THREATENED PARADISE
North Borneo and Its Peoples

By the same author

IN THE SHADOW OF KINABALU

CYRIL ALLISTON

THREATENED PARADISE

North Borneo and Its Peoples

ILLUSTRATED AND
WITH MAP

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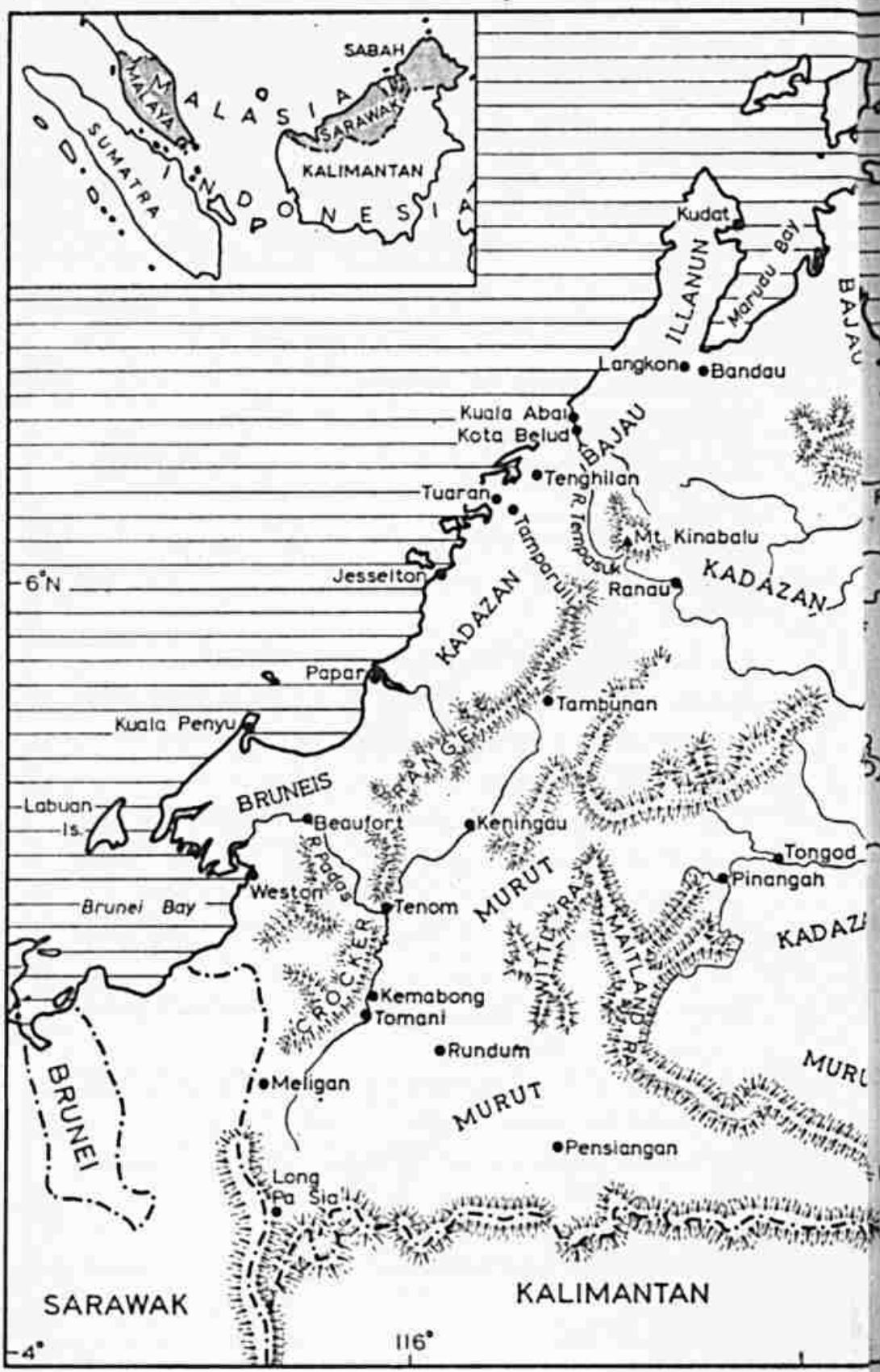
ILLUSTRATIONS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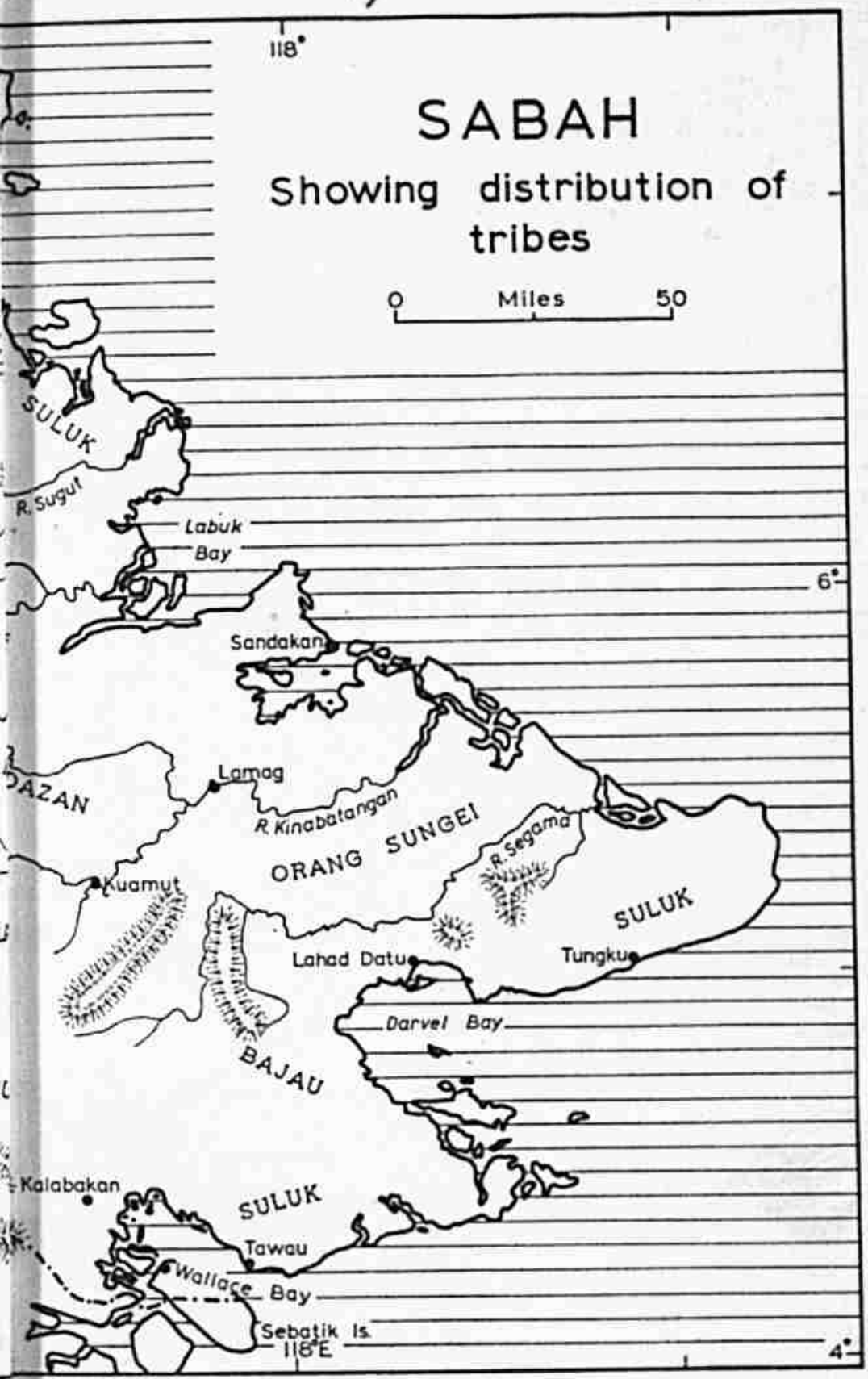
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Part One
SEA-GYPSIES' COAST

1

SABAH, a country of 29,388 square miles in the island of Borneo, has since 1963 formed part of the Federation of Malaysia.

It is still far from the tourist routes, and as long as Indonesian 'confrontation' lasts and its southern borders are harassed by guerrilla bands, is likely to remain so. Nevertheless a certain number of visitors find their way to Sabah's shores and often their first reaction is one of considerable surprise.

Most of the towns are on the coast and their unexpectedly impressive modern buildings raise clean lines against the blue of a tropic sky. The steamer docks at a new, business-like wharf. Or an airport turns out to be as up-to-date as that from which the visitor's plane took off in maybe Singapore or Hong Kong or Australia. Hotels prove as comfortable as many in the well-known cities of the East. Modern banks, offices, public buildings and blocks of flats all combine to strengthen an atmosphere of determined progressiveness.

"Can this really be *Borneo*?" one is tempted to ask. "No shrunken heads? No blowpipes and poisoned darts?" No—that is the old, fast-disappearing image of the country. Today these things are hard to find; tomorrow they will be in museums.

Of course there are primitive conditions. The search for them, if it is desired, will depend naturally on the time and resources at the traveller's disposal—and also, it should be added, on his physical energy, for Borneo miles have a way of being extraordinarily long once you get in the jungle-ranges of the Interior. In other respects, however, everything tends to be on rather a small scale.

Sabah's largest town, Sandakan, boasts of a population of just under 30,000. Jesselton, although it is the capital, has just under 22,000. The few other towns have no more than a few thousand each. The total population of the state is given in the latest (1960) census as slightly less than 455,000.

What one sees on landing has been created by the Europeans and the Chinese, both immigrant races. The presence of the Chinese is at once noticed everywhere; they are some of the millions who have spread southward from their homeland in a wide dispersion that now covers the whole of South-East Asia —the millions who ply their trades or work their smallholdings so industriously that they often provoke the jealousy of the more leisurely indigenous inhabitants. Towns such as Jesselton, Sandakan, Kudat or Tawau are virtually Chinese towns and alive with all the noises and smells of traditional Chinese shop-houses and coffee-shops. But go out to one of the small places such as Tuaran or Kota Belud, which are really centres of agricultural and cattle-raising communities, and you notice the contrast at once.

Tuaran is within easy reach of the capital but the atmosphere is unmistakably 'Bornean'. Here, twenty miles out along a pleasant road to the north, short dark men in turbans can be seen sauntering—or perhaps swaggering—through the streets, flicking riding switches, their keen eyes as black as the cotton jodhpurs they are wearing. Others may have astonishingly light skins for the East and may affect shorts or drab, baggy trousers and a singlet. The women, whatever their shade of complexion, will be in black cotton or velvet clothes, or perhaps a flowered sarong, and their eyes will be even brighter than those of the men. Arms and legs may be heavy with coils of wire or cane bangles and heads graced by beautifully-woven hats, real masterpieces, perfectly conical in shape and dyed in exquisite patterns of red and black.

If it should happen to be the day of the *tamu,* or native

market, then many of these women will be sitting behind stalls or on the pavements, selling fruits of extravagant size, shape and colour. These tropical fruits are fantastic, riotous—mangoes, mangosteens, custard apples, limes, pomeloes, papayas, jack fruits, durians, pineapples, bananas, langsats, rambutans. . . .

Bananas can be anything up to eighteen inches long and there are over twenty varieties of them. Equally colourful are the vegetables which sprawl wantonly under the baking sun, along with tobacco brought down from the hills, sweetmeats, betel-nuts, hats, mats, lengths of woven cloth.

In the midst of all this, fighting-cocks, straining to get to grips with one another directly their owners have completed their business, will fix you with a baleful eye. Your ear will be assailed by a bewildering variety of strange, yet not harsh, tongues. For here at Tuaran, and perhaps even more so at Kota Belud—the 'hill fort' further along the coastal uplands—you are among the native people: the Bajaus and Illanuns, and the Dusuns from both the hills and the plains. There are Chinese, too, but they are a small minority.

Go further round to the east coast and stand on the waterfront at Sandakan or Tawau and watch the tall-masted ships as they come in from the Sulu Islands and Celebes and crowd the harbour, and you will find a similar mixture of languages: Malays, Bajaus, Suluks, Obians, Binadans, Bugis and Timorese all mingling their soft cadences with the harsher tones of the Chinese. Any traveller arriving for the first time at one of these ports might very well despair of ever being able to sort out 'the natives' of Sabah.

On closer inspection, however, it is found that they fall into three fairly distinct groups.

Discounting those who are pure foreigners, such as the Timorese who come into the country to work only on a short-time basis, there are first of all the Moslem tribes of the sea

coast and river estuaries. They are peoples of many languages and dialects but they share a common religion. A man of this group is always referred to by the rest of the population as an *Orang Melayu*. Technically he may not be a Malay, but he is none the less an *Orang Melayu*. A little inland comes a large group, the largest of all the indigenous tribes, the Dusuns, inhabiting the coastal plains and lower uplands. Last of all there is the smaller group of the Muruts who live in the deep mountainous terrain of the Interior.

In every case there has been some overlapping of the tribes through inter-marriage; the Dusuns and the Muruts, for instance, are much closer to each other than either is to the coastal Moslems. Nevertheless this broad division is a simple and very convenient one to follow, and I have therefore adopted it in this book.

Borneo is a vast island—the third largest in the world. Its irregular coastline culminates in the extreme north in two capes, between which lies a bay called Marudu Bay. From this point, as the country extends southwards, its physical features are markedly different.

To the west the coastal plain is comparatively narrow and soon gives way to foothills which lead up to the heights of the Crocker Range, a range which runs down as far as the Sarawak border and keeps almost parallel to the coast all the way. These Crocker mountains vary from about 2,500 to 4,000 feet except for the magnificent dominating peak of Kinabalu which rises to nearly 13,500 feet. Here on this west coast all the rivers are short except the Padas, and none is navigable for any length. But to the east of Marudu Bay the land stretches out in an immense low-lying plain where the rivers are long and brown and wind slowly towards the Sulu Sea with which they merge in a maze of mangrove swamp; rivers such as the Labuk, the Kinabatangan and the Segama. Except for this plain, and one or two plains south of the

Crocker Range, Sabah is a land of jungle-covered mountains

As in every country, its geography has deeply affected the people.

Coming in as invaders at some uncertain date, the Moslem tribes pressed back the older indigenous peoples forcing them into the hills. One tribe pushed another deeper and deeper into the hinterland. The Moslems feared to press too far, however. One sometimes hears it said that they will settle only near salt water—that is, not beyond the tidal limits of the rivers—though in fact some of them can be found much further inland. But generally speaking they cling to the coast, and the steep, jungle-clad hills have kept the pattern of the tribes for centuries much as it still is today. The jungle-ranges proved too daunting to new invaders, whether Asian or European; and thus, while other islands of the East Indies became 'opened up', Borneo was left pretty much to itself. For century after century the primitive Murut remained in his hills, and remained primitive because of them. They preserved him—some might say fossilised him—a pure relic of the Stone Age.

Despite a certain amount of mixing and merging of the groups at the edges, the broad outline of Sabah's people is therefore quite distinct: there are men of the coast, men of the nearer hills and plains, and men of the far hinterland.

