movement or growth of British influence from the offshore island of Labuan to firm political dominance over northern Borneo. It was rather a slow hesitant movement over a long period. As reluctant as the growth of influence was it can nevertheless be demonstrated that at each stage Britain successfully assumed, by diplomacy and by manipulation of her colonial officials, a position of strength commensurate with the potential power of her imperialist rivals—real or imagined.³

Having thus traced in a rudimentary way the bases for the British interest and presence in northern Borneo, and perhaps being forgiven for some oversimplification of a somewhat complex issue, we now turn to the major consideration of the theme, how Englishmen increased and improved upon their place in Borneo. We turn then to the internal political picture.

From 1805 when the East India Company abandoned the factory at Balambangan, until 1840 Britain had few contacts with Borneo. In August of that year James Brooke, a well-to-do English adventurer and former officer in a Bengal regiment, intervened in a rebellion on the Sarawak river in the southern-most part of the Sultanate of Brunei. He was instrumental in bringing an end to the conflict and in 1841 was given the government of Sarawak. Five years later Brooke received an outright cession of Sarawak, then only the area which roughly corresponds to the present first division, or province of that state. From then until his death in 1868 he ruled as a white prince, founding a dynasty of white rajahs which was to last a century.

Brooke's arrival in Borneo coincided with growing demands by the merchants of Singapore for a British port on the northwest coast of Borneo. They argued that this was necessary as a defense against pirates and for the promotion of trade. From 1841 Brooke urged the British government to establish a naval station, colony or protectorate on the coast to forestall any other power from doing so. In 1845 Brooke was appointed diplomatic agent to Brunei and the following year he supervised the transfer of Labuan to Britain as a colony and became its first governor. In the meantime in 1847 he negotiated a consular treaty with the sultan. While the treaty pro-

² It must be added that such a feeling was strong among the Conservatives as well as the Liberals although "little Englanders" tended most frequently to be Radicals or Liberals. For a study of colonial policy see C.A. Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid Victorian Imperialism*, Copenhagen, 1924.

³ For a study of the growth of British influence see L.R. Wright, "British Policy in the South China Sea Area with Special Reference to Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo 1860-1888," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1963.

vided for the usual mutual trading rights it sanctioned the cession of Labuan and, most importantly for Britain's political position in Borneo, it contained a permissory clause which placed some restrictions upon the sultan's conduct of foreign relations. It said in part in Article X,⁴

. . . in order to avoid occasions of difference which might otherwise arise, His Highness the Sultan engages not to make any similar cession either of an island, or of any settlement on the mainland, in any part of his dominions, to any other nation, or to the subjects or citizens thereof, without the consent of Her Britannic Majesty.

Article X then formed the legal base of Britain's political position in Borneo. Possession of Labuan provided a base for the implementation, after a fashion, of Article X. The implementation of Article X seemingly gave Britain an exclusive hand in northern Borneo. But Article X was not entirely a blessing to British officials. In the hands of a weak and corrupt government such as that of Brunei the British were never certain that the clause would not be abrogated. It was, for example, lightly passed over by the sultan on at least two occasions when territorial cessions were made to Americans and an Austrian.⁵

It behooved the British then to establish a fairly vigilant connection with the Sultan by means of H.M. Consul to Brunei who usually also served as governor of the colony of Labuan.

While the dual role of consul and governor should have worked to promote the greater political stature of Britain on the coast it frequently, in fact, promoted not an articulation of strong policy but a clouding of the whole issue of political control. The parochial concerns of the colonial administration of Labuan were not always compatible with the best interests of Britain vis-a-vis her power position on the eastern flank of the South China Sea.

The colony was established in 1848 as a naval and coaling station. It was hoped by some that it would become an entrepot for the Borneo coast and the Sulu Archipelago. Some optimistic persons compared it to Singapore in this respect. As a station Labuan was seldom used by ships of the Royal Navy. To be sure coaling facilities were provided at the port of Victoria. Kuching in Sarawak, however, was usually favored by naval officers for a stopping point in Borneo as it was more attractive and offered the refreshment of a larger English community. More than one governor of Labuan complained that the colony was ignored in favor of Kuching.

⁴ A copy of the treaty is to be found in W.G. Maxwell and W.S. Gibson, *Treaties and Engagements Affecting the Malay States and Borneo* (London, 1924), pp. 143-47.

⁵ The grant to U.S. Consul C.L. Moses of a large tract in northern Borneo in 1865 and the grants to another American, Joseph Torrey, later to be U.S. Consul in Bangkok, in 1875; and the cession to Alfred Dent, an Englishman and Baron Gustav von Overbeck, an Austrian, in 1877.

In 1886 the coaling station was closed by the navy because of disuse. For long periods the supply of coal was not dependable. The island had rich sources of coal but the coal companies failed one after another. This was largely because of a shortage of labor. Borneo Malays were found to be unreliable workers. Sufficient numbers of Chinese laborers could not be attracted to the mines. And convict labor failed because the men refused to work underground.

Another reason for failure of coal operations was poor management. Managers were too frequently eager to show immediate and impressive progress by exploiting the surface coal and neglecting the longer and more tedious effort to win the deeper veins. During the period 1847 to 1880 four companies operated and failed one after the other. Each of the first three companies lost in the vicinity of £100,000. The fourth lost £150,000.

A fair amount of the commerce of Borneo and Sulu was attracted to Labuan where a small community of Chinese and Indian traders handled sago and jungle products. Most traders, however, found it convenient to by-pass Labuan because of the failure of the coal companies and its virtual abandonment by the navy. They traded directly to Singapore from Borneo and Sulu.