As I write, the border of this hinterland is distraught, not by ancient head-hunting feuds, but by modern guerrilla activities and the jungle echoes to the sound of Western-type weapons—an import which no primitive stronghold, however remote, seems able to withstand.

2

Of the group of peoples which can properly be described as coastal Moslems it is the Bajaus who form the majority. Their number is given as 59,710. Dark, short, with high cheekbones,

they are not only of the same religion but are of similar stock to the actual Malays. Strictly speaking they are Proto-Malays; they have their own language and many of their customs are quite distinctive.

Bajau villages begin in the bays near Jesselton and are to be found on and off all the way round to Tawau. Between the handful of coastal towns the long stretches of Sabah's beaches —fringed with heavy jungle, mangrove swamp and sometimes coconut and casuarina trees—are often broken only by a tiny Bajau settlement. Some of these at least are not difficult of access.

The typical village is set at the water's edge. The South China Sea, or on the east coast the Sulu Sea, laps the beach and the houses stand either just above or just below the high water mark, raised on wooden piles and backed by coconut palms. These houses are built of planks or plaited leaves round a framework of rough poles, the roof being thatched with *attaps*—leaves of the sago or *nipah* palm doubled over and stitched together to form a long panel. Each family possesses its own house and it is not uncommon for it to consist of one room only, with a separate cooking-place.

To walk along a beach and to come upon such a village as it basks in the sunlight of this ever-warm coast is to discover a lotus land. One gets the impression that nothing else matters but life upon the shore. The world of the towns, of the Chinese shops, of the bustle of commerce—all this, and indeed all existence beyond the gently-lapping surf can be well forgotten. The sea and the sky seem to be sufficient.

A few boats will be drawn up on the beach near the huts —for the Bajau is a good sailor and a good fisherman. Almost certainly there will be some water-buffaloes wandering somewhere behind among the trees, especially if it is the west coast, and in the village itself chickens and goats—though not pigs on account of the people's allegiance to Islam.

If not actually facing the open sea a Bajau settlement will be built in an estuary or lagoon. Mengkabong, near Tuaran, is a perfect example of such a village, a gem in incredibly picturesque surroundings, where the houses, all on clusters of stilts, rise from the calm water and where small canoes glide in and out of the canals. With its background of low hills Mengkabong is reminiscent of the well-known Kampong Ayer, the old river city at Brunei.

There are no sanitation problems—all refuse goes over the side or through a window or hole in the floor and is carried away on the tide. Washing and bathing are easy matters. Babies are given their tub from the steps which lead from the water to every house, while anything just older than a baby is in the water most of the time anyway and quickly learns to swim.

Another alternative to the beach village is a settlement placed a little distance up a river. This is quite common on the west coast where the rivers are short; houses are spread out along the banks, shaded by clusters of bamboo and coconut palms, and can often be as attractive as those on the shore. Narrow paths wind along both sides of the stream and here and there a flimsy bamboo bridge spans it. Canoes are tied in the cool shade beneath the banks. Near the village are usually small cultivated patches of rice or sugar-cane.

But agriculture does not come easily or naturally to the Bajaus, whose traditions are entirely of the sea. Less than half of them are engaged in it.

In the only area where the people have come inland and settled in any numbers, Kota Belud—which is only a few miles from the sea—some have taken to paddy-growing but the majority have become cattle-breeders, and in this capacity are probably making the best contribution to their country.

Wild cattle, so far as is known, have been roaming the plains round Kota Belud, especially to the north, for genera-

tions—certainly before any European took an interest in Sabah. Possibly the cattle came in the first instance from India, and some have definitely been imported from there in more recent times; but their origin, like that of most things in Borneo, is obscure. Today, wild, semi-wild and comparatively tame, the total reaches over 20,000 head, mostly owned by the Tempasuk Bajaus. Though the stock is still not of very high quality it has been greatly improved as the result of Government interest and assistance in this area.

About twelve years ago the North Borneo Government decided to start an experimental farm at Kota Belud on lines similar to the various agricultural stations it had already established in certain districts to assist with rice production. This project, which is known as the Sorob Cattle Farm, has become one of the best in the country. The first manager was a New Zealander, Bill Reece. He set about collecting a herd, fencing large areas of land (there is room for everybody) and encouraging others to do the same, advising on the feeding of cattle and generally spurring on the Bajaus to improve the standard of their stock.

Perhaps because Bill Reece was something of a character he met with success among these independent-natured people. He quickly became known all over the district as 'Tuan Cowboy' and his wide-brimmed floppy hat was copied by every spirited young horseman of the Tempasuk—to the delight, of course, of the Chinese traders who supplied them. His stay in North Borneo was of only a few years' duration, but by the time he handed over the management of the farm to his successor he had already become a legendary figure. Everyone remembers 'Tuan Cowboy'. He gave to cattle-breeding that touch of romance that appeals to the Bajau soul, and today his type of hat is to be seen everywhere. Some of the men are in the direct employ of the farm and are known as 'Sorob Cowboys'; many more have invested in it or

benefited in some way from the help it has been able to give.

The Kota Belud Bajaus have developed into great horsemen and have rather lost their old love of the sea. They can usually be backed to steal the limelight on ceremonial occasions, when they turn out in their traditional costume.

This consists of a black jacket with open sleeves and beautifully faced with gold embroidery. Trousers to match and a woven head-cloth, starched to stand up with striking effect, complete the garb. The horses' harness is elaborately decorated and each man is armed with a sword and a long spear. Thus mounted parties of men will parade in a long double line. At a word from their chief they will rush suddenly forward. Bells jingle from the horses' necks and the riders shout wild whooping cries as they break into a full gallop. It is an impressive spectacle.

A word about the wives who weave the turbans and so carefully embroider the ceremonial jackets. They are usually considered to be far more industrious than their husbands. Despite the competition of imported manufactured materials the Bajau women still produce some very fine work and are noted for their woven cloth. For Moslem women they are remarkably free. One never sees a Bajau woman veiled, for instance; and though they do not share quite all the recreations and amusements of their menfolk they are in most other respects equal.

Like all peoples of the Malay Archipelago the Bajaus love the rather monotonous type of dancing in which you walk backwards and forwards in front of your partner. But the distinctive Bajau dance is the *berongsai,* and in this the women have their special part. It is undoubtedly a relic of pre-Moslem days, for they move slowly round a pole—a phallic symbol—in a small circle, while the men move round in a wider one, singing their songs, or *pantuns*, to the accompaniment of gongs and drums. At certain times, especially among the Bajaus of

the east coast, the dance is kept up for three nights running.

The Bajaus have been in Sabah for at least several centuries. Their conversion to Islam was presumably effected by the true Malays, to whom they are racially so akin. But they in their turn did not much influence the older indigenous tribes as far as their religion was concerned. This distant coast is a far fringe of the Moslem world (the people belong to the Sunnite sect which is different from the Mohammedanism of Malaya) and with the distance from Mecca so great religion tends to be somewhat lax.

The Bajau men and boys, if they do not wear a head-cloth, will usually wear the Moslem *songkok* or black velvet cap, which can sometimes be incredibly shabby. Each village, except the tiniest hamlet, will possess a mosque—a wood and *attap* building with open sides—which is often to be seen in a shockingly neglected condition. Of all the Bajaus those of Semporna, a lovely village on the east coast between Tawau and Lahad Datu, have the reputation of being the strictest Moslems and of these quite a number manage to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and to return as *hajis*.

The character of the Bajau, or at any rate of the male, has I fear been pretty well torn to shreds by the very few writers who have had anything to say about this little-known people. I believe myself that today these judgements should be modified —perhaps considerably. But first something about the origin of the Bajaus.

Perhaps because they are Moslems none of the coastal peoples has such interesting folk-tales as the indigenous pagans. Ivor Evans, who was an assiduous collector of native folk-lore in Malaya and Borneo some fifty years ago, lamented that he had to give up listening to Bajau stories, for on one occasion when he was busily writing down what was being related, it suddenly dawned on him that it had nothing to do with Borneo at all but concerned the activities of the Prophet!

After that he would not allow himself to be caught again.

The origins of the Bajaus are obscure. Several legendary places have been suggested as their possible home, but nothing is certain. However, they have one good story about themselves which is very illuminating.

Long ago, so they say, the sultan of Johore had a beautiful daughter named Dayang Ayesha. The rulers of both Brunei and Sulu were in love with her. She herself inclined towards the prince of Brunei. But her father thought the prince of Sulu a better match and favoured his suit. Under such circumstances the daughter of a sultan of course had to bow to her father's wishes, and Dayang Ayesha was packed off to Sulu with a strong escort of men and war-boats.

As the fleet was passing the Brunei coast, out sailed the dashing Brunei sultan from his capital in the river estuary and at the head of his own boats gave battle on the high seas. In the thick of the fight he managed to manoeuvre his *prahu* alongside that of the princess, took her on board and sailed away before any of the escort could stop him.

The Johore men were aghast. Whatever course they now took death stared them in the face. They could neither sail on to Sulu nor back to Johore. To attempt to recover the princess from Brunei was equally out of the question, for their numbers were not strong enough. Therefore they became sea-gypsies, cruising wherever they could pick up a living, stealing their wives from unwary villages along the coast.

Presumably the beautiful Dayang Ayesha lived happily ever after, for we hear no more of her. Meanwhile the Bajaus continued to live as outcasts in their boats (some still prefer to live permanently in boats to this day) until a few of them began to settle on lonely islands. At length they came to the mainland and formed the scattered communities which are now to be found on Borneo's north-eastern and north-western shores.

Perhaps there is some truth in this story. Or it may be a pure legend. But at least it points strongly to what some of the Bajaus have always said about themselves—that their ancestors came originally from Johore.

The story is very significant for another reason. A wandering band of sea-gypsies could easily transform themselves into sea-robbers if the conditions were favourable, which they were. No transition could have come about more naturally, and this is indeed what did happen. Obscure as their homeland may be, the ancestry of the Bajaus can be summed up in a single word—pirates.

3

Borneo is not a land of archaeological remains. It has no ancient temples, no mysterious ruins. If it ever had a civilisation which created buildings on a large scale the jungle has completely overwhelmed all traces of it.

The traditional medium of building in the country has always been wood. Wooden structures are easy to erect and when worn out can be replaced with little trouble. It is still customary among some of the indigenous people to build a fresh house as soon as their old one shows signs of decay. A small village may be moved to another place, and within a year or so all evidence of the former site will have disappeared.

This absence of remains, and also of written records, makes the historian's task particularly difficult. Very little is in fact known about Sabah before the time of the British North Borneo Company, usually called the Chartered Company, which was founded less than a hundred years ago. Yet there are tantalising hints of civilisation of some kind in the distant past.

Trade between Borneo and China, for instance, is known to have existed for many centuries. The junks with their great fan-shaped sails would come down from China in the north-

east monsoon which blows from about November to April. In their holds they brought consignments of pottery, brass or beads. Among the very few old relics that do remain in Sabah today are large and highly-prized Chinese jars. But no doubt other and more perishable goods were traded.

Between May and August the junks would return, taking advantage of the south-west monsoon, and carrying with them pearls and spices, nutmegs and camphor, rattans and bamboo canes. They also took edible birds'-nests and sharks'-fins for the soups which Chinese gourmets value so highly, commodities that are still exported today.

Marco Polo, who himself visited the East Indies, mentions this trade. From it grew Chinese influence in Borneo. The extent of that influence is one of the big question marks. Probably it never penetrated very far into the Interior, but it has left its mark on the arts and agriculture of the coast.

On the Kinabatangan, the largest river in Sabah, a Chinese colony flourished in the fourteenth century and records in China show that it sent tribute to the Emperor. There is even a legend which tells of the marriage of one of the governors of this colony to a sister of the sultan of Brunei. Accounts of contacts between Borneo and the Celestial Empire go back at least as far as the Sung dynasty. Intermarriage to a certain extent there must have been; probably, however, on a very limited scale, and the light-skinned appearance of so many of the hill people of Sabah should not, so we are told, be taken as evidence of ancient Chinese blood.

The first sniff, as it were, at these Eastern shores by a European may have been about 1507, when an Italian named Ludovico Barthema came to the Malay Archipelago. The first to set foot on the island seems to have been Lorenzo de Gomez, a Portuguese, in 1518. But it is to Pigafetta, the historian of Magellan, we owe the first detailed description.

Magellan's fleet anchored in the Bay of Brunei shortly after

Magellan himself had been killed in the southern Philippines. The remaining leaders went ashore and Pigafetta was greatly impressed by the sultan's court and the large prosperous town standing, like an Eastern Venice, in the water. The sultan received the party and an exchange of presents took place. Then, unfortunately, the squadron took to plundering and before the end of the voyage had become nothing more than a pirate fleet—a bad omen for the future. White barbarians had entered the Eastern seas!

Possibly piracy in South-East Asia is an extremely old game; there is now no means of telling. But we do know that it increased with European influence in the area. From about the beginning of the eighteenth century a flood of it was let loose.

Dampier, for example, who lived for six months among the Illanuns in the southern Philippines (a people similar to the Bajaus and who later settled in small numbers on the Sabah coast) does not mention piracy at all. Writing after his visit in 1686-7 he describes the Illanuns as a peaceable people. Yet during the following century they became the most notorious and dreaded of all the pirates and made the most far-reaching voyages. It is said that they would give no quarter to the crew of any captured European ship because of past ill-treatment by the Spanish; while they would often spare the crew of a native vessel.

The establishment of the Dutch trading stations at Malacca and Batavia tended to disrupt native commerce, for the Dutch drew the trade into their own hands. It was not uncommon for quantities of precious spices to be destroyed to prevent them from falling to competitors—a practice which has been not unknown since. European interest in the Archipelago certainly seems to have crippled the China-Borneo junk trade, and in time it died away altogether.

The Spanish followed the Portuguese, the Dutch followed the Spanish and the British followed the Dutch. British efforts

at establishing trading bases were not, however, so successful and it was much later before Britain began to acquire territory in the region. But it seems fairly clear that an old-established pattern of native trade broke down and that out of the resulting confusion some at least of the sea-faring peoples turned to piracy as a more profitable way of life.

Main bases of operations were in the islands of the Sulu Sea. Others were developed on the mainland of Borneo, especially on the heavily-indented north-eastern and north-western coasts. Before the middle of the last century, largely through the influence of Rajah Brooke, these latter bases were to become targets for the British Navy.

The Illanuns were undoubtedly the most dreaded of the pirates. They and the Balagnini—another similar people from the Sulu Islands—built long war-boats which were often manned by as many as a hundred captured slaves and in which they made the most extensive voyages of plunder. Closely associated with them were the Bajaus, but the Bajaus do not seem to have sailed quite so far, confining their activities more to the Borneo coast and coastal waters.

When they attacked a trader these pirates must have presented a terrifying sight. They wore scarlet, with jackets of chain-mail and sometimes a kind of helmet. Their technique was first to discharge a round of shot from all their firearms; then, when the victim was sufficiently scared, to leap aboard yelling hideous war-cries and brandishing fearsome knives and spears.

The small number of the Illanuns who eventually settled down in Sabah alongside the Bajaus still possess some of the old brass cannon and other arms dating from these days, and they are the treasured heirlooms of certain families.

The Illanuns now live on a coastal strip between the Bajau villages south-west of Marudu Bay and in a few places on the east coast. Like the Bajaus they are a Moslem people.

There has been some intermarriage between the two peoples, but also a good deal of mutual suspicion and friction which at times has led to open hostility. But today relations are friendly enough.

James Brooke, on becoming Rajah of Sarawak, soon realised the danger to shipping from pirates whose bases lay to the north of his newly-acquired state. By the early part of the nineteenth century all these waters had become a nightmare to peaceful traders, and the local rulers—the sultans of Brunei and Sulu—were quite helpless in face of the situation. Indeed, they were often themselves involved in piracy and slaving. The sultanate of Brunei had gradually declined, while the ruler of Sulu finally lost all power. James Brooke persuaded the British Navy to extirpate the pirates.

The fiercest and best known of the chiefs was Serip Usman, who had his headquarters up the Langkon River in Marudu Bay. A serip, or sharif, was a Moslem chief of partly Arab blood who claimed descent from the Prophet. As such Serip Usman could always command a considerable following; he had ten Arab captains under him, thirty-two eighteen-or twelve-pounder guns and hundreds of men. His fort, which stood near a confluence about five miles up the Langkon River, was protected by a huge double boom which stretched from bank to bank and was fastened with immensely strong chains.

In August 1845 an attack on this fort was launched by British sailors under the command of Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane. The squadron entered Marudu Bay and the blue-jackets came up the river in small boats. They took a tremendous risk as they crowded up to the boom under the fire of the guns from the fort. However, the fire was inaccurate and they were able to hack their way through the boom and attack Serip Usman. They carried the defences with remarkably little loss, and when it came to hand-to-hand fighting

the pirates, though brave, were quickly routed. Serip Usman, together with hundreds of his followers, was killed and the entire fort was burned to the ground.

This was the first of several blows to be struck at the North Borneo pirates, who hitherto had had the run of the coast. Piracy continued on a reduced scale throughout most of the century. Nearly forty years later another notorious stronghold, Tunku, just north of Darvel Bay, was attacked and destroyed. Small pirate raids have in fact been common on this coast right down to the present day.

In 1957, ironically enough, the same village of Tunku was subjected to a violent raid by modern pirates operating with high-powered canoes and automatic weapons. In this case the raiders came from bases in the Sulu Islands. Three years previously the little town of Semporna was attacked. In 1958 an R.A.F. Shackelton crashed into the sea on an anti-piracy patrol, resulting in the death of the Deputy Commissioner of Police who was advising on operations. The police are equipped with special launches to deal with these incursions, but to patrol the hundreds of miles of heavily-indented coast effectively would require a larger force than Sabah possesses. Every year there are attacks, perpetrated by present-day Suluks, who slip back easily and quickly to their islands. The result is considerable loss of goods, such as copra and nutmeg, and not infrequently of life as well.

In earlier times piracy was often combined with slave-raiding and it was a common thing for attacks to be made on coastal villages for this purpose.

Before the coming of the British with the Chartered Company in 1881 there were a great many slaves in North Borneo and Brunei. Some of them were Spanish subjects who had been captured from trading vessels and sold to the Bajaus, the Brunei Malays and others.

As early as 1858 a Spanish priest, who strangely enough

had himself been a slave-raider, came to the country and built a little palm-leaf church near the sea in Gaya Bay—no light venture considering the appallingly unsettled conditions of the time. The story of Father Carlos Cuarteron has never, I believe, been fully told. But it is one of those amazing stranger-than-fiction lives, and one which, if far from perfect, does seem to point to supernatural influences.

Cuarteron left his native Cadiz as a young man and went to seek adventure in the Philippines, which at that time were Spanish possessions. At Manila he joined the crew of a trading schooner and later became captain; he soon found that one form of trading could be particularly profitable.

In Brunei, slaves were beginning to get in short supply as a result of Rajah Brooke's campaign against slave-raiding and piracy in general. As we have just seen, he had been able to secure the help of the British Navy in attacking such a vast stronghold as that of Serip Usman in Marudu Bay. The British had also annexed the small island of Labuan, another factor which increased the risks of plying this trade in Borneo waters. However, Cuarteron successfully accomplished a number of journeys in his schooner from Manila to Brunei, each time carrying Filipino slaves who fetched a high price in the market.

Then, during a voyage in 1849, when he was thirty-three, he had an astonishing piece of luck. He discovered a wrecked Spanish galleon on a lonely reef; on board was a whole cargo of Mexican silver dollars! It was like a wild dream, a schoolboy's dream, come true. Carlos Cuarteron loaded the treasure on to his schooner and sailed away over the limpid blue sea of the Archipelago, a man of now untold wealth.

Alas, the very next day outrageous fortune gave him a taste of the uncertainty of life—especially of life at sea. The schooner ran into one of those violent tropical typhoons that can blow up so quickly off the Philippine coast. There was barely time to heave to in the gale before gigantic waves began

to crash over the little treasure-laden ship. As the storm reached its terrible height, Cuarteron fell on his knees and vowed to God that if he were spared he would give up slave-trading for ever and devote the treasure, and indeed his life, to the freeing of slaves and the advancement of the Christian religion in Borneo. The typhoon died away and the captain with all his crew were saved.

It seems to have taken Cuarteron some time to establish his claim to the silver, which he took to Hong Kong; meanwhile certain of his enemies who considered that he should have brought it to Manila, thought fit to accuse him of his former acts of piracy. For it was apparently true that the Manila Government had once set a price on his head.

However, he finally received the whole of the money and true to his vow he left for Rome where he studied for the priesthood. After five years he was ordained and returned to the East, receiving the appointment of Prefect Apostolic of North Borneo and Labuan—surely a pioneer assignment if ever there was one.

Spenser St. John, who was commissioned as Her Majesty's Consul-General in the Island of Borneo in 1855, came in touch with Cuarteron in the course of his duties and about two years later saw his church in Gaya Bay, between Mengkabong and the site of the present Jesselton, near Gantisan.

"We found anchored at Loporin, in the north-west part of the bay, a Spanish brig, belonging to Monsieur Cuarteron, the Prefect Apostolic of the newly-arrived Roman Catholic mission. He had built a hut and a chapel of palm stems and leaves, as a commencement of what he hoped would be a prosperous mission; but he had his attention too much directed to temporal, to take proper care of spiritual affairs."

St. John was obviously deeply suspicious of the Prefect Apostolic and openly accuses him of political intrigue on behalf of the Spanish Government. He also maintained that

he made little effort to secure the release of the slaves, many of whom had married with the coastal people and turned Moslems. When St. John heard of the return of the priest to Manila he thought it "a very fortunate circumstance".

Undoubtedly there was truth in all this; but the fact remains that the visit to Manila could only have been temporary. Carlos Cuarteron stayed on in Borneo for almost twenty years, dying not long after his return to Europe—apparently a very poor man. He is now a forgotten character, the pirate who turned priest. But he has nevertheless the distinction of being the first Christian missionary to Sabah's shores.

4

It is not surprising that when at length the British North Borneo Company was formed and the country received the beginnings of some kind of settled government the first opposition came from the traditionally lawless people of the coast.

The Royal Charter which the Company received of course stipulated proper treatment of the natives. The name of the Governor was always to be submitted to the Secretary of State for the Colonies before appointment; the Governor was answerable to a Court of Directors in London, which in its turn had its responsibilities to the shareholders.

If commerce were to flourish, the first aim of the Company had to be the establishment of settled conditions in this territory over which it had acquired sovereign rights. Proclamations were therefore read in certain centres announcing that North Borneo had been leased from the two sultans of Brunei and Sulu. The name Sabah was dropped.

There was very little show of force about the take-over; indeed, the Company was not in a position to exercise much force even if it had desired to do so. Rather, it sought to win the population by explaining carefully that the 'Company'

was now the lawful government and hoping that it would see the benefits to come.

To the majority of the natives, however, the former governments had meant almost nothing. The story of the sultanate of Brunei had been one of continual decline, while that of Sulu was practically defunct. In view of the nominal suzerainty tribute had sometimes been paid; more often it had been forced. The position was further complicated by the existence of rights—or rather claims—of some of the leading Brunei nobles who had taken the chance of bleeding the native inhabitants whenever they had felt themselves strong enough to do so. Also, there were still some independent rulers left, with small pockets of territory, usually lands along either side of a river, which intersected the Company's land. From the sultans downwards, most chiefs were involved in slave-trading or piracy of some kind or other.

For the first few years things went fairly well.

Lone young Englishmen found themselves administering vast tracts of country hitherto unknown to 'the civilised world', and as they ventured further up-country they gained an impression of a people who were on the whole fairly amiable. One intrepid explorer, Witti, ignored the Governor's advice and venturing too far lost his head. But by and large the outlook was promising. A small capital was established at Kudat, at the tip of Marudu Bay, but was soon moved to the commercially more prosperous Sandakan. Many Chinese immigrants were encouraged in to develop the country, and in 1888 North Borneo, together with Brunei and Sarawak, became a British Protectorate.

But even then the full implications of the white men's activities do not seem to have been fully understood. Were they perhaps only temporary 'invaders', who should be treated politely but watched with care? Would they tire of life in the tropics and after a time withdraw? One can easily

imagine such thoughts passing through the Oriental minds of the Bajaus and Illanuns of the coast. Then, as they watched more settlements being built, more district officers and courts of law established and—final horror—a police force being gradually organised, it must have dawned upon them that the White Tuans had really come to stay.

A reaction of some kind was probably inevitable, but it was several years before a leader of sufficient personality emerged who could gather enough followers together to challenge the Chartered Company's rule.

This man was Mat Salleh, the only really formidable opponent the new régime ever encountered.

Mat (i.e., Mohammed) Salleh was of mixed race, his mother being a Bajau and his father a Suluk. Tall, fiery and immensely strong, he was also an accomplished orator. In a sense he was a kind of Far Eastern Mahdi, destined to preach a holy war—though among followers of much less fanatical breed.

His birthplace was on the west Sabah coast, at the Bajau village of Inanam; but when he first came to the notice of the government it was as a trader up the Sugut—one of the slow, brown rivers that rise in the inland mountains and wind through the jungle to the Sulu Sea. This country, midway between Sandakan and Marudu Bay was, and still is, lonely and sparsely-populated. Here, about 1894, Mat Salleh began to influence the restless, freedom-loving Moslems, maintaining that the new government was nothing but a restrictive force. He claimed the right to raise a rebellion—a rebellion of course against infidels.

He seems to have acquired the reputation of being invincible to bullets, and some flags embroidered with Arabic inscriptions proclaimed the attribute. Several large silk umbrellas—insignia of royalty—were prepared in readiness for his eventual leadership of the country. His wife, who belonged to the royal house of Sulu and whose feet, it was said, never

touched the ground, for she was carried everywhere, must undoubtedly have encouraged Mat Salleh in these dreams—dreams to which he was to cling desperately for six years, till at last a shot from a mountain gun in the far Interior brought them to an abrupt close.

The first signs of trouble came when two Dayak traders were murdered at his village up the Sugut.

As K. G. Tregonning, the historian of the Chartered Company, has pointed out, there is now no means of knowing the rights and wrongs of this case. It led to various complaints against Mat Salleh by the government and presently he appeared in dramatic fashion in Sandakan Bay with a large force of followers, demanding to see either the Governor or William Pryer, who had founded Sandakan and was known and trusted by the natives of the district.

The Chinese shopkeepers were terrified. The Governor happened to be away, and Pryer, who had in any case left the service of the Company, was on sick leave. Mat Salleh got no satisfaction. Instead, some police were later sent up to burn his village.

From then onwards the outlaw—as he was soon declared—constantly made daring raids on the Company's settlements. These were punctuated by solemn oaths under the Koran in which he swore obedience to the government, oaths which of course were never kept. The Company has been criticised for its vacillating handling of the affair, since it neither caught the leader and dealt summarily with him nor, in the earlier stages, endeavoured to incorporate him into the administration.

One of Mat Salleh's most spectacular raids was on Gaya Island. For this he had the support not only of his own Moslem people but of some of the indigenous pagans as well. Before dawn on a July morning in 1897 he suddenly landed on the island, the principal government station on the west coast, and captured all its arms, ammunition, boats, stores and

money; he then proceeded to burn the settlement to the ground, sparing only the small village of Bajaus nearby. He felt so confident after this that he announced his intention of attacking every government station in turn and then setting up his own government.

Reprisals for the raid took place; nevertheless it was still believed in some quarters that Mat Salleh could be won over. William Cowie, the then Managing Director of the Company, who had been instrumental in obtaining the original concessions which had led to its formation, came out from England and went unarmed to meet the rebel.

An apparently friendly interview took place in which terms were discussed. Cowie's idea was that Salleh should be made a kind of feudal lord of a remote inland valley which was still practically unknown to the Company. After this meeting Mat Salleh sent in his spear and *kris*—the curved Malay sword—as tokens of goodwill. Cowie accepted and returned them, with a message expressing the hope that in future they would be used in the Company's service and not against it.

At the next meeting the Governor was present, together with Cowie and two officers named Pearson and Wise. Unarmed, they went up-river to a place called Menggatal—which worried the captain of a British gunboat, H.M.S. *Swift,* who thought he ought to provide an escort. This was refused. It was agreed, however, that if the party had not returned by noon the captain would send a landing-party up-river after them.

Pearson, who later became Governor, recorded his recollections of this trip. They arrived at the house of a certain chief at Menggatal and Mat Salleh kept them waiting for nearly two hours. When at last he turned up it was at the head of two hundred men, all bristling with spears and rifles.

"Have you brought any police?" was one of the outlaws' first questions.

"No," replied the Governor.

"Where is the gunboat?"

"In the bay."

"Has she landed any men?"

"No, we promised to come alone and unarmed—and white men keep their promises."

As midday approached the atmosphere grew hotter. Mat Salleh's followers began to fidget with their weapons. Half a dozen bottles of soda water were fetched from the boat and the leaders all had a drink. It was touch and go whether the sailors would appear before the conference ended; had they done so the balloon would have gone up. But luckily the party got away in time, and as they rounded the first bend of the river with Menggatal safely behind them, Cowie made a remark that was long remembered: "Mr. Wise, this time we'll have some whisky with our soda."

The policy of appeasement, however, proved unsuccessful and in fact led to a spate of resignations on the part of the Company's officers.

The story finishes away from the coast, in the inland valley of Tambunan, where Salleh built a fort—he had always been a great fort-builder—and where he finally ended his career. The new Governor, Hugh Clifford, shipped the widow back to Sulu.

The death of the leader did not bring peace at once, for several of his lieutenants carried on the rebellion. One of them, Mat Sator, attacked Kudat only two months afterwards. He and two others were killed in the attempt and the raid was beaten off, though not without some loss of life among the innocent Chinese smallholders of the district.

For many months later villages were being raided and burnt on the west coast, the gangs being led by two further followers of Mat Salleh, Kamunta and Langkap. So much panic was caused that on one occasion all the Europeans in

the newly-founded Jesselton herded together in one bungalow for several nights. Another thorn in the flesh was Si Gunting, a Dusun rebel who remained at large for nearly ten years but who had always been independent of Mat Salleh. By contrast Si Gunting became a government chief and lived on in contentment to a ripe old age.