The colonial establishment of Labuan was always a modest one. From the beginning in 1848 the tendency of the Colonial Office in London was to cut back expenditures by reducing the number of officials. There were nine in the establishment in 1848. Over the years reductions came when officials after their tours were not replaced. Under Governor John Pope-Hennessy (1867 to 1871), there was a temporary reversal of this policy. He was able to badger the Colonial Office into appointing a full staff including a private secretary and an aide-de-camp for himself. By 1881 it had again been reduced, to five. It was a make-shift arrangement in which a former colonial surgeon was acting governor and also colonial secretary, auditor and police magistrate. The posts of colonial treasurer, surveyor-general, superintendent of convicts and harbor master were combined in one man. There was a colonial surgeon and an apothecary. The fifth European, a member of the Legislative Council and a judge in the general court, was also the Chief Superintendent of the British North Borneo Company.

After 1869 no imperial grants were sanctioned for Labuan and the establishment struggled along on its own meager resources. Britain's attitude toward her colony alternated between a desire to abandon the place because of its failures and hope for its eventual success. The fact is that Labuan could not be abandoned for fear of some other power taking it. The abandonment of Labuan would undermine Britain's influence in Brunei and hence her position on the coast. The sultan would have looked upon withdrawal from Labuan as a sign that Britain was losing interest in Borneo. He depended

upon the British as his defenders and for support for what small authority he continued to hold. If the British were to leave Borneo it would behoove the sultan to look elsewhere for support. So because Britain could not abandon Labuan she wanted very much to believe in the success of the colony. In this she was aided by the governors who were naturally anxious to raise the standing of Labuan.

The governor of Labuan was, of course, responsible to the Colonial Office. In his capacity as consul-general to Brunei, however, he was instructed by and reported to the Foreign Office. These two principal cabinet ministries then were involved in the internal politics of Borneo. From the beginning there was a basic conflict of interests in the dual role. Indeed, when James Brooke occupied the two posts he played a triple role for he was, in his own right, the Raja of Sarawak. The difficulties which he faced in separating his various duties brought him into disfavor with official London and forced his relinquishment of the governorship and the consular office. The conflict of interests was never more apparent than in the relations between Labuan and Sarawak. And in these relations the conflict was most in evidence over the subject of Sarawak's annexation of Brunei territory.

Most of the governors beginning with George Edwardes in 1856 were hostile to Sarawak and jealous of Brooke's rule. T.F. Callaghan who succeeded Edwardes in 1861 opposed colonial status for Sarawak, a project which Raja Brooke had been promoting for twenty years. He thought Sarawak would be a liability to Britain because "like all Borneo it suffered from want of population and cultivation." Governor Hennessy had no liking for Sarawak or Raja Brooke whom he considered a vassal of the Sultan of Brunei. Although he professed considerable respect for James Brooke and even ordered official mourning at Labuan upon his death in 1868 Hennessy did not trust James' nephew and successor Raja Charles Brooke. He looked upon Charles' desire to annex Brunei territory as a challenge to Labuan and as a threat to his own prestige at Brunei.

Governor Bulwer, succeeding Hennessy in 1871, was even more opposed to Sarawak's expansion. Governors H.T. Ussher (1875) and C.C. (1879) were more friendly to Sarawak. But in W.H. Treacher, who was acting governor and consul-general at intervals from 1877 to 1885, was found the greatest opponent to Sarawak interests and Brooke's ambitions. Treacher became an enthusiastic supporter of the British North Borneo Company and he opposed Raja Brooke's power in Borneo for all the reasons put forward by previous governors. But mainly he challenged Sarawak because Brooke opposed the company in North Borneo of which Treacher became governor in 1881.

Central to the conflict between the Sarawak rulers and other Englishmen in Borneo was the rivalry over Brunei territory and the contest for prestige and power on the coast. The rivalry over Brunei territory and the

eventual partition of the sultanate can be considered in two distinct periods or phases. The first, the period between 1840 and 1878, covering the early annexations, and before the advent of the British North Borneo Company, and the second, the period following 1878 which saw the final demarcation and settlement.

In the first period the two principal cabinet ministries involved in Bornean affairs were in general agreement on policy. Always conscious of Article X of the Brunei treaty, British policy and practice relied upon the dominance of British influence on the northwest coast. This meant to a large degree the influence which the consul had with the sultan's government. The ministries relied heavily upon their representative in Borneo and followed closely his recommendations. On several occasions Britain interfered in Brunei affairs to prevent the annexation of territory by Sarawak.⁶

Britain's refusal to allow Raja Brooke to annex territory northward of Sarawak was an attempt to prevent Sarawak from undercutting Labuan's position. Britain could not allow such competition so close to Labuan and Brunei. She could not allow an increase in the raja's influence at Brunei at the expense of the prestige of her representative, the governor and consul.

Sarawak annexed Brunei territory on two occasions before 1878. In 1853 she purchased northward to and including the district of the Rajang River. And in 1861 she purchased the five so-called sago rivers as far north as Kidurong Point. In neither instance was the consent of the British government requested nor reference made to Article X of the 1847 treaty. Neither did official London obstruct the annexations. But in 1868 when Raja Charles Brooke sought to purchase a further stretch of territory, to Baram Point, the Foreign Office, upon the advice of Governor Pope-Hennessy, applied Article X and refused Brunei permission to grant the territory to Brooke.⁷ The Colonial Office concurred in this policy.

What were the various motives?

Brooke wanted Baram for a very practical reason. Sarawak people and Brunei subjects intermingled in the area of the upper reaches of the Baram and Rajang rivers. Friction often occurred between them, especially between Sarawak traders and Brunei Malays. It was difficult to settle these disputes or for innocent parties to receive redress because of the lack of control by the sultan over his territories. Raja Brooke wanted Baram because he saw

⁶ Britain interfered also on two occasions, in 1846 and 1877, to help select the successor to the throne of Brunei and thus guarantee a pro-British orientation of the government of the sultanate.