Charles Bruce joined the Chartered Company service in 1902, and in the following year became one of the first of those many lucky young district officers to be stationed at the Tempasuk, or Kota Belud, which is generally reckoned to be the pleasantest district of the country. In an entertaining account of his years in Borneo he gives some idea of what the mopping up of these last remnants of rebellion was like. Rapid night marches, long treks over native hill-paths crawling with leeches, and hours up a mountain torrent in spate were all part of the game.

At Tempasuk he had to arrange for the execution of the notorious Langkap, who having refused to eat anything but bread for some weeks after his capture, at the last moment demanded a curry—a dish that takes three to four hours to prepare! Si Gunting—'a harmless little man' though admittedly a potential danger as a focus for other outlaws—also took up much of Bruce's time.

"It was at one time," he says, "prima facie evidence of outlawry to be found wearing a pair of tight breeches." This was because all the leaders had been from the Bajau, Illanun or Suluk tribes and it had become fashionable to copy them.

When rebels 'came in' and were pardoned it was customary for them to go through an interesting ceremony known as 'planting a stone'. Bruce describes this in the case of Si Gunting. The first requisite was a water-buffalo, who remained a spectator until the final stage. Other things required were a river-stone about two feet long and cylindrical in shape, some salt and some rice. A hole was dug deep enough to

receive about two-thirds of the stone and the ex-rebel then began to swear allegiance to the government " in a long-drawn, repeated, falsetto howl ", casting a handful of rice to the winds and a pinch of salt into a bowl of water at appropriate moments as he took the oath. The district officer then swore to treat the new subject fairly, after which the buffalo was led forward and its throat cut. The blood was allowed to pour into the hole and both parties solemnly smeared the stone and set it in position, the whole thing finishing with a feast of buffalo-meat.

Many of these stones are still to be seen in Sabah today and they are usually pointed out with mild amusement.

5

We are now perhaps rather better placed to review those assessments of the Bajau character to which I referred earlier.

A comparatively mild one is given by Owen Rutter in his detailed and extremely informative *British North Borneo*. " The Bajau," he says, " is a graceful liar and an accomplished cheat." But to Ivor Evans he is " a lazy spendthrift, a liar, a cheat, a thief, a wheedler, a blusterer and a swaggerer," and other references follow in the same strain. The character of the Illanun, who is often spoken of as the cousin of the Bajau, is very similar 'only more so'. The only concessions that Evans will make are that both tribes have a love of sport and a saving sense of humour; but he has a better word for the womenfolk, praising their weaving and acknowledging that by comparison with the men they are quite industrious.

It is interesting that both these judgements date from the same year, 1922, though the writers were in fact drawing on experiences of the country prior to World War I. Evans was an authority on the Tuaran and Tempasuk Dusuns, where his real interest lay, and he confined himself largely to those areas.

One must, I think, in fairness remember that the Moslems of the coast have had more time now to adjust themselves and to settle down to vastly changed conditions. Whatever criticisms of the Chartered Company may be justly made (and Evans is critical of the Company too) it did provide a long period of settled government which extended almost to the first half of this century.

Then, when the Japanese occupied North Borneo, some of the Bajaus became rebels again, helping the Chinese in a determined effort to drive the invaders out. In 1943, under a young Chinese leader named Albert Kwok, the capital was actually seized for a time. Kwok and his followers attacked by land, while about a hundred Bajaus attacked by sea—which was, of course, their natural element. Unfortunately the revolt was premature and the Japanese quickly recaptured Jesselton; nevertheless it was a valiant attempt.

In the post-war period, as a British colony, North Borneo advanced with spectacular strides and all sections of the community shared in some way in the general prosperity. In particular there were great advances in public health and in education. All the indigenous races have now increased in numbers and in the case of the Bajaus it has been from 44,728 in 1951 to their present number of nearly 60,000 at the last census.

I myself have from time to time visited Bajau villages, especially on the west coast. I never found the people anything but friendly, and on one occasion at least I had very good reason to be specially indebted to a Bajau chief.

It was during a journey between Kota Belud and a small place called Bandau, in the Kudat peninsula to the west of Marudu Bay. Because of the possibility of a school being opened at Bandau I had been asked to go and have a look at conditions there and meet some of the people. A Chinese teacher who lived at Kudat was planning to go in that

direction; so rather than travel in the usual way by sea we got together and decided to make the journey overland.

A Land Rover took us easily to Kota Belud from Jesselton, and from there we set out northwards, over open rolling country which has since become an Army training-ground, on ponies lent us by the district officer. I shall never forget this open country, the Pindasan plain, that morning as people came in from all the surrounding villages to the *tamu*. Everyone was riding a beast of some kind—an ungainly buffalo, a fast shaggy pony, a cow or an ox. We kept meeting colourful parties as, for almost the entire morning, they converged on Kota Belud. Later, after passing through some low hills, we spent a night on the road.

The approach to the *sulap,* or small bamboo sleeping-shelter, was over slippery logs, laid to form a path of sorts across the swampy ground—our first indication of trouble. It rained heavily in the night and next morning as we pushed on, the 'path' rapidly became worse. Eventually we were halted by a vast sea of grey mud stretching depressingly ahead and on every side. To have ventured through it would have been to court disaster and reluctantly we resigned ourselves to a dismal return to Kota Belud.

We were just on the point of turning back when a gang of about a dozen men suddenly emerged from some impenetrable-looking jungle far away to our left. They shouted to us to stop. They turned out to be a fearsome crowd; one or two wore shabby black *songkoks,* the rest turbans, and all were bare to the waist. Everyone carried a heavy *parang,* the universally used native knife.

I must admit to a slight feeling of uneasiness as they approached, squelching through the mud—a feeling which immediately turned to relief when they told us that they had been sent by their chief to try to guide us to firmer ground. It seemed they had literally just hacked a way through the jungle.

Following them along the faint track they had made—leading our ponies and squeezing through as best we could—we eventually reached a clearing where the chief himself joined us. He had come out from his village on horseback and not only had he troubled to send 'the relief party' but he now accompanied us on a three-mile detour through difficult country until at last he had set us on the path again. A small, lithe man, with a black, almost pencil-line moustache, this helpful Bajau chief has left his image on my memory: we never met again, but I have never forgotten his kindness.

On completion of my business in Bandau we went on to Kudat, making the journey by launch via the Langkon River. Shades of Serip Usman! As we travelled down that brown-stained, winding stream I could not help dreaming a little about the past, wondering if perhaps the forebears of some of those very men who had recently helped us round the mud had died at the bloody Battle of Marudu or been with Mat Sator in his raid on Kudat.

That the Bajaus and Illanuns—and the Suluks, Obians, Binadans and others who are to be found scattered round the Sabah coast—should have settled down as well as they have is in itself remarkable, and a tribute surely to British guidance over the past few generations. For all are descendants of the notorious pirates. Nowadays they live lives which, while following the leisurely tempo of all tropical races, are nevertheless frequently of value to the community as a whole. Piracy, for them at least, being at an end, excitement has to take the form of such activities as cock-fighting, gambling and buffalo-stealing.

If one must criticise one's fellow men I should say that most of these people have an innate unreliability. All the same, one can safely pronounce them to be better citizens than they have ever been in the course of their history; and certainly Sabah is a more mature state.

With regard to our friend the Bajau in particular, let Charles Bruce have the last word:

"He *is* a bit of a blackguard in many ways and a difficult citizen to handle; but personally I have always felt that half the crimes of the Bajau are due to his sporting instincts. It may be a very immoral sentiment, but there must be something very exhilarating in cattle-lifting. A dark night, the search for an eligible buffalo, the chase, the capture, and then the long ride by circuitous tracks to the highlands, the bargaining with one's tame 'receiver', the effort to establish a fool-proof alibi, and all for very long odds—ten or fifteen dollars against a couple of years in gaol."

A stolen buffalo would fetch many times that amount today: I'm not sure about the length of the prison sentence. But surely it was such broad-minded administrators who in their day must have won the guileful Bajau's heart!

6

Before taking leave of the coast we must look briefly at the remaining groups of people who, together with the more numerous Bajaus, make up the 'Moslem third' of Sabah's population.

The Illanuns I have already mentioned. Along with the Suluks, Obians, Binadans and other tiny and scattered communities they are very similar in their customs and traditions, though there are definite variations in the language. Today, a considerable barter trade is carried on between the Sulu Islands and the east Borneo coast, the centre of which is Tawau, and it is not always easy to distinguish between locally-born natives and those who are strictly speaking citizens of the Philippines. But for all this group the Sulu Archipelago is their ancestral home.

From the opposite direction have come the Brunei Malays

—another quite considerable element in the Moslem population. While they are, of course, similar to the Malay inhabitants of Malaya they are as thoroughly indigenous as any tribe in the country, since they came originally from the 'Borneo Capital', i.e., Brunei. They find themselves in another state today because the present borders throughout Borneo were drawn largely as the result of European influence.

The Bruneis are fairly widely scattered in Sabah (and also in Sarawak), mainly between Jesselton and Brunei Bay itself. Occasionally the Sultan of Brunei visits these people and is received with a good deal of ceremony. In a sense he regards them as his own; for unlike the Bajaus and the rest, the Bruneis can look to an ancestral home which has not only existed throughout the centuries as a centre of Malay culture —and on Borneo soil—but which is now flourishing again.

When the present sultan, Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin, visits Sabah he naturally does so by courtesy of its government; but both he and his people must be only too well aware that the land was at one time part of the ancient Malay kingdom. Sultans have ruled in Brunei for generation after generation; indeed, Sir Omar's lineage goes back much further than those of the ruling houses of Malaya itself.

Since World War II the royalties from the oilfields have revived the glories of Brunei and what was formerly a wretchedly poor and backward little state is now one of the richest in the world. Not so long ago the state had the money to make its desired improvements but could not get the necessary work done to carry them out; but now the town itself, if not the country as a whole, has been transformed with up-to-date schools and hospitals, and the great golden mosque opened in 1958 alongside the old riverine city is one of the modern wonders of the Far East.

It is against this background that we must see the short, sharp but abortive revolt under Inche Ahmad Azahari, head

of an organisation known as *Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara*—Northern Borneo National Army. It succeeded in capturing the important Seria Oilfields for a short time at the end of 1962, and also caused disturbances in the neighbouring territories. This revolt, egged on by outside help and sympathy, was an expression of Brunei nationalism and a desire to revive the ancient glories of the sultanate in a wider manner and, of course, on much more reformed and modern lines. It was also an anti-Malaysian gesture. Without the wealth of the oilfields nobody in Brunei would, I believe, ever have had any second thoughts about the issue.

But as far as the Bruneis in Sabah are concerned they are a reasonably contented section of the population of their adopted home. Some have received an education—occasionally at a Christian mission school—which has fitted them for service in one or another of the government departments. The very real tradition of racial friendship and tolerance for which the country is noted and which it greatly values is something that they also share.

The majority are fishermen, boat-builders or connected in some way with the sea. In dress, the men generally favour the black *songkok* rather than a turban, with a shirt and trousers or a *sarong,* while the women have a flair for brilliant colours. The Bruneis are always seen at their best at Hari Raya, the holiday which ends the fast of Ramadan. Then they all turn out in new and lovely clothes, the little boys exactly like miniature men and the little girls—as painted as their mothers—like miniature women; they stroll at leisure through the streets enjoying themselves. Borneo is a hot country—why exert oneself overmuch? Why worry unduly—about the past, about the future, about politics, or indeed about anything at all? That, if I have interpreted his mind aright, is how the Brunei looks on life. But one can never tell what outside influences may in time affect him.

Another similar people are the Kedayans. In Sabah, these are usually classed with the Brunei Malays. They form most of the native population of the Island of Labuan and smaller groups of them live along the mainland opposite. It is thought that the Kedayans came originally from Java or Sumatra and intermarried with the people of Brunei. In the past some of them seem to have been slaves, or freemen in search of land, and in order to obtain a freer life they left the sultanate of Brunei. Unlike the Sabah Bruneis they are mainly agriculturalists.

I have mentioned a certain 'merging at the fringes' between the coastal folk and one or another of the indigenous pagan tribes who form the largest element in the population.

Of the groups that have come about as a result of this merging the most interesting is probably the people known simply as *Orang Sungei*—Men of the River. They are found along with the Suluks on the east coast, in the lower reaches of the Sugut, the Labuk and the Kinabatangan Rivers and actually are Islamised Dusuns, the change in religion, from paganism to Islam, coming about largely through intermarriage.

Further down the coast, round Semporna, Tawau and across the Indonesian border, live the Tidongs, the counterpart as it were of the *Orang Sungei* since they are Islamised Muruts. It was through the Suluks and Bugis of Kalimantan that they received their Moslem religion. No definite numbers of either of these people are obtainable, but probably they are very small. All the above are rightly classed as indigenous Moslems, a reminder that the term 'Malay' is everywhere more a religious than a racial one and embraces great variation of ethnic stock.

Apart from a little agriculture, and such ventures as cattle-raising among the Tempasuk Bajaus, the sea provides the livelihood of by far the majority of this 'Moslem third'.

Salt-making is a trade pursued by some—traditionally to supply the up-country peoples. The salt is extracted from the *nipah* palm, which will only grow in salt water, by a process of burning. Another small industry is the sale of firewood cut from the mangrove swamps, and also, at Sandakan, of the mangrove bark for the manufacture of cutch. A few of the Bajaus on the east coast have for long collected and sold turtle eggs from some of the tiny off-shore islands; others harvest seed pearls which are exported to China and in the gathering of which there are special dances and interesting but little-known ceremonies.

But it is fishing that remains above all the chief occupation. At the impressive colony exhibition of 1959, staged in the capital in honour of the Duke of Edinburgh's visit—an exhibition in which North Borneo, as it was then called, excelled itself—even the oldest hands were amazed at the variety of fishing tackle that could be produced. For example, from one district alone, Kudat, the following articles of equipment—all in regular use—were on show: *rawai, pandung, sabit, larung, senapang, ikan, panah, tipara, tali tunda, rambat, tampuling, sangkap, bubu besar, bubu kechil, ablong, penggang, pukat.* And no excuse, as somebody remarked at the time, for the fish that got away!

Of the many methods of fishing round the Sabah coast the most ambitious is the construction of long bamboo fences which lead out into the sea, forming enclosures into which the fish swim and pass from one enclosure into another until finally they reach a small area from which there is no escape. All the owners have to do is to come out at low tide and collect the catch in a foot or so of water. Once these fences, or *pagars,* have been constructed, and provided they are kept in proper repair, they are very profitable investment. Wherever there is a sheltered bay or normally calm strip of sea you will find them, stretching out into the blue limpid waters, as

typical a sight as the striped sails of the little boats, the *lipa lipa* and the *dapang* that are always dancing their way round the coast.

Another quite common, and certainly quaint, method is to build a tall tripod of bamboo poles on which the fisherman sits perched high above the water and tries his luck with an ordinary rod and line. I have seen this method in use both on the remotest beaches and just near Jesselton's busy water-front, with cars and lorries passing within a few feet of the complacent native anglers.