⁷ The Foreign Office had in 1863 recognized Sarawak as an independent principality. Thus for purposes of Article X of the treaty Britain could consider Brooke, although a British subject, the ruler of a foreign nation. Although this was a dubious interpretation it effectively obstructed Sarawak's annexation of Baram. See Wright, *British Policy* . . . Chap. IV, *passim*.

nothing but unrest and continual friction in a rich trading area as long as a weak sultan held nominal rule.

The Foreign Office shared Governor Hennessy's distrust of Charles Brooke. It disliked Brooke's tactics with the Sultan. Hennessy complained, for example, in 1871 that Raja Brooke, "that ill-tempered vassal," used threats to compel the sultan to accede to his demands. The sultan, Hennessy said, was a good and true friend of Britain and had done more for the cause of justice on the coast than all the well meaning officials of Sarawak had achieved in thirty years.

But what most deeply disturbed the Foreign Office were the indications of foreign interest in the area. As recently as 1865 an American company had purchased a tract of territory in northern Borneo.⁸ The company failed within a year. The French were already heavily entrenched on the Indochina coast in Annam and Cambodia and were being observed with a great deal of apprehension by British officials.

Not only, then, did the Foreign Office obstruct Brooke's annexation of Baram, they developed their case one step further and took the occasion to declare the whole northwest coast a British sphere of influence. The Foreign Office saw no reason to arouse the suspicion of other powers by sponsoring territorial changes. Sarawak could not annex Baram.

The Colonial Office was in agreement with the Foreign Office on the Baram issue. Officials there were opposed to Sarawak's expansion not because of foreign threats but because of the supposed competition with Labuan. Although Labuan had not prospered, Governor Hennessy in 1868 was thought to be making progress in reforming the administration of the colony. The Colonial Office felt that Labuan had bright prospects in spite of some doubt concerning Hennessy's reports of the favorable commercial position of the colony.

In 1868 Brooke thus found himself opposed in his expansionist designs by a formidable combination of the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office and the Governor of Labuan. For the next ten years this combination held firm against Brooke's repeated attempts to annex Baram.⁹ It was not a change in the international "balance" of power in the South China Sea which brought an end to Brooke's ostracism from official London but a change in the attitude of the Colonial Office toward its colony of Labuan. This change plus a new colonial project in northern Borneo formed the nucleus of the second phase of rivalry over Brunei which culminated in the partition of the sultanate.

⁸ The American Trading Company of Borneo headed by Consul C.L. Moses and Joseph Torrey. For an account of this intriguing enterprise see K.G. Tregonning, "American Activity in North Borneo, 1865-1881," in *Pacific Historical Review* (November 1954), and Wright, *op. cit.*, Chaps. IV and V.

⁹ Brooke repeated his request to annex Baram in 1874, 1876 and 1878. See Wright, *British Policy* . . . Chap. IV.

The change of attitude toward Labuan at the Colonial Office was a slow process. It began with a change of personnel in the permanent staff. In 1870 Frederick Rogers, who for over a decade held the post of permanent undersecretary and who was a declared proponent of the Manchester philosophy, was succeeded by Robert Herbert, a Liberal and one time private secretary to William Gladstone. His assistant undersecretary was R.H. Meade who would succeed Herbert in 1892, and who had a similar background, as private secretary to Lord Granville. Neither Herbert nor Meade, though Liberals and despite their close past association with the Manchester school of thought on colonial policy, adhered to the philosophy of restricting colonial responsibilities which had so long dominated the Colonial Office. Together they brought fresh thinking to bear upon colonial problems.¹⁰

Coincidental with the change of personnel at the Colonial Office was the disclosure of the financial maladministration of Labuan by Governor Hennessy. During most of the 1870's whenever Labuan was discussed a mood of disappointment dominated the subject. There was sentiment in favor of drastic change for the colony. At one point the Colonial Office favored reducing the status of the colony to a penal settlement. At another its attachment to the colony of the Straits Settlement was seriously considered. In the end nothing was done further than allowing the process of attrition to continue. But after 1878 the Colonial Office never used Labuan as a pretext for opposing the expansion of Sarawak. When the failure of Labuan was at last recognized the basis for opposition to Raja Brooke was removed.

The Colonial Office *rapprochement* with the raja came about largely through the efforts of Governor Ussher during the latter half of the decade. To be sure the governor's first concern had been for Labuan. In the summer of 1876 he warned, as had governors before him, that Sarawak's expansion northward would injure Labuan's trade and prestige. But Ussher took the effort to establish friendly communications with Raja Brooke. This resulted at first in rather cautious praise of the raja's "firm and just" rule which had "saved some of the finest provinces in Borneo from anarchy and bloodshed." Eventually Ussher became convinced of the raja's sincere attempts to bring good government to the Borneo coast, and he wrote a long and complimentary report on Sarawak which impressed both Herbert and Meade. From this point onward suspicion of Brooke at the Colonial Office diminished.

The reversal of attitude was complete in 1878 and was influenced greatly by another development in Borneo. That development was the grant

¹⁰Recent authors have noted and discussed the personnel changes at the Colonial Office in the early 1870's and the "beginning of a new era" which those changes helped to bring about. See C.D. Cowan, *19th Century Malaya* (London 1961), Chap. IV, *passim*; and David M.L. Farr, *The Colonial Office and Canada, 1867-1887*. (Toronto, 1955), Chap. 2, *passim*

by the Sultan of Brunei of northern Borneo to Baron Gustav von Overbeck, the Australian honorary consul in Hong Kong, and Alfred Dent of the London oriental trading firm of Dent and Company. This grant¹¹ which led to the founding of the state of North Borneo created a division among British officials concerned with Borneo.