Nets of many kinds are of course used, but there is little or no deep-sea fishing. Nevertheless, many tons of fish, prawns, shrimps and other sea-food are caught every year and much of it is salted and sent up-country where there is always a plentiful demand. This still leaves a considerable quantity for export. At all the main coastal centres there are flourishing fresh-fish markets, largely run by the Chinese, who also act as middlemen in the export trade.

Many countries boast of the brilliance of their sunsets; but I believe that nowhere in the world are they finer than off Sabah's north-western coast. The clouds bank up above the China Sea in mountains as magnificent and as fiery as Mount Kinabalu whose jagged peaks reflect in their turn the flaming colours. Then slowly both let them die; the light lingers on for some brief minutes and a man creeps silently and stealthily through the water, wading knee high, his net poised for a throw. Now is his best time, now in the quiet brief tropical evening. The net splays out in a wide circle and is quickly gathered in; the fish are tossed into a straw basket on the man's shoulder and, ready for another throw, he moves on, a black silhouette against the fast-fading sky.

Perhaps he is a Bajau, or a Brunei Malay, or a Kedayan. It doesn't really much matter—he is an *Orang Melayu* and, above all, a man of the coast.

Suluks bringing in their copra for sale near Tawau wharf

The modern waterfront, Jesselton

A Bajau making a canoe at Papar

Mengkabong, a village above the water where the Bajaus live

Part Two
BORNEO'S MILD MEN

7

FROM the coastal fringe of mangrove swamp, of casuarina trees, of long beaches, of creeks and estuaries where the sea-loving people ply their boats, broad rice fields lead up to the foot-hills of Sabah's high mountain ranges. Villages lie encircled by emerald green, or half-hidden along river banks; or, further inland, they clutch the steep slopes of the hills.

Above this country of the Dusuns, the largest group of all the native people, Mount Kinabalu rises like an emperor, or perhaps a god, looking down on their scattered dwellings—watching, brooding, and often smiling, swaying the destiny of the tribes. Kinabalu must be forever the Dusuns' mountain.

'Dusun' is not the name however that these folk, who numbered 145,229 at the last census, give to themselves or have ever recognised as a generic term for their various communities. It would seem that the Brunei Malays and the Bajaus thought the appellation *Orang Dusun*—a man of the orchards, or of the gardens—an apt description of their nearest inland neighbour and the word has stuck.

An earlier name still was *Piasau Idaan, piasau* meaning a coconut and *idaan* a village; thus these people were 'coconut villagers', and like 'people of the gardens' the name carried a suggestion that they were somewhat slow and backward—country bumpkins in fact. Slow, and perhaps more sure, no doubt they were in comparison with the quicker, slicker man of the coast. The Dusun has always been essentially

a man of the soil. But education has moved forward and because of the implications of the word 'Dusun' a strong movement today is seeking to replace it by 'Kadazan', a name which was in use in the Putatan and Penampang districts, not far inland from Gaya Bay, at the end of the last century and was known to the first Roman Catholic missionaries there. With the ever-growing use of the name 'Kadazan' there has now developed something of a new national consciousness and a laudable desire, as we shall see later, to preserve the Dusun culture.

The Dusuns—let us continue with the name for the time being—are not only the chief indigenous community, they are also the largest of any group, making up another one third of Sabah's total population. The numbers I have just quoted show a substantial increase on those of the former, 1951, census, when they stood at only 117,867.

These widespread people stretch from the Sugut and Labuk Rivers westwards as far as Membakut, and from Kudat to Tambunan in the Interior. That is to say, they are all round the mountain but especially to the west and south, where they form an almost solid group—if one may use the word 'solid' for so sparsely an inhabited land—over all the west coast and on the upland plains of Ranau and Tambunan.

It is interesting that while there are Muruts in other parts of Borneo—in neighbouring Sarawak and Kalimantan—and while most of the coastal peoples have distant cousins somewhere in the Malay Archipelago, the Dusuns alone seem to be confined to Sabah. But one must not regard them as a single group; there are many sub-tribes, each with distinctive traditions and customs and speaking a variety of dialects which are on the whole mutually understood. A certain number speak Malay, a very few, English. There is great variety, too, in their personal appearance: in the hills they are of a lighter complexion than in the plains and they tend to be stockier,

with strongly-developed calf muscles, the result of constant walking and climbing.

Like the Bajaus, they are short and are not perhaps a particularly handsome race. But the Dusun has an honest and usually cheerful expression. Some of the young women, as the early European travellers were quick to notice, can be very lovely and know how to enhance their charms by fantastically beautiful traditional dresses. In both sexes the face is rather full and round and the nose is often too pudgy, with the nostrils splayed out as one sees sometimes among the Chinese and similar Eastern peoples. But then, few noses are entirely satisfactory, aesthetically at any rate, either in the East or the West.

A Dusun will usually describe himself as a man of the village where he lives, for instance, a 'Kiau', or by the name of his river, or perhaps more generally as a *tulun tindal*—a landsman. And as agriculturalists the Dusuns are a prosperous people and the principal rice growers of the country. They form a stable element in a territory where the bulk of the population lives away from the towns.

The biggest step forward in their history must have taken place at some unknown and remote time when they learned the technique of wet-paddy growing—the use of a plough in a flat, flooded field. By this they jumped from the age-long method of growing rice known as shifting cultivation—the clearing of the jungle from the hillside, the scratching of the soil, the planting and gathering of the crop and the passing on to another hill. This wasteful method is still practised by some of the Dusuns, in common with many of the Muruts; but for the overwhelming majority the cultivation of wet-paddy fields, with resulting better crops, has for long been the custom.

A typical village on the west coast plain will stand surrounded by its coconut trees, with perhaps some other large trees such as mangoes or rambutans interspersed among the

houses. The houses themselves are raised a few feet above ground as with the Bajaus. The materials used are also similar : planks or woven walls and a roof of *attap*.

Each family occupies its own house. In Sarawak you can sometimes find a communal longhouse at no very great distance up a river; but in Sabah, except for a few instances in the Kudat peninsula, you have to go far inland in order to see such a dwelling-place, for the Dusuns have long since abandoned this form of living.

All the animals common to a coastal village are much in evidence, with the notable addition of the pig. You will not go far in Dusun country without seeing pigs, which are mostly dark grey like the wild boar that is still very common in the jungle. The domestic pigs roam about freely, the owners only endeavouring to get them into some sort of enclosure at night. Water-buffaloes, goats and chickens are also ubiquitous.

Round the village stretch the paddy fields : at certain seasons a broad sheet of water intersected by low narrow mud walls which reflects the white billowy clouds; at other times a soft enchanting emerald and at others again a mixture of brilliant green and gold, for rice ripens in patches.

All the land is individually owned, each family possessing a few acres. Mutual help is given at the busy seasons of ploughing, planting and harvesting, a general supervision being exercised, if he is active, by the village headman. During the Japanese occupation the system of land tenure was much disorganised and for many years afterwards the Department of Lands and Surveys was faced with an immense task in issuing and reissuing native land titles.

It has sometimes been pointed out that the kind of rice cultivation practised by the Dusuns is almost identical with that to be seen in southern China. Possibly it was from the Chinese that the flooding of fields and the ploughing of them with a simple plough drawn by water-buffalo was learned.

That the Chinese came to the country at a very early date we know—the extent of their influence is largely a matter of conjecture. Our real difficulty is that we have no means of telling how far the Chinese settled down and intermarried with the original inhabitants, which the Dusuns certainly are, there being no traces of older aboriginals at least in Sabah. Like most matters concerned with Borneo's past this question seems likely to remain conjectural.

The similarity of agricultural methods, together with such facts as the extremely pale skins of many of the hill Dusuns, have nevertheless been claimed as proof that these people are in fact a mixed race, partly of Indonesian stock, partly of Chinese. There are one or two old Dusun legends that lend colour to the idea.

A good example is a tale related by Kabong, a former headman of the well-known village of Kiau which stands perched on the lower slopes of Kinabalu. It seems likely that it first reached European ears through him. It is not a particularly nice story, but I give it as told by Owen Rutter in his *Pagans of North Borneo.**

" The son of the Emperor of China (Rajah China) was on a visit to Brunei and went to bathe in a pool. The daughter of the Sultan of Brunei (Rajah Brunei) came to fetch water, and the prince, being ashamed to be seen naked before a woman, submerged himself in the water. In drawing the water, the princess slipped on the stones and fell on top of the prince in such a way that they became physically united, and the union was consummated by her making efforts to get up. In due course she bore a son, and a similar incident, repeated later, produced a daughter; the two children married and founded the Dusun tribe."

The Malays love stories of this and many other kinds. But it is remarkable that the Dusuns should have preserved it,

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especially in view of the horror with which they have traditionally regarded the practice of incest.

Another legend in which a Chinese figures is the old story of the Dragon of Kinabalu. This takes a number of different forms but in all of them a dragon guards a great diamond near the summit of the mountain and it is always a Chinaman who climbs up and tries, unsuccessfully, to obtain it.

Whatever one may care to make of such legends, the origin of the Dusuns remains a mystery. We are only able to say that, unlike the waves of Moslem immigrants who at one time drove them from the immediate coast, they have been in the country for many thousands of years and that, as with the Muruts to whom they are so akin, no people have a claim to be more thoroughly indigenous.

If in the remote past the Chinese played any part in bringing about the Dusun race as it now is, then all trace of their language must have long since disappeared; for there is not the slightest similarity today.

8

Day to day life in a Dusun village mostly revolves round the annual cycle of preparing the fields, planting the new rice and reaping the harvest.

For this there is a division of labour in which the men seem to come off slightly better than the women. Both help with the first stage, which is the construction or repair of the dykes or little mud walls—usually just wide enough for one person to walk along—and which are to be seen everywhere in Dusun country.

They divide the fields and contain the water which softens the soil for ploughing. For this, rainfall is widely relied upon, though in one or two areas, notably Tuaran and Papar, successful irrigation schemes have been introduced. The men-

folk do the ploughing, followed by harrowing with a wooden rake, using the same type of primitive tools that have been customary for centuries. Their water-buffaloes, or *kerbau,* are essential for this work.

The women must then by tradition take the young rice-stalks from the nurseries and dibble them into the wet, ploughed fields, which they do in wonderfully straight rows. The work is back-breaking, for they keep at it all day and the constant paddling about in the muddy water must be unhealthy for the rheumatically inclined. Women, too, usually weed the crop as its growth advances, receiving perhaps some help from the bigger children. In all these activities they wear their distinctive hats, their *saroungs* (not to be confused with the Malay sarong) which are delicately woven and are always conical, though each district has its special variety of shape and pattern.

As the rice begins to ripen measures have to be taken to protect it from the depredations of certain animals, birds and insects. In the more remote areas deer and wild pig are a menace, and everywhere there is danger from the flocks of weaver-birds, sometimes known as Borneo sparrows, which can descend like locusts on the ripening paddy. In the battle of wits that follows the Dusun often displays great ingenuity. For example, he will often set a number of bamboo poles loosely in the ground all over his field and connect them by strings to a central point—a tripod or a little shelter. Here a boy or even a small child can sit pulling the strings which have tins and other pieces of bamboo attached, thoroughly enjoying himself making an unearthly rattling which if persevered with will keep the birds off all day. For insect pests a great deal of help is given through the several agricultural research stations established throughout the state.

Everybody, man, woman and child, joins in the harvesting. Schools often close voluntarily during this period. The times

vary in different parts of the country, but on the west coast where there is the greatest concentration of population and most rice is grown, it usually takes place soon after Christmas.

The final stage is the drying of the rice by spreading it out on large mats in the sun. Primitive threshing is still carried out in many villages and homesteads but in the main rice-growing areas mills owned and operated by the Chinese are generally within easy reach of most of the fields. It is a common sight to see the buffaloes lumbering to and from the mills, each animal carrying a heavy sack—and usually its owner—on its back.

In former times when the only outlet for surplus rice was casual barter, the amount of the crop considered necessary for the coming year was set aside and stored in special containers which were kept resting on the rafters of the roof of the house. The rest was promptly turned into *tapai* for the harvest celebrations. *Tapai,* or rice beer, is the great Sabah drink and when the gongs beat and the dancing begins enormous quantities of it are consumed. The feasting after the harvest did, and still does, continue for days; but in recent years the North Borneo natives as a whole have become much more cash conscious and the Dusun in particular has begun to see the advantages of selling his surplus rice. The old forms of wealth—ancient gongs and jars—are still highly prized. But money is slowly taking their place. As a result, many of the Dusuns are prosperous and have been able to build better and more substantial houses for themselves.

An instinct for trade is specially common to all coastal peoples. The Bajaus, though often living on uneasy terms with their nearest inland neighbours, whose buffaloes they loved to steal, nevertheless undoubtedly encouraged them to enter into a trading relationship which for generations was carried on by barter. The Bajaus had their salt and fish to offer, together with such attractions as cloth, beads and brass wire from the

outside world; the Dusuns had their rice, tobacco and jungle produce.

Ivor Evans, who made the most intensive study of the Dusuns of the Tempasuk, discovered the following tale of how according to Dusun folklore the Bajaus first came to that district and began to trade in beeswax.

Once there was a poor man who dreamed that if he could find a *kendilong* tree—a tree with a white sap that is very irritating to the skin—he would become rich. He set out and found one just as it was growing dark. It had a bees'-nest in it. So he slept the night there and in the morning went home and brought back two friends with him to the tree. Between them they got the nest down but did not know to whom to sell it.

Now a Bajau came up the river, the first time one of his race had ever ventured so far. He met the man with the nest, and going back to his home he saw there a quantity of nests —no less than four sacks of them. They were quite unknown to the Bajau but he bought them for a little cloth and said he would do his best to sell them. Together the men swore brotherhood and sacrificed a hen to mark the occasion. After three months the Bajau returned with a large boat full of goods. He found the Dusun's house full of bees'-nests ready to be exchanged, and from then on they traded and the Dusun became rich.

Though the Chinese have now largely edged the Bajau out, he is by tradition the go-between for the up-country people. In fact, in the early days of the Chartered Company, whenever a Dusun wished to approach one of its officers over any matter he would invariably bring along a Bajau with him—a practice which the administration tended to discourage.

As well as the main activity of wet-paddy growing there are many other calls on the Dusuns' time and energies.

Tapioca, or *ubi kayu,* is widely cultivated and is often used to supplement the diet when the rice crop has been poor.

It also makes satisfactory *tapai*—satisfactory, that is, from the Dusuns' point of view. For my own part, nothing could persuade me that any *tapai,* whether made from rice or tapioca, is a satisfactory drink. Pumpkins, melons, cucumbers, sugar-cane, sweet potatoes and bananas are all grown in the gardens, the success of the crops depending very largely on local keenness, for all do well in virtually any village provided proper care is given to them. In certain areas near Kinabalu, especially at Kiau and Ranau, good little oranges are grown. The skin is green but they are sweet and usually sell well down at the coast and along the railway that runs from Tenom to Jesselton. At Kundasan High Altitude Agricultural Station, a government venture at the foot of the mountain, strawberries and various sub-tropical fruits flourish, but they have not so far been produced in any great quantity.