Baron von Overbeck's mission to Brunei in the winter of 1877-78, which culminated in the grant, found Ussher on sick-leave in England and William H. Treacher acting for him as governor and consul. Ussher was in contact with the government in London, however, and warned that the grant to von Overbeck and Dent might endanger the British position. They were, he said, commercial adventurers in the project for profit and would sell their rights to the highest bidder, possibly a foreign power.¹²

Raja Brooke who had been trying to annex Brunei territory for ten years was incensed that so large an area of Brunei should be obtained so easily by strangers to the country. He complained, with some justification, that Acting Consul Treacher supported von Overbeck's project. He reminded the Foreign Office of its policy of opposing territorial changes on the coast. Governor Ussher and Raja Brooke joined in opposing the Dent-von Overbeck scheme and succeeded in gaining the sympathy of the Colonial Office. While British policy toward the project was to be decided at the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office in 1878 supported Raja Brooke when, in July, the Colonial Secretary, Michael Hicks-Beach, informed Lord Salisbury at the Foreign Office that Sarawak's request for Baram should be favored if any territorial changes in Borneo were contemplated. Undersecretary Herbert with no little sarcasm even suggested giving Raja Brooke Labuan as well. "For Baram," he wrote, "will bring Sarawak close up to our important island—failed in coal and failing in coin."

Dent and von Overbeck who formed the North Borneo Provisional Association applied for a royal charter as the British North Borneo Company. After much debate and scrutiny the charter was granted in November 1881. The fight for the charter, which was heavily supported by the Foreign Office from the first, involved the Colonial Office and Foreign Office in heated controversy over the disposal of Brunei territories. The Dent-von Overbeck project was the vehicle which finally moved the Foreign Office from opposition to Brooke's acquisition of Baram.

For years the Foreign Office had based their opposition upon rather tenuous grounds: Firstly, that any territorial changes would arouse the sus-

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of the grant and the political origins of North Borneo (Sabah) see Wright, *British Policy . . .*, Chap. IV and V, and L.R. Wright, "Historical Notes on the North Borneo Dispute," in *The Journal of Asian Studies* (May 1966), pp. 471-84.

¹² The grant was conditionally offered to certain parties in Vienna and Berlin upon the Baron's return to Europe.

pitions of foreign powers; and secondly, that Sarawak itself was a foreign power and ought not to be allowed to intrude upon British influence in Brunei. As to the first, it must be remembered that Britain in 1868 had pronounced a sphere-of-interest over the whole of the northwest coast including Sarawak. If anything was calculated not to arouse international suspicions such an action as this was not the one. Further, Britain had in 1863 granted Sarawak recognition as an independent principality although the Foreign Office as late as 1876 insisted that because of a technicality Her Majesty had not recognized James Brooke as a sovereign prince.¹³

The studied ambiguity of the Foreign Office arguments ignored several important points in Britain's favor. First, that Sarawak was an English settlement and that there was not a shred of foreign influence in the principality in spite of Raja James Brooke's flirtation with French and Belgian connections prior to his death in 1868. Secondly, Raja Charles had declared on several occasions that wherever the Sarawak flag flew British interests would be paramount. The state was, in the 1870's, a flourishing English colonial enterprise.

With the advent of the Dent-von Overbeck scheme the Foreign Office decided to postpone a decision on Brooke's latest request for the annexation of Baram until the charter issue was decided.

The Colonial Office reservations about the Dent-von Overbeck scheme were based upon the contention that Raja Brooke had a better claim to northern Borneo than had the new syndicate. The colonial officials were suspicious of Baron von Overbeck's part in the scheme and the possibility that the cession would be sold to Germany or Austria. On this point the Foreign Office admitted that both Ussher and Treacher had said there was nothing to prevent the owners from transferring their cession to a foreign power. But, the Foreign Office argued, a charter giving ultimate control to Britain would prevent this. In the event the Colonial Secretary, Hicks-Beach, decided to press for government sanction of Brooke's annexation of Baram if the Foreign Office favoured the Dent-von Overbeck venture. Soon after granting the charter to the British North Borneo Company, Britain decided to allow Brooke to annex Baram. Thus it is seen that once it was decided to support North Borneo the Foreign Office could no longer sustain their argument against Brooke.

The loss of territory to Brunei was considerable. Sarawak gained a stretch of Brunei coastline of about 120 miles, with the hinterland and the indented river valleys included. The new state of North Borneo was formed from perhaps 25,000 square miles of Brunei territory with a coastline of

¹³ The technicality: In appointing the first consul to Sarawak in 1864 the Foreign Office instructed him to apply for acceptance as consul from the "local authorities" instead of from the sovereign ruler, as was customary. See Wright, *British Policy* . . . , pp. 239-44; and Graham Irwin, *19th Century Borneo* (The Hague, 1955), p. 189.

some 500 miles stretching from Kimanis Bay, less than 100 miles northeast of Brunei Town, around the northern part of Borneo to the Sibuco River on the east coast. The state comprised a somewhat smaller area than the present state of Sabah.¹⁴

As to the attitude of Brunei toward the carving-up of its territory few of the rajas of Brunei Town objected. In general the temptation of a considerable monetary payment in-hand overrode any desire to retain nominal title to territories over which Brunei sultans had long since ceased to rule and from which little if any revenue was obtained. That the presence of the British colonial establishments in Borneo and the monetary payments to the sultanate tended to bolster-up a declining court and infuse it with superficial vigor was not lost upon the sultan and some of his rajas.

This was not to be the end of the dismemberment of Brunei, however. For hardly had the two states completed their respective annexations than they were seeking further territory. The keen competition which arose over the charter issue and Baram created a strong and bitter rivalry between the two states. The rivalry was evident not only in the respective prestige and influence of each at the court of Brunei, but among the advocates of each colony in England. North Borneo lured away some Sarawak officials for service in the north. To be sure in time most of these returned, while some of the recruits in North Borneo ended up under the employ of Raja Brooke. Both Sarawak and North Borneo retained agents to press their respective causes in Brunei Town and to report important intelligence about conditions there.

The attention of the two states was soon drawn to the area remaining to Brunei. It seems clear that both Raja Brooke and the North Borneo Company fully expected the demise of the sultanate and each was determined to claim as large a share as possible. Raja Brooke had, for example, as early as the summer of 1874 suggested that the whole of the Brunei sultanate be placed under the administration of Sarawak as a protectorate.¹⁵ And although this was a tactic in his long campaign to acquire Baram it indicated his ambition to stabilize and organize the government of the whole of the northwest coast under the control of the only viable government of Englishmen in the area, that of Sarawak. That there was little stability in Brunei or a guarantee of even a future viability for the sultanate was indicated by the ease with which concessions could be bought at Brunei with ready cash. In 1882 W.C. Cowie, an English trader and later to be managing

¹⁴ The territory excluded several small river enclaves on the northwest coast north-eastward of Brunei Town which were under the independent rule of river chieftains. These rivers were later annexed separately by individual agreements between the chartered company and the chiefs.

¹⁵ Brooke to Lord Derby, 17 July 1874, in Foreign Office Borneo correspondence, series 12, volume 42 (FO 12/42) as cited in Wright, *British Policy . . .*, p. 222.

director of the British North Borneo Company in London, leased the mineral rights of Muara, a peninsula at the mouth of the Brunei River. The next year two more leases were sold by the aging Sultan Mumin. One and a half miles of coastline north of Brunei Bay went to one Lee Cheng Lan and included the "independent governing authority of the area." In July 1883 A.H. Everett, a former North Borneo employee, was granted the mineral rights of the Pandasan River. The following year he was granted the revenue rights as well.

As we have already noted the company's grant as far south as the Kimanis River was interrupted by several rivers belonging to independent chiefs and not included in the grants to Dent and von Overbeck. These rivers formed enclaves in company territory and became a problem to the company in its attempt to develop the area. Rebellious tribes as well as slayers and smugglers could operate in company territory from these areas. The Pandasan River was one of these enclaves. Its lease by Everett particularly irked the company officials because they suspected that Raja Brooke and Everett were in alliance and meant to restrict the company by controlling the enclaves and by preventing its approach to Brunei in any possible territorial aggrandizement southward. They had good reason to suspect Everett and Brooke for Everett had in 1881 been established in Brunei Town as Brooke's agent and in 1882 had been offered the post of resident officer in Baram by the raja. Everett had been for some time petitioning the sultan for mineral rights in much of what remained of Brunei territory and when he succeeded in obtaining Pandasan he had also coveted several other unleased rivers. In 1885 Governor Treacher of North Borneo leased the Putaton district, north of Kimanis Bay, from its chief, to prevent Everett from going there.

The company found it necessary in order to protect its own interests in Brunei and on its southern frontier to engage in the scramble for Brunei territory. In 1883 North Borneo officials were instructed by the managing director of the company in London, Sir Rutherford Alcock, a former British consul in China, to negotiate for the cession of Brunei land bordering company territory. "We are eager," wrote Alcock, "to get a foothold in Brunei before the death of the present sultan." In June, North Borneo asked the aging sultan for the lease of the Klias Peninsula and the Padas River on the North of Brunei Bay. This was only a first step. What the company envisaged was the annexation of the five main rivers emptying into Brunei Bay. These were, from north to south, the Klias, Padas, Lawas, Trusan and Limbang. Alcock told the Colonial Office that the rivers of Brunei Bay "fall within our absorbing power."¹⁶

Early in 1884 Governor Treacher had again become acting governor of Labuan and consul upon the illness of Governor Leys. He reported to Lon-

¹⁶ Alcock to Colonial Office, 8 May 1883 in FO 12/59.

don that the Limbang River, under proper management would be a rich district to the company. The Limbang, of which the Brunei River was an estuary, was perhaps the most fertile of the lands left to Brunei. The Brunei pengerans, however, extorted taxes and fines to an extreme degree so that by the 1880's the inhabitants of the river were more or less in revolt against Brunei. In June 1884, the Limbang people attacked and killed agents of the Pengeran Temenggong of Brunei who were extracting "taxes." Later they successfully defeated a small force under the pengeran himself and followed it up by moving on Brunei, where they attacked several houses on the outskirts. The sultan appealed to Acting Consul Treacher, who refused to intervene unless the sultan agreed to cease the arbitrary taxation of the Limbang people and promised in writing to limit taxes to a poll tax and 5 per cent *ad valorem* duty on gutta percha. The sultan reluctantly agreed, but while Treacher was in Limbang getting the agreement of the Limbang chiefs to the document, Brunei resorted to the only power it had to retaliate. It urged the Murut tribe of the Trusan River district to attack their old enemies, the Limbang people. Treacher was able to persuade the chiefs to sign the truce. The chiefs relied upon the English to hold the sultan to the agreement.

In October the Limbang chiefs were again threatening to attack Brunei and the sultan was powerless to prevent them. At this point Treacher arrived on board the British naval vessel *H.M.S. Pegasus*, and the visit of this warship had a quieting effect upon the situation. Brunei was upbraided for allowing the Muruts to attack Limbang while Treacher was negotiating the truce and he received an apology. At the same time the Padas-Klias cessions were offered to the company and Treacher accepted them. With an eye to Sarawak, Treacher had written into the Padas cession the stipulation that any prospective cession of Brunei territory would first be offered to the company. Just how binding such a restriction was would soon be evident.