Coconut trees of course grow everywhere and bestow many benefits on their owners, including a palm toddy which is made from the sap. But another tree, the *pinang* palm, is just as highly prized for it provides the betel-nut so essential for chewing.

This habit is so universal, not only among the Dusuns but among all the native peoples that it is worth giving in some detail the delectable experience of ' chewing a quid '.

No visitor to a house is allowed to depart without being offered betel-nut, and indeed it would be a serious breach of hospitality not to offer it. First, a box or tray containing some *sireh* leaf—a kind of climbing pepper found in the jungle —is placed on the floor before you; if the family is ' modern ' and has gone in for tables and chairs it will of course be placed on the table. You are then expected to help yourself to the necessary ingredients to wrap up in the leaf: a piece of betel-nut, a piece of gambier, a smear of lime and sometimes perhaps a little native tobacco. The leaf is folded over to form the quid and is popped into the mouth. In due course

a flow of blood-like saliva will result, which can be spat out of the window or over the veranda or, if you are sufficiently adroit, through a crack in the floor-boards. The quid has an astringent taste and the effect is stimulating.

As well as their coconut and *pinang* palms most Dusun villages will have a few of the larger trees such as the mango; the well-known durian with its overpoweringly odoriferous skin; the tarap, a kind of bread-fruit; the langsat—oval, honey-coloured and rather tart—and the rambutan, a crimson and hairy fruit with a sweet flesh something like a grape.

In certain up-country districts native tobacco is quite an industry, especially at Ranau and Keningau, while in the lower areas the people have clumps of sago which are traditionally owned and which, like the bamboo, can be put to many uses.

It is not surprising, therefore, that if one visits a typical village during the daytime it will usually appear to be almost empty. The little paths meander past the houses. A few old people and young children will be about. Chickens scratch in the dust, pigs wallow in the mud. But most of the inhabitants are either out in the rice-fields or collecting bamboos or fruit or engaged in searching for jungle produce of some kind.

In the lowland regions of Penampang and Putatan, which are fairly densely populated, you may come across many such semi-deserted villages; but as you follow the winding paths and pick your way over stiles and muddy ditches, as I have often done, you begin to see the people. There is always some activity in the fields and you are hardly ever out of sight of a homestead.

Remembering that the Dusuns are an Eastern, and tropical, race they can fairly be termed industrious. And if they are somewhat slow-moving they are none the worse for that; they are countrymen, with the ways and solid virtues of the countryside.

9

"I'm sure that is the spot where I left a bottle in 1851."

Hugh Low, treasurer of the tiny and dismally-struggling island colony of Labuan, gazed at the clear-cut, distant peaks of Mount Kinabalu and his remark aroused his companion from a reverie, as together they rested in the welcome shade of some palm-trees while beside them flowed the Tempasuk River, bubbling and breaking over its uneven bed.

This companion, Spenser St. John, we have already met in connection with the ex-pirate, Father Cuarteron. Appointed ten years earlier—the year was now 1858—as secretary to the first Rajah of Sarawak, he had acquired a taste for adventurous travel in the East and with the Rajah and the Rajah Muda had made many journeys, including visits to Siam and the islands of the Sulu Sea. He had left Sarawak in 1856 for Brunei on his taking up the appointment of British Consul-General in Borneo.

One of St. John's long-cherished ambitions had been to climb the mysterious, unknown mountain of Sabah—and perhaps, in conquering its crisp, crenellated peaks, to become the first white man to do so. In this, however, his friend had forestalled him: Hugh Low had made the ascent in 1851, perpetuating his name both in Low's Peak and in *Nepenthes Lowii*—one of the varieties of the fascinating pitcher-plant which still adorns the slopes of the mountain.

It had been an incredible achievement in an entirely unknown country. No one had believed that Low would succeed. But he had in fact reached the foot of one of those last rugged peaks that rise a few hundred feet to the summit; and there, as he remarked, he had left a bottle, containing of course an inscription. Later the journey was proved to have been all the more incredible since he had approached Kinabalu by way

of the Tuaran River. Even today, when a jeep-track has been pushed up from this direction, linking the Interior with the coast, the route over those dizzy, razor-back hills is known as the ' Wall of Death '.

Now the two friends were launched on another expedition. Spenser St. John had sailed across from Brunei to Labuan and together they had planned the approach by the same Tuaran route. But it so happened that they had met a Bajau chief—in Labuan on a trading voyage—who had persuaded them that it would be easier to reach the mountain by way of *his* river, the Tempasuk. Accepting the advice, they had come up the North Borneo coast and landed at a small bay called Abai.

Here the chief had met them and proved most helpful, putting them up at his large house on the lower Tempasuk and securing some Bajau guides. When finally the travellers got started he accompanied them on the first few miles of their journey.

They had left Labuan with two servants and seventeen followers. Now, with the recently-recruited Bajaus, the party amounted to about thirty. Every man was provided with a musket.

Sitting beneath the palm trees St. John had become lost in wonder at the massive form of Kinabalu when Low pointed suddenly to a huge fissure high up among the purple peaks. " I'm sure that is the spot where I left a bottle . . ."

Out came the telescope to note the exact position of every crag. St. John made a rough sketch of the whole summit. He was determined if possible to visit that fissure and see if the bottle still remained. In the event he got there, his feet dripping blood on the granite slopes . . . and found the bottle intact. But for Hugh Low, as things turned out, the trip proved to be a failure.

Meanwhile a tough but fascinating journey lay ahead.

The rapidly-flowing Tempasuk had to be crossed and re-crossed many times; the sandy track became so hot that the white men felt the pain through their shoes; while those who went barefoot " danced along over it as if they were on burning stones ". Near the village of Ghinambur St. John noted that the natives were ploughing—the first time he had seen it in Borneo. The rough primitive ploughs must, he thought, have been derived from the Chinese. They only scratched the surface but it was better than any attempt at agriculture he had seen in the Brunei district. Today, Ghinambur, which has changed its name slightly to Teghinambur, is a flourishing centre of wet-paddy growing, a number of the hill Dusuns having been persuaded to settle in the lowlands under missionary influence.

The ' Idaan ' natives, the explorers found, were not unfriendly and were willing to barter through the Bajaus. But when the latter suggested to the white men half a dollar's worth of goods for a fowl—knowing well that they themselves could get a dozen for the same amount—the offer was firmly declined. " We expected and intended to let them cheat us moderately, but this was too barefaced."

Still, an occasional offer of a house to sleep in as an alternative to their tents was made to the travellers, and one of them impressed St. John by its cleanliness. He compared it favourably with the Dayak houses in which he had stayed. " These Idaan are very good specimens of the interior people —clear-skinned, free from disease, with pleasant, good-humoured countenances. None of the women are good-looking, yet they could not be called ugly. We noticed these peculiarities: that all the girls and young women wore a piece of black cloth to conceal their bosoms, which was held in place by strips of coloured rattans . . ." (The fashion still prevails among the Kiau Dusuns.)

They met a number of large parties of Idaan, travelling

Young rice growing near Tuaran, on the west coast

A Bajau with his water-buffalo — in Sabah, man's best friend

The station at Papar on Borneo's only railway

Dusuns—or Kadazans—crossing a stream at Kota Belud

to the coast with loads of tobacco with which they were going to trade. Some of the men were tattooed on their bodies and arms, a custom which, though still common in Sarawak, has now to a great extent died out in Sabah. All the natives were small and slight and armed with spears and swords.

"As we were the first Europeans who had ever penetrated so far into the country, we excited great curiosity, particularly among the female portion of the tribe; every action was watched and commented upon . . ."

A question the travellers were constantly asked was why they were visiting Kinabalu. Some thought it must be a search for gold or copper. One man sagaciously observed that they were seeking the *lagundi* tree, the tree which was said to grow on the summit of the mountain and whose fruit had the power to restore youth and enable one to live for countless ages. It was useless to assure their questioners that the object of the visit was curiosity—or a desire to collect botanical specimens. The natives were left wondering.

Climbing steadily now, they reached the village of Kaung and were entranced with the beauty of its situation. Round the village they noticed an abundance of rice and vegetables, and also some wild strawberries. Cattle and buffaloes grazed in the vicinity and there were many pigs and fowls—"and no one near them to plunder or exact."

But when they reached Labang Labang, on the way up to Kiau from where the real climb was to begin, the two white men ran into trouble. With a few others they had walked on ahead of the main party and as they passed the first house of the village an old woman came to the door and began uttering what appeared to be curses. Taking no notice they pressed on till they were hailed by an ugly-looking fellow ("with an awful squint") who stopped them, declaring that they could not pass through his village.

All this was undoubtedly a prepared scene. Immediately

the whole population collected together, fully armed. The squint-eyed leader protested that since Mr. Low had climbed the mountain in 1851 the crops had never been good. The travellers promptly recollected that in 1856 a naturalist named Lobb (the second white man to approach Kinabalu) had been turned back by the people of Kiau. Arriving quite unarmed, he had been confronted by the villagers with extortionate demands which he had had to refuse. Lobb had therefore contented himself with climbing a much smaller peak.

It was clear that the same kind of tactics were being tried again. After some parley the headman actually suggested that a slave ought to be made over to his people in return for permission to proceed.

Spencer St. John was not standing any nonsense of this kind. But in the expedition's not inconsiderable baggage were bales of cloth and coils of brass wire, brought to exchange for provisions; he offered a present of forty yards of grey cloth.

After this proposition had been insolently turned down the Labang Labang warriors all began shaking their spears. St. John sent back one of his men to tell the main party to hurry up. In the meantime the villagers made an offer to take the explorers up the mountain if they would agree to start from their village. But owing to the uncertainty of the route and the now general atmosphere of suspicion this had to be declined.

The main party arrived and St. John ordered the men to load their muskets. Low then stepped up to the headman with his five-barrelled pistol and through an interpreter explained that they were peaceable travellers who had obtained the permission of the Government to enter the country—which was true, since the whole region was at any rate nominally under the Sultan of Brunei who had given his consent to the venture. Low remarked that if any threats of violence were

carried out he would shoot five men and his friend was prepared to do the same. The opposition melted away. The original offer of cloth was accepted and the party of climbers allowed to proceed without hindrance.

"We were detained," records St. John laconically, "forty minutes by this affair."

10

The two friends had now to contend earnestly with the torrents of the Tempasuk.

This river is fed by numerous foaming streams which rise in the heights of Mount Kinabalu and which meet in the region they were now traversing. Many of these streams had to be crossed. Also the steep path up to the village of Kiau proved difficult and slippery. But here they were at least out of the heat; the steaming jungle through which they had recently passed stretched behind them, down to the lowlands and the sea. Ahead loomed the great mass of the mountain.

On reaching Kiau St. John found that he had to revise his opinion a little about the cleanliness of the Dusun folk; the people were dirty—and most of them troubled with colds, "rendering them in every sense unpleasant neighbours." He observed that the features of many of these people "were like the Chinese—perhaps a trace of that ancient kingdom of Celestials which tradition fixes in this neighbourhood."

Accommodation was provided by the elderly chief of a longhouse, Li Moung. Among the Bajaus and lowland Dusuns the travellers had seen only small separate houses in the Malay style—an indication that head-hunting feuds no longer made life in a longhouse imperative. At Kiau, the old style of building had been preserved: a long passage led right through the house from end to end; on one side were private apartments, on the other a raised platform on which slept the lads

and unmarried men. St. John thought it better arranged than the Sea Dayak longhouses he had seen in Sarawak, and more comfortable since the dogs were not permitted to wander all over it.

Shortly after their arrival Hugh Low's old guide came in. His name, Li Maing, was similar to that of their host. Low at once recognised his voice, though it was seven years since they had met. Unfortunately he had not been in the house long before a quarrel broke out between the two Dusuns. There was a good deal of talk about no crops growing since the white man's ascent of Kinabalu. Both Li Moung and Li Maing grew very excited, and finally each jumped up and spat on the floor in an outburst of mutual defiance. It transpired that this was a renewal of a dispute about the distribution of some goods left by Low that had been going on between them for the past seven years. The total value of the goods was about a pound.

There were rumours of war between the various tribes and sub-tribes. On the second morning in Kiau the war-drums sounded in some of the houses and there were shouts and yells from the boys. The travellers guessed, quite correctly, that the demonstration was not without some reference to their expedition; for later stones were thrown at them from a nearby hill. The guide, Li Maing, did not appear as promised. St. John thought it time to bring out his revolver, which he discharged and cleaned; this operation seemed to lessen the hostile shouting and cool the atmosphere generally.

At noon Li Maing decided to turn up and the party at last got away, heading straight for the mountain. They followed a path along the side of the hill on which Kiau is perched, and after four difficult miles descended to one of the feeder streams of the Tempasuk. For some time Low had been having trouble with his feet and now they were swollen and suppurating—both men had walked barefoot for a time in the earlier

stages of the journey. It was decided to camp by the stream for the night.

Next morning the real ascent began. But for Low this was an impossibility; reluctantly he stayed at the camp, four others remaining with him to guard the muskets, and the climbing party took only their swords and one revolver between them.

The walking was severe—the path " as vile as path can be " —but for St. John as he went ahead with the guide Li Maing, it was the realisation of a long-cherished ambition. He was on the slopes of Kinabalu itself, with its two miles of serrated summit beckoning him on.

Before another night passed, Li Maing, who had brought with him an enormous bundle of charms, began to carry out those ceremonies which are still to be witnessed in one form or another by those who attempt to climb Kinabalu today. Before the mountain is invaded, the spirits which inhabit it must be informed and placated. On Li Maing fell the duty of praying and of imploring the forgiveness of his ancestors for disturbing the peace of their resting-place. St. John timed him by his watch and the ' service ' took two hours. He could gather little of what was said owing to the difficulty of interpretation but he heard his own name repeated a number of times. The spirits of the ancestors were being left in no doubt that another white man was coming up.

The next night was spent at Paka Cave, a large overhanging rock near a stream some 3,000 feet below the last granite slopes of the summit itself. Some of the lowland natives found the going so heavy that they did not arrive till after dark, and the Malays were paralysed with the cold.

But the following morning St. John and his party did the final strenuous climb, reaching the highest peaks through thick low jungle full of rhododendrons, stunted brushwood, and then over the naked granite. " The rocks were often at an angle of nearly forty degrees, so that I was forced to ascend

them, at first with woollen socks, and when they were worn through, with bare feet. It was a sad alternative, as the rough stone wore away the skin, and left a bleeding and tender surface."

Finding the bottle left by Low in 1851, he returned it unopened to the spot where it had been placed—later it disappeared. Then he looked down, as climbers have done ever since, over the sheer precipice of several thousand feet from Low's Gully, and fell to speculating what might lie inland beyond the gigantic mountain. Both Low and St. John seem to have been convinced at this time of a great lake somewhere to the south-east. They also thought that there was another peak even loftier than Kinabalu in the far Interior.

Before making the descent, the guides—who became very nervous as swirling mists began to sweep up the slopes below them—pointed out to St. John a certain kind of moss growing in the crevices of the rocks; this, they declared, was the food on which their ancestors fed. A certain grass was also pointed out as the food of the ghostly buffaloes which always followed their masters to this other world of the mountain; and in support of this they showed him the footprint of a young buffalo. The explorer remained unconvinced.