Prior to this Treacher had suggested to the company a pact with Raja Brooke for the partition of Brunei, giving the company all Brunei territory to and including the Limbang River, and granting to Sarawak the land as far north as the Tutong River, about mid-way between Baram Point and Brunei Town. Such a plan would suit Alcock's ambitions for the company would in effect surround Brunei and control Brunei Bay while the raja would be stopped somewhat further south. Alcock had declared his interest in obtaining Cowie's lease of Muara and had also proposed to the Colonial Office an arrangement for taking over Labuan for a period of three years. Had such plans been successful the instability of the area during the next few years would have been prevented. In the event only the offer of Muara was taken up. But not only did North Borneo feel it could develop the rivers of Brunei Bay better than could Sarawak, it also desired a control over what

would remain of the sultanate. Alcock hoped to do it by urging Britain to establish a protectorate over Brunei and appoint the company to administer it. Short of this he was prepared to propose the annexation of Brunei. But annexation he hoped would be only as a last resort to keep it from falling to Sarawak, for the company had its hands full of plans for the development of an already vast territory.

Events in Brunei moved rapidly. In December, the company's hopes were thwarted when Sarawak got ahead of them in a bid for the Limbang River. F.O. Maxwell, the senior resident of Sarawak, acting for Raja Brooke who was in England, went to Brunei to seek compensation for Sarawak traders who were killed by Muruts in the Trusan district. The old sultan and his regent Pengeran Temenggong offered to cede the Trusan River to Sarawak and Maxwell accepted. The Temenggong also offered Limbang. Maxwell accepted conditionally upon the raja's return. When Treacher heard of Maxwell's success in Brunei he fired off angry dispatches to the Foreign Office and to the company court of directors in London. He urged Alcock to press the Foreign Office to send him instructions. As acting consul he reminded Brunei that British permission must be granted to any cession of Brunei territory. He wrote to Alcock,

I have strained every nerve to prevent any cession, using the agreement in the new Padas lease, with reference to submitting all offers of territory to the company in the first instance, as my principle card. It would be wearisome to relate all the steps I have taken with this object in view.¹⁷

Treacher had indeed been active. Under his direction, G.L. Davies, the company's west coast resident, became the company's agent in Brunei. With Maxwell and Everett acting for the raja, the rivalry for cessions reached a peak during December 1884.

In his dispatch to the Foreign Office Treacher said that Britain should decide whether Sarawak or North Borneo got Limbang. Baram, he said, formed a good boundary for Sarawak. Pending a decision he proposed that both Sarawak and North Borneo cease further negotiations for cessions. Sarawak deplored the action by Treacher of bringing North Borneo into the picture for Sarawak maintained that the company had never been offered either Trusan or Limbang.

The crisis over Limbang showed up the factionalism in Brunei. While the sultan was old, imbecile and weak, his pengerans, unable to protect themselves from the Limbang attacks, divided on the question as to the cession of the river. At the time of the Padas lease to North Borneo the

¹⁷ Treacher to Alcock, 20 December 1884, in the British North Borneo Company Papers (BNBCoP), Colonial Office Library, as cited in Wright, *British Policy* . . . , p. 397. (The company papers are now in the Colonial Office collection of the Public Record Office, London.)

Temenggong had agreed to press for the cession if the company would loan him \$25,000. When the company instead advanced \$15,000 to the Pengeran di Gadong and Pengeran Bandahara in return for pushing the negotiations the Temenggong was angered. It was in this mood that the Temenggong ceded the Trusan Riven to Sarawak for \$4,500 and also offered the Limbang as noted above. The old sultan and the di Gadong refused to agree to the Limbang grant. Thus while the Temenggong and the Bandahara favored Sarawak in this instance, the di Gadong sided with North Borneo. The latter depended for part of his income upon the company for he held certain hereditary rights in the Padas River and thus shared in the lease money from that district. It is interesting to note that in his official capacity as a Brunei raja the di Gadong was the keeper of the sultan's seal and regalia. When the Temenggong became regent in 1878, the di Gadong had refused to give up control of the seal. The seal was necessary for validating cession documents. It was while that di Gadong controlled the seal that W.C. Cowie had purchased the Muara governing rights. And the document was sealed without the Sultan's knowledge.¹⁸

But these alignments it must be understood were tenuous and depended in no small way on the monetary payments each rival could or was willing to offer to the Brunei pengerans. In addition both North Borneo and Sarawak used the threat of withholding payments for other leases in order to keep the Brunei rajas in a sympathetic mood.

It was the di Gadong's friendship and his control over the sultan which the company exploited in their attempt to gain the favored position in Brunei and to annex Limbang. Treacher instructed his agent Davies how to influence the pengeran and the sultan. "Maybe," he said, "we can get the government of Limbang, without actual cession" by inducing them to withhold their "chop" on the Trusan and Limbang cessions to Sarawak. Davies was to urge the sultan to write to the consul repudiating the cessions to Sarawak. At the same time Treacher persuaded Maxwell to agree to cease negotiations in Brunei pending a decision from London.

With the Padas-Klias cessions to North Borneo and the Trusan-Limbang cessions to Sarawak to deal with, the British government was handed the complications of Brunei to unravel early in 1885. With the requests for the sanction of these cessions came also the company's proposal for a protectorate over Brunei. Both states protested against the cessions to the other. The agents of both were busy buying influence and advantage in Brunei Town.¹⁹ Raja Brooke again complained of Treacher's triple role as

¹⁸ See Treacher to Foreign Office, 13 May 1885 in FO 12/72.