The return to the cave and thence to the base camp was uneventful. Low had meanwhile employed his time in collecting plants. But unfortunately his feet were no better. The whole party descended to Kiau, where the next morning they made a kind of litter on which to carry him. On a later stage of the journey he had to be carried on a raft down the Tempasuk for part of the way.

Regrettable incidents marked the white men's leave-taking of the Kiau villagers. The atmosphere was obviously still very unsettled and everyone was certainly determined not to let any goods leave the village at all if he could possibly help it.

After the two travellers had distributed various items on the evening before they were due to leave, there was some thick brass wire weighing about twenty pounds left over. This Li Maing coolly walked off with while St. John was bathing. Low, who could not move, was unable to stop him; the wire was taken to the other end of the longhouse where St. John later found Li Maing showing it off to a large and admiring audience. He decided that unless he took firm action this incident might well lead to a signal for general plunder. So he forced his way through the crowd, tore the prize from Li Maing's grasp with one hand and with the other put a revolver to his head. Li Maing's astonishment was so great that he could not speak. St. John reclaimed the brass wire and the crowd opened to let him pass.

The payment to the guides seems to have been generous, for it included twenty fathoms of the wire. But the natives could not decide how it should be divided. After two hours' discussion they could not even agree as to who should take charge of it for the night and they quarrelled about it till the morning.

When, after what must have been an unpleasantly disturbed night, the two travellers were all set for an early start they were alarmed by a shout from the house. A man ran to say that their baggage, ready to be carried by some of the lowland Dusuns, was being plundered. This contained their clothes and their cooking utensils.

St. John re-entered the house to find two hundred of the Kiaus undoing the packages. There was only one answer to this—he produced his rifle. Even Low hopped back, revolver in hand. The rest of the travelling party showed a readiness to fight if need be. But the sight of the weapons was enough to restore order; the plunderers fled to the end of the longhouse and disappeared through the opposite door. The party got away safely.

"I may here remark," records St. John, "that in none of our journeys have we ever found it necessary to use our weapons against the inhabitants." He claimed that by showing themselves prepared to fight if necessary they prevented its ever being necessary to fight. His motto was *Si vis pacem para bellum*.

11

Relationships between European explorers interested in the same locale have often been marred by jealousy. There seems to be no trace of this with Low and St. John. They had been good companions on the journey. Each had now climbed the summit of what transpired to be the highest mountain in Borneo and in South-East Asia and have given his name to one of its peaks. Three months later they got together again and set out for another, and this time much more successful, ascent of Kinabalu.

Rather surprisingly they decided on the Tuaran River approach which Hugh Low had followed on his first journey. They sailed, as before, from Labuan and up the north-west coast, landing in Gaya Bay. It was here that Spenser St. John saw the little palm-leaf hut and chapel built by Father Cuarteron, whose Spanish brig was anchored at a place called Lokporin.

The travellers made arrangements to leave their own boat in the care of the native chief of Gantisan, and presently they met the missionary, who accompanied them as far as the Tuaran. At Mengkabong, the largest Bajau settlement on the north-west coast, all three white men had breakfast at the house of the nominal ruler, Pengiran Duroup. Cuarteron did not allay St. John's suspicions of him by pointing out the Pengiran's son, an intelligent lad whom, he said, he intended to raise to power over all the surrounding countries and be

himself the boy's Prime Minister. "A Spaniard has many temptations," wrote St. John later, "to intrigue in these districts . . ."

By the time some Bajaus had been hired as carriers the climbing party numbered forty-one. Walking in the lowlands was easy and pleasant. Some of the baggage was taken for a time on light bamboo sledges drawn by buffaloes. St. John again noted the ploughing and thought that on the Tuaran plain it was better and deeper than at Tempasuk. For three miles before the river was reached, the hills rose in successive ranges, with Kinabalu crowning the scene. There were groves of tall palms; fruit trees and sago; Indian corn and sugar-cane; yams and caladium. This lovely stretch of country-side made, as it still does, a strong appeal.

Some of the houses were small and detached, others were obviously longhouses which have now disappeared. The gardens were neatly fenced and carefully tended. There were cattle, buffaloes and goats in great numbers. The old chief's house at Tamparuli—the only place apparently where St. John saw human heads—was very similar in appearance to those of the Sarawak Sea Dayaks.

The two friends also saw here "the loveliest girl in Borneo". She was the chief's daughter and St. John gives a most enthusiastic description of her.

"I have never seen a native surpass her in figure, or equal her gentle, expressive countenance. She appeared but sixteen years of age, and as she stood near, leaning against the door-post in the most graceful attitude, we had a perfect view of all her perfections. Her dress was slight indeed, consisting of nothing but a short petticoat reaching from her waist to a little above her knees. Her skin was of that light clear brown which is almost the perfection of colour in a sunny clime, and as she was just returning from bathing, her hair unbound fell in great luxuriance over her shoulders. Her eyes were black,

not flashing, but rather contemplative, and her features were regular, even her nose was straight."

The old chief of Tamparuli had been with Low on his first trip, but he now felt that his days for climbing were past. He accompanied the travellers for a short distance, then handed over to his son-in-law and a Malay who was married to a Dusun girl and who was to act as interpreter and guide—not very satisfactorily in either capacity.

The Tuaran River was unfordable and the whole party had to be taken across by boat. This, together with having to wait about for the men who had been sent in search of rice, made progress slow. Then came the first range of hills. " For a thousand feet it was abrupt, and severe work to those unused to such toil." But St. John was enraptured by the magnificence of the view all down the coast, with the intricate waters of Mengkabong beyond the plain.

Now really in the mountains, the guide next day led them in a totally wrong direction and instead of reaching the village of Kalawat, as they had hoped, they found that they had come round in a circle. Up and down steep ravines, they pushed on further into the ranges, reaching Kalawat at last and, next day, the large village of Bungol.

Bungol, which St. John estimated from the length of the different houses to contain about 160 families, stood on the banks of the upper Tuaran, now a rushing, foaming torrent. Omar, the guide, reported that all the bridges on the regular track had been swept away and that he would have to take the party by another path which he had never followed before.

The travellers had no choice but to agree. The word ' path ' proved a euphemism and the unfortunate Omar led them for eight hours over numerous pathless ranges until eventually they found themselves at the Tempasuk—about three miles below Kaung. " A fatiguing day " comments St. John; but

at least they knew where they were. The next morning they walked on into Kaung.

Here they found the chief's house crowded with villagers, and to their astonishment the chief began to demand payment for permission to travel through his territory. Unable to account for this change of attitude in an elderly man who had previously received them kindly, they looked round to see if someone were perhaps putting him up to it. Sure enough they caught sight of the squint-eyed headman from Labang Labang, whose name transpired to be Timbangan.

Quickly sizing up the situation, the two white men dealt with it with characteristic energy. They got the interpreters to explain carefully their objects in travelling through the country and to say that they would pay for everything they required, and for any possible damage done by the party, but not for the mere permission to travel. A revolver was then discharged through a thick plank to demonstrate how useless a native shield would be; this was specially for the benefit of Timbangan, who promptly disappeared. The old chief was invited to handle St. John's heavy double-barrelled rifle, and doubtless he reflected on the uncanny power that these strange visitors possessed.

The first impact of civilised Europeans on a people still in a primitive stage of society is always a fascinating study. In the case of these up-country 'Idaan' who, like some of the hill Muruts today, had scarcely moved out of Stone Age conditions, the experience must have been an extraordinary and a revealing one. That they were fortunate in receiving two pioneers of the calibre of St. John and Low there can be little doubt. Whatever the circumstances, these men never flinched under threats; never showed the slightest fear; and at the same time could be kind and generous to a degree. At Kaung, for example, they made presents to the old chief's wife which far exceeded in value what had been demanded as 'travel

blackmail '; while at Kiau, as we shall just see, their attitude of firmness had won the friendship of the tribe which, rather to their surprise, turned out to give them an enthusiastic welcome.

First, however, they had to pass through Labang Labang and there were rumours afloat that Timbangan was collecting his people together in order to dispute their passage. The village stood at the foot of a hill. Before ascending, the leaders halted to allow the rest of their party to catch up. They then approached Labang Labang in strength.

To their surprise they found the place completely deserted—except for Timbangan himself! Surprisingly again, he offered his services as a guide; and though the travellers now knew the way fairly well they gladly accepted and at a later stage rewarded him for his assistance.

Great as this change of attitude was, the welcome they received at Kiau must have struck them as even more astonishing. A wedding was in progress as they arrived, and soon all the guests came flocking down to meet them "in the most friendly and hearty manner," and these were the very men, as St. John says, who previously had been ready to exchange blows.

Even this welcome, however, gratifying as it must have been, could not overcome the perennial difficulty of obtaining sufficient rice for the needs of the party. Accordingly it was decided to send back a large contingent to the coast to fetch up supplies. The two white travellers told the Kiau Dusuns of this intention, and for several days they stayed among them, with complete trust on both sides; only six of the lowland natives remaining in the village.

It is unnecessary to recount the actual ascent of the mountain on this occasion. The two companions reached the summit successfully and we hear no more about sore feet. A brief period of sunshine gave a magnificent view of the coastline

which could be traced even down to a distant and somewhat hazy Labuan; but bad weather marred the descent. A great many plants were collected, including some new varieties of the *nepenthes* or pitcher-plant.

There was still a good deal of talk about the presumed lake to the south of Mount Kinabalu. The native encouraged the idea freely, even mentioning the name of villages on the road to it; and the white men, possibly with recent African discoveries in mind, were eager to believe what they heard. Borneo, however, proved to be a country without lakes. It is possible that some swampy marshland in the vicinity of Ranau gave rise to the misconception, for Ranau would seem to be a corruption of the Malay word *danau,* which means a lagoon. If the explorers constantly heard their guides talking about a lagoon somewhere behind the mountain one can easily understand how they came to believe, with the early map-makers before, in the existence of a large lake.

On returning to Kiau they had a very different kind of settling day from their previous one. The proceedings were marked by the utmost civility and everyone, St. John says, seemed sorry at their leaving and begged them to return as soon as possible.

They had noted with disapproval on their first stay in Kiau that the girls' faces were dirty, and they had offered a cheap looking-glass to all who would go away and wash themselves. There had been a number of takers. But this time the whole crowd appeared with carefully-washed faces and they thronged round the white men; some wanted needles and thread, others looking-glasses or combs. In return for the neat little baskets of tobacco which they offered, all the travellers' warm clothing —now no longer needed—was also distributed among them. St. John laments that he even had to make a present of his brush and comb to Li Moung's daughter, so great was her admiration for these unusual appliances.

"When we started next morning, crowds of friendly faces were around, a troop of girls walked with us part of the way, and on our leaving them at the crown of the hill, they insisted upon our repeating the promise to visit them again. The good impression we made upon these villagers may be of service to future travellers . . ."

We can be sure that it was. The promise to return could not, alas, be kept. But in slightly under twenty-five years' time other white men of similar stamp were to find their way to Kiau, not as explorers but as administrators of the country.

Meanwhile, in 1861, Spencer St. John received an appointment as British chargé d'affaires to the Republic of Haiti and his days of travel in the East were over. His companion remained at Labuan, to become its secretary and lieutenant-governor. He is best known however for his later work in Malaya where, as Sir Hugh Low, the distinguished British Resident, he raised Perak from a condition of misery and poverty to one of the most prosperous of the Malay States.

Present-day climbers rarely approach Kinabalu from Kiau, since there is now a much easier ascent from Bundu Tuhan—a village further to the south-west, famous for its guides. But of the many who make the climb, taking their chance of sun or swirling mist, few fail to remember Low and St. John, especially when they stand by the jagged pinnacles which perpetuate the names and exploits of these two good companions.

12

For many years the path up the valley of the Tempasuk was considered the best and most direct route, not only to the mountain of Kinabalu but to the Interior generally. Along it came the first thin trickle of European pioneers and Chartered Company officers. Burbridge and Whitehead came this way

on botanical expeditions which followed up the explorations of Low and Lobb. And Mat Salleh, the rebel, brought his followers along it as they fled after the Company's reprisals for his audacious raid on Gaya Island.

This was the final phase of the rebellion, when Mat Salleh's support became confined almost entirely to one section of a remote Dusun tribe and to such of the Bajaus as chose to throw in their lot with him.

At Ranau he built a huge fort, the stone walls of which were eight feet thick, and by this means he hoped to hold all comers at bay. After him trudged a small punitive force sent up by the Company into this practically unknown land. In the eventual battle for the fort an English officer and six Dayak police were killed, while fifteen others were to die before the revolt was completely over. The fort had taken two years to build. It was razed to the ground after its capture. Mat Salleh retreated even further into the mountainous hinterland, where he could still count on some backing from the Tegaas Dusuns of the upper Tambunan valley. Here he set about building more forts; and it was in the defence of one of these, in 1900, that he finally met his death by a shock from a mountain gun.

Apart from these few and far expeditions, the country leading to Kinabalu—and of course the valleys beyond—remained virtually unknown right up to the early years of the present century.

Then, following the troubles of the Mat Salleh rebellion, the Chartered Company decided that it must pay more attention to the Kota Belud area. In 1903, Charles Bruce (whose actual name was Captain Francis) was seconded from the constabulary to serve as district officer there and to organise a detachment of mounted police.

After twenty years he wrote that he did not mind then confessing that he used his very large measure of independence and freedom to enjoy such advantages as the district offered.

Among these was what he called his own private and select health resort—the village of Kiau. He used to make every effort to spend two days or so up there every month.

The picture he paints of the place is not greatly different from that of Spenser St. John forty-five years earlier: the cool, even chilly, climate; the soul-satisfying scenery; the welcome by the people; the same kind of camping out in a corner of a village house.

Among those who made the ascent of Kinabalu with St. John in 1858 was a boy called Kabong. This boy, now well over sixty—which was, and still is, a good age for a Borneo native—had become headman of the village and chief of the surrounding countryside. It was Kabong, it will be remembered, who first related the legend of the origin of the Dusun tribe. He and Francis became great friends.

He seems to have been full of stories, both historical and mythical, and throughout long nights devoted to talk and palm-toddy the patient district officer would listen to Dusun folk-lore. Sometimes, he says, they were difficult to follow owing to the chuckles with which Kabong would intersperse them when he came to the grossest improprieties; but he tested the stories by leading the old man back to those he had told on previous occasions and they varied by scarcely a syllable.

One night Kabong suggested that he and his visitor should become 'blood brothers'. He was sure that they were spiritually akin, for the young D.O. was the first European who, speaking the Dusun tongue, had listened to and appreciated the old fables.

It was in fact already in the small hours of the morning, but the chief aroused everyone in the house and the ceremony took place there and then. To become a 'blood brother' you pricked your arm, drew a drop of blood and placed it either in a cup of rice-beer or on the palm-leaf

wrapper of a native cigarette. To make doubly sure Kabong and Francis did both. They pricked their arms, then each took a pull at the rice-beer and puffed from the cigarette. They had absorbed each other's blood and become brothers. It was the kind of thing that undoubtedly helped on the white man's administration of the country and laid something of the foundation of that mutual trust which both Briton and Dusun were to enjoy.