¹⁹ For examples, see the Davies-Treacher correspondence for December 1884 in BNBCoP. The company advanced to the di Gadong \$15,000 for the Padas-Klias cessions; it offered \$4,500 for the Limbang, plus \$1,000 to the sultan's secretary if he could influence the cession, a \$5,000 loan to the sultan, and a promise to Inche Maho-

governor, acting consul and acting governor of Labuan. Indeed Treacher's interests were conflicting. He was freely sending to the company in London copies of his official correspondence with the British government.²⁰ He had negotiated the Padas cession to North Borneo while visiting Brunei in a British naval vessel as acting consul. When the raja pointed out that the cession was "negotiated under cover of the consular flag" Treacher remarked that the accusation was "too childish to call for refutation." In answer to a question in Parliament about Treacher's conflict of interest, the parliamentary undersecretary in the Colonial Office replied that the sultan was fully aware of the constitution of the North Borneo Company and of Treacher's role. In private Colonial Office officials were more candid. When some time later a gift of a rifle was presented to the sultan by Treacher as acting governor of Labuan, Meade, at the Colonial Office, remarked that "it may be difficult for the sultan to discriminate clearly between the acting governor of Labuan and the officer of the North Borneo Company as the giver of it."

The Colonial Office supported Raja Brooke's protest and pointed out to the Foreign Office Treacher's serious conflict of interest. Pouncefote agreed that there was a conflict but failed to see where Treacher had acted other than scrupulously in support of British interests. Treacher was assured of the confidence of the Foreign Office. This suggests that Pouncefote viewed company interests and British interests as one. Indeed the role of Pouncefote in support of the North Borneo venture from its inception is certain if not always clear. Even as early as 1878 when the Dent-von Overbeck cession was made Pouncefote was using his official position in the Foreign Office to promote the project.²¹ Nevertheless the Colonial Office with Foreign Office approval soon began making arrangement for Governor Leys return to Borneo to relieve Treacher.

The company in London headed by Alcock and with sympathetic ear of Pouncefote and its man as acting consul was in better position than Sarawak to influence the government decision on the cessions and protectorate question. Alcock revived the fears of Sarawak's political instability and possibility of foreign influence in Sarawak. He used this argument to the

met, the British Consulate writer, of a "good berth" in Limbang if the company got it. For Sarawak Everett was instructed to offer \$7,000 to \$8,000 for the Padas River; Maxwell got the Trusan for \$4,500 plus a \$13,000 advance to the Temenggong and the threat of withholding two years' worth of Sarawak cession money (\$22,000).

²⁰ See for example Treacher to Alcock, 29 October, 10, 16 and 24 November 1884, and 7 March 1885, in BNBCoP. "I enclose you," he wrote to Alcock, "my draft of a report to the Foreign Office in full reliance that you will see that the Foreign Office does not become aware of my having done so." Alcock replied, that he could feel "quite at ease about the safe custody of the enclosures." (Private letter of Alcock to Treacher, 17 April 1885.)

²¹ See Wright, *British Policy* . . . Chaps. V and VI; and Irwin, *op. cit.*, p.204.

Foreign Office in official letters and in private notes to Pauncefoot in attempts to prevent Sarawak's annexation of Brunei land. As for Sarawak Raja Brooke was frequently in England. During most of 1884 and 1885 Governor Leys was also at home. Both worked on government officials. Perhaps Sarawak's strongest card was the support she received at the Colonial Office for reasons already noted. Herbert pointed out to the Foreign Office the inaccuracy of Alcocks's allegations of the susceptibility of Sarawak to foreign pressure. For Raja Brooke had with the Baram cession agreed to be bound by a restrictive measure granting Britain a veto over any transfer of Sarawak territory. The Colonial Office actually favored transferring Labuan to Sarawak and allowing her to annex all of Brunei. "As far as the Colonial Office is concerned," wrote Meade, "we incline rather to the raja than to the company." As for Brunei and Labuan he said, "we tend to encourage their transfer to Sarawak in preference to the company." Herbert pointed out that Sarawak was sound financially while North Borneo would require an imperial grant to administer additional territory. There was a strong belief among officials that the North Borneo Company was headed for financial collapse because it had over extended its resources. If this happened Sarawak ought to be in a position to take over.²²

On the immediate question of the cessions, however, the Colonial Office suggested that Britain approve them in line with the previous proposal for a partition. This was, after all, a partial partition. The Foreign Office agreed and notified Treacher that Britain would not object to the Brunei cessions of Padas-Klias to the North Borneo and of Trusan-Limbang to Sarawak.

At this point Brunei affairs became even more complicated. The raja began occupying the Trusan River. With his pending move into Limbang this now meant that Sarawak territory surrounded Brunei on three sides. Moreover it was now pointed out to the Foreign Office that the Trusan and Limbang districts were not contiguous and that in effect Brunei territory would be separated into two parts by Sarawak's possession of Limbang. Britain decided however to stand by her sanction of the cessions. The company as a retaliatory measure now negotiated with W.C. Cowie for the purchase of his rights in the Muara Peninsula. The company was attracted by the idea of establishing at Muara a coaling station for ships plying the South China Sea. In May 1885, the sultan approved of this transfer pending British sanction. This was almost the last official act of Sultan Mumin's reign. He died on the 29th of May and was succeeded by his regent the Pengeran Temenggong as Sultan Hasim.

²² The Prime Minister Lord Derby agreed with the Colonial Office that Sarawak was the logical protector of Brunei because of its experience and financial stability. He wrote, "I think a Sarawak protectorate of what remains of Brunei might prove a good arrangement, but we need not now say so." See Minute of 28 March 1885 in Colonial Office Labuan series 144, vol. 60 (CO 144/60)

When the Foreign Office sent their approval of the cessions to North Borneo and Sarawak news of the Sultan's death had not reached London. The Foreign Office consequently did not know that the new Sultan was now bent upon a different policy. He had, for example, soon after assuming the throne reconsidered both the Limbang cession to Sarawak and the transfer of Muara to the company. A few weeks before the old sultan's death, in a burst of unanimity, the pengerans of Brunei had agreed among themselves not to cede any more Brunei territory.²³ The new sultan considered the grant of Muara to Cowie invalid because he, as regent, was not consulted at the time and because the di Gadong had sealed the cession without the knowledge of the old sultan. Britain was reluctant to force the transfer of Muara to the company against the sultan's wishes. Thus in spite of British sanction for the Limbang cession Sultan Hasim now refused to give up either Limbang to the raja or Muara to the company.

Yet there was strong sentiment in Britain in favor of settling the Brunei question because of the instability of the area and its vulnerability to foreign overtures. And the gradual absorption of Brunei by its neighboring states, as advocated by the Colonial Office, might be too dangerous a process. Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury noted in October 1885:

I agree to the proposal but I look with some apprehension to the Colonial Office plan of pressing the wreck of Brunei. Remember the new principles Bismarck has introduced into colonial politics. He might as likely as not seize the balance while we are awaiting to see it reach the proper stage of decay.²⁴

The two principal ministries then evolved a compromise plan which had been proposed by Governor Leys. The Padas-Klias and Trusan-Limbang cessions would be confirmed, making Trusan the boundary between Sarawak and North Borneo. Simple political protectorates would be established over the three states of Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo. A special mission was taken dispatched to Borneo to observe conditions. Pauncefote wrote from the Foreign Office,

. . . it appears to the Secretary of State that the authority of the British Crown is not defined with sufficient precision to obviate the risk of an attempt being made by some foreign power to obtain a footing in those regions.²⁵

It was necessary to secure the British position, he continued,

. . . not only from the magnitude of the commercial interests involved, but also from the strategical position of the territories in question. The remarkable activ-

²³ Despite this agreement Raja Brooke was able to persuade Sultan Hasim, by a loan of \$40,000, not to cede territory to any party other than Sarawak or Britain.

²⁴ Minute of 24 October 1885 in FO 12/68.

²⁵ Pauncefote to the CO, 13 January 1887 in FO 12/75.

ity which has been displayed during the last few years by some foreign states in the acquisition of colonies and new outlets for trade call for the utmost vigilance on the part of Her Majesty's Government, in order to avoid rival claims and encroachments in territories where British interests preponderate so largely as they do in that part of Borneo.

The Governor of the Straits Settlements, Frederick Weld, was entrusted with the Borneo mission. He was instructed to present the plan of settlement to the sultan. In Brunei Sultan Hasim, although urged to give up Limbang to Sarawak, declared his intention not to cede any more territory because of the raja's agreement. But he welcomed a British protectorate and asked for a resident. Both North Borneo and Sarawak agreed to the plan. Weld in his report recommended a protectorate for Brunei similar to those in the Malay states, with a resident-adviser to the sultan who would also administer Labuan. But London felt that Weld's insistence upon a resident and an administrative protectorate was financially impracticable. The treasury would not make available an imperial grant. A simple protectorate was agreed to although there were some last minute reservations. Lord Salisbury, noting that Sarawak and North Borneo were "rapidly crushing out" Brunei between them, wrote,

I think we had better let them finish it, and make no agreement with the Sultan of Brunei which would stand in the way of a consummation which is inevitable and, on the whole, desirable.

Nevertheless the whole plan was adopted.

Thus in 1888 Britain negotiated protectorates with all three states. As the extension of both Sarawak and North Borneo into Brunei territory had already been agreed, the final settlement of the Brunei problem was substantially as the plan had been given to Weld. Two rivers south of Brunei, Belait and Tutong, as well as the Brunei River and Muara remained under the sultan. Though British permission for the cession of Limbang stood on the record it remained nominally under the sultan. In practice, the chiefs of Limbang were independent until 1890 when they placed themselves under the rule of Raja Brooke and he annexed the district. Contrary to Herbert's prediction the sultan did not readily accept the cession of Limbang.

The agreements provided for no interference with the internal affairs of the states. The important provision, however, gave Britain control over their foreign relations.

Summary

By the latter half of the 19th century Brunei was in the last stages of decline. Her sultan and ministers competed with each other for wealth to

be had by making cessions. Enriching themselves was the main motive in their respective roles in the partition of the state. But another motive gradually appeared. The rapid dismemberment of Brunei alarmed the old sultan and his heir. Thus the continued existence of Brunei became a motive for a different attitude. How much this could stand against the offer of ready money was seen later when in 1890 Brooke annexed Limbang and offered the sultan \$6,000 a year. Sultan Hasim refused the payment. It was used to develop the Limbang district.

As we have seen the various rajas allied themselves with the most lucrative proposition of the moment presented by Davies and Everett, the agents of North Borneo and Sarawak respectively. Raja Brooke of Sarawak had ambitions to rule all of northern Borneo. The company interfered with these plans and so Brooke increased the pace of his movement northward by pressing for now part, now all of Brunei. The company at first was content with its large cession. But under the energetic administration of Treacher it decided to oppose Brooke's advance and itself developed an absorption policy toward Brunei. Britain's objective was to prevent an opening for a foreign footing in northern Borneo and to secure her own dominant position there as an imperial power. This involved stabilizing the political situation by settling the rival claims of Sarawak and North Borneo; delineating the boundaries of the three states; and placing the relations between each one and Britain on a regulated basis by establishing simple political protectorates.

It is quite clear that both the Colonial and Foreign Offices fully expected Brunei to be completely absorbed by her neighbors. Nothing in the protectorate agreements stood in the way. When Raja Brooke annexed Limbang it was not surprising then that Britain raised no protest. Brunei remains, a small enclave surrounded by Sarawak, the result of the 19th century rivalry of Englishmen with mixed commercial and political motives. Lawas River, the last district to change hands, was ceded by the company to Raja Brooke in 1905.