Isolated as a district officer in the Tempasuk must have been, this particular one seems to have found the life congenial enough. For four years he lived alone, receiving only the odd occasional visitor—and odd some of them certainly were—such as an orchid hunter, a geologist or merely a 'height merchant' who wanted to get up the mountain.

Two thirds of his time was spent in constant travel. Camping meant either a hastily-erected hut in the jungle or, as at Kiau, a corner in a native house. Gradually, over the years, a network of bridle-paths, built by the district officers themselves, was developed not only round the Tempasuk but over a fair part of the country in general; paths wide enough for a man and his pony, together with a series of shelters spaced at reasonable intervals. These bridle-paths mostly followed the old native trails, just as today the recently-developed jeep-tracks follow the bridle-paths.

In time the approaches to the magnificent country around Kinabalu will be further developed, and the solitary splendour of the great mountain further invaded. For some years now a radio repeater station has been established actually on its slopes, at Kambarangan; while the agricultural station at near-by Kundasan has been growing in importance. An ambitious scheme for a large Kinabalu National Park is going slowly ahead.

All these factors will one day combine to create a cool upland paradise in a humid, tropical land—and run no doubt

on best tourist paradise lines. One can almost see the air-conditioned coaches taking their loads up and down and round the hills, the planes and helicopters soaring up from the steaming heat of the coast. Given only peaceful conditions this development seems bound to come—the hotels and restaurants, the bathing pools and riding stables, the conducted tours (for the specially active and adventurous, 'Sunrise on the Summit', weather conditions permitting) and ever-fascinating 'Native Life' with dancing to the throb of gongs laid on nightly. When it does come it can be stated quite simply that no country in the world will be able to offer anything finer in the tourist line.

How will the spirits of the Dusun ancestors, drifting like mist in their timeless mountain home react? That, at least for the present, must remain their secret.

13

The Dusuns, together with all the indigenous non-Moslem people of Borneo, are by tradition animists. That is to say, their religious ideas are shaped by belief in a great variety of separate spiritual existences which are closely linked with things they see around them. External phenomena are interpreted always in terms of one's own human consciousness.

In contrast to the simple monotheism of Islam the animist acknowledges that there are certain gods and spirits ruling over almost every department of life. The jungle, for example, is full of them. Any peculiar tree, any stream, any hill, any great mountain will be the home of spirits—which by and large are more likely to be hostile to human beings than friendly. This is the background against which the majority of people still live their lives, and it is an extremely complicated background. For such gods and spirits have to be placated. Charms, omens, offerings and incantations naturally assume

an immense importance, more so among the hill Dusuns than those of the plains, since they are in closer touch with the jungle.

Another element that enters strongly into the scheme of things is fear. The jungle is in any case eerie enough at times; the dank gloominess even when the sun is shining brightly in the clearing; the sense of being shut in by the vast giants of the forest; the smothering undergrowth and the fantastic trailing creepers—all this creates a feeling of unease as you stumble along a narrow, slippery path. Any rustling among the leaves, any sudden call can awaken an almost panic feeling of dread. If one adds to this the constant awareness of malevolent spirits it is not difficult to gain some idea of the depths of fear of the jungle folk.

It is most important not to make a mistake. Among the hill Dusuns, where the method of rice growing is still to burn off and clear a patch of mountain slope, one tall tree must be left standing as an offering to the spirits of the forest. The branches of certain other trees should not be cut down even when they obstruct a path, for fear of offending an indwelling spirit. Offerings must be made when houses are built or vacated, before the rice is planted or cut, and when a death has taken place lest the ghost of the deceased should refuse to leave the place and make its proper journey to the spirit world.

While animism as a belief is stronger among the up-country tribes it is still very much alive among the more sophisticated Dusuns of the coastal plains.

The fields which play such an essential part in their lives have their own spirits and the 'rice soul'—something that carries on the life of the crops from year to year—is an important element in traditional religion. Many of the ceremonies are connected in one way or another with the annual cycle of rice cultivation. All are designed to insure success, or at least to lessen malignant spiritual interference, and the reasons given

for the occasional failure of a crop can sometimes be astonishingly different from those advanced by the government agricultural department.

Spirits, too, are believed to be the fundamental cause not only of sickness in crops but in the human body. The fact that there is a special name for the 'Spirit of Smallpox', for example, is an indication of the immense effect that this and other serious diseases have had on the people in the past. Bisagit, as the Smallpox Spirit was called, was a very real and terrible spirit and figures prominently in some of the old Dusun legends. He had to be cajoled, fought against, tricked if necessary, so that he turned from one's own village and took the path to somebody else's. Though now apparently driven away from the country by white men's medicine, who is to say that he is not still hiding somewhere, waiting his time to stage a comeback?

Before European influence made itself felt there was, of course, no written language among the Dusuns and therefore no sacred writings embodying their religious beliefs. Also, though they had their 'head-houses', to which a certain mystical significance was attached, they never built temples. There is nothing in a pagan Dusun village even remotely resembling a Bajau mosque, though I have myself seen a small 'prayer-house' a flimsy structure of bamboo poles decorated with pieces of dirty cloth—on a river bank on the upper Kinabatangan, where the pagan people apparently came in times of sickness. Incantations and prayers follow no set forms, but the various ceremonies all follow a familiar pattern, for instance, the procession round the rice-fields with the beating of gongs and blowing of whistles while the crop is growing.

One particularly picturesque ceremony is traditional to some of the Bajaus as well as the Dusuns, though it must seem strange to orthodox Islam. This is the annual making and launching of a raft on which is heaped the 'evil of a village'.

Offerings of food are placed on the bamboo raft and it is pushed out into the middle of the river and allowed to float down to the sea, where it bears away all the troublesome spirits of the community.

Public ceremonies of this kind undoubtedly make for a strong and close sense of community life; in the face of manifold hostile influences, the Dusun clings to the comfort and security of his own village.

Another remarkable aspect of his belief concerns the ancient Chinese jars which, as I have mentioned, are so highly prized in Sabah. This veneration for old jars is also common in other parts of Borneo. It seems that the cult goes back for many centuries. St. John says that probably the most valued jar in the whole country was that owned by the Sultan of Brunei, who in his time was Abdul Mumin. This jar not only possessed all the valuable properties of other sacred jars, but in addition it would speak. On the night before the Sultan's first wife died it 'moaned sorrowfully', and in any case of impending misfortune it did the same. When asked if he would take £2,000 for it, the Sultan replied that he did not think any offer in the world would tempt him to part with it.

Old jars have always been greatly valued in the Tuaran district. The old chief at Tamparuli (father of 'the loveliest girl in Borneo') had two jars in his house, one a *gusi*—an object of veneration among the Dusuns—which he had bought for the equivalent of nearly £700. He was still making the payment in rice. To the other, which is described as being about two feet high and of a dark olive-green colour, he attached an almost fabulous value. His custom was to fill both the jars with water, add flowers and herbs, and sell the water to everyone in the surrounding country who suffered from any illness. In this way, thought St. John, the old man had probably paid for both his treasures and made a little profit to boot.

Maxwell Hall, one of the few Chartered Company officials to stay on in the territory after a lifetime of service and to become a Grand Old Man, has an amusing story about a certain *gusi* jar at Tuaran.

It stood in a railed-off space at the end of a veranda of a house, a large cracked earthenware thing, and no one could say how old it was; but for generations it had held the bones of ancestors, which had been buried first in less worthy jars and then "transferred on promotion" to this *gusi*. An old Dusun named Patok hoped that his body would one day rest in it when his spirit had soared upwards to the heights of Kinabalu. Unfortunately, however, there was a rival claimant; another old man had the same ambition. How was the dispute to be settled?

The jar itself provided the answer. In the best tradition of talking jars, when the time came for the ceremonies in connection with its veneration, it spoke. Old Patok cupped his hands over its mouth and leaned his grey head towards it to listen to what the spirits within had to say. It informed the assembled company that the issue should be settled by ordeal according to the custom of the people.

This meant choosing two young men who would submerge themselves in the Tuaran River, and the one who could keep his head under water the longer time would be the winner. Patok chose his son, Lasong, as his champion; his rival chose a young man called Sunal. Everyone discussed the merits of the competitors in the local coffee-shops and bets were placed on them.

A somewhat different training was selected for the two rivals: while Lasong was massaged by a woman—a dark-eyed, red-lipped, full-breasted widow who was "as merry as a cricket"—Sunal was coached by men only. "No woman may touch a game-cock," said the wiseacres who supported him, "lest he lose his fight. This is a similar case."

The training went ahead. At last a site on the riverbank was selected and the day and time appointed for the ordeal. On the eve, the champions were sent to bed early, one attended by women and the other by men only. On the day itself a huge crowd assembled in brilliant sunshine; the ancient jar, adorned with beads and cloth, was carried down to the river and set in a prominent place.

The men entered the water, each holding a pole in his hands for support, and as a gong was struck, they ducked under. A few bubbles rose to the surface and the crowd roared encouragement. After three minutes both poles were swaying uncertainly and it was clear that a decision would soon be reached. At last a spluttering mouth appeared—that of Sunal. Lasong, old Patok's son, had won, but only by a few seconds; for he too came up, blowing like a grampus and squeezing the water out of his eyes. "He wins! He wins!" roared the crowd.

Then old Patok in his excitement seized the coveted jar and proudly bore it homeward; his hands could hardly meet round its belly and he had to support it with his knee. Alas, he staggered and tripped on a stone. The jar slipped from his hands and broke to smithereens. But the merry widow, without even a glance at the broken fragments, held Lasong firmly with one hand and guided *him* towards her home. Old Patok had to lay his bones elsewhere, but she had got her man.

The cult of ancient jars still continues among the Dusuns, though the full ceremonies lasting six days and nights with the whole village feasting has become very rare. Annual 'jar-worship', lasting for one evening, is however, quite popular, and recourse is also had to the jars in case of sickness.

The place of women in the Dusuns' religious rites has always been a prominent one, and it is ancient widows who act as priestesses of the jars. I have not myself witnessed jar-

worship, but it is said that the language used as they squat on the floor offering up incantations is quite different from that ordinarily spoken and is handed down among the women as a jealously-guarded secret. The clothes worn on these occasions are a short, tight-fitting blue or black jacket and a special ceremonial skirt of variegated colours and a scarf. The skirts and scarves are passed down from older women and are thought to have come originally from Brunei. Strings of ancient beads are also worn, and rattles carried, at all the ceremonies; the part played by the men being confined to the beating of the drums and gongs.

Small offerings of food and drink are given to the jars, various ceremonies are carried out in order to drive evil spirits from the house, and finally—a very common feature of pagan Dusun worship—a chicken is sacrificed. The company then falls to, and a long night of *tapai*-drinking begins.

14

Belief in an after life is a normal feature of animism. At death the soul separates from the body and continues its existence in another world, under different conditions but not so greatly different, from those of the world it has left.

For the Dusuns, death means the journey of the soul to Mount Kinabalu. So important is this belief that there is a host of customs and taboos in connection with it. Offerings of real food and drink are placed by the graveside of the deceased to provide him with nourishment on his way. The clothes of a dead person are often put on a grave, together with small wooden models of his more important possessions. At Tambunan I have seen both the actual hat (a battered trilby) and a rough model of the gun owned by a dead man adorning his grave.

If for some reason a soul fails to get properly started on its

journey to the sacred mountain and hangs around a house or a village as a ghost it can be a great nuisance. Every care must be taken, therefore, to ensure that this does not happen. After a funeral all doors and windows of a house where a death has taken place should be flung open—not merely to air it but to let out any harmful spirits. The mourners must bathe after a funeral, washing away any demons in the waters of the river.

But by tradition every Dusun hopes and expects that his soul will find its way to the heights of the great mountain; and so the old men will grow their finger-nails long to enable them to get a good grip of the steep slopes as they ascend.

From time immemorial Kinabalu has held this place in the Dusuns' world. It is a belief that is readily understandable. Most mountains have their myths and legends, and the more striking the mountain the more the legends tend to grow, and the greater the feelings of awe among those who live round it, especially if they are a primitive people.

What is so striking about Kinabalu is the way in which it rises with dramatic suddenness above a range not averaging much more than about 3,000 feet. Unlike a peak that just happens to be the highest of many, it soars in solitary grandeur. It has a quality of uniqueness.

At the nearest point from the summit to the sea the distance is barely twenty-five miles. Thus as you approach the northern waters of Borneo it gives the appearance of rising directly from the coast. Every village of the plains lies beneath it. Very few of the Dusuns—even those as far as Keningau in the Interior or those down towards the Sarawak border—are unable to see it from their fields or houses. Like the sun and the moon it is constantly with them, and like the sun and moon it seems to hang above them in the sky—sometimes hidden, sometimes shining, but always present and forever watching.

For those who live further up country and directly below

its slopes, Kinabalu's strange, numinous influence must always have been absolutely overwhelming.

I remember standing one evening on a ridge opposite the village of Kiau as a storm blew up. Only a single deep valley lay between the ridge and the actual slopes of the mountain. Quickly the valley filled with cloud, the huge jagged peaks of Kinabalu disappeared and the lightning zipped across the sky. In the roar of thunder that followed and in the torrential tropical rain that soon shut out the whole scene one felt crushed by the immense power of Nature, a tiny helpless speck of humanity in the mountains. Nowhere else, I think, have I felt quite like that—not even at the mighty Victoria Falls, which is possibly the world's most impressive sight. On three occasions I have stood and gaped before them, thinking them more breath-taking each time; but still not quite so overawed as I have been by Kinabalu.

In the wake of the storm dawned a perfectly calm and clear day; Kinabalu rose majestic and glistening like Neptune, the first magic touches of sunlight playing on the myriads of silver streams that now coursed like tears down its gigantic face. Small wonder that the natives believed—and in places do still believe—in a great lake lying somewhere among its peaks. One could imagine, too, a fearsome dragon guarding a precious stone far up on the summit and see there, on those massive slopes, the last home of the spirits of the dead.

When a belief has been current among a primitive people for many generations there are always a hundred facts that can be pointed to, to prove it true.

Thus the Dusuns know when a spirit is passing on its way to the mountain top. You have only to put your ear to the streams as they bubble over the stones in the upper Tempasuk and listen; if you know how to distinguish the sounds properly you will be able to hear the gentle tapping of footsteps as an old man crosses the river for the last time, or the soft moaning

of a young girl as she sets out for the mists that wreathe round Kinabalu's pinnacles.

The haunted mountain is always full of departed spirits. Yet the Dusuns do not hold the belief that their life continues there for ever. In the end they will become merged with the mist or be absorbed into the plants and moss which grow between the rocks and upon which they themselves have fed. Other spirits from the world below will come up and take their place; names become forgotten; memories fade, and man " fleeth as it were a shadow ".

A *menghaji,* or religious ceremony, must always be performed before an ascent of the mountain is attempted. Politeness and prudence both dictate that the ancestors should be notified of an impending approach to their domain. It would appear that the Dusuns, though they would wander for certain distances up the slopes in search of game—wild pig, for instance, or deer—would in former times never invade the actual summit slope. That was somewhere taboo—sacred territory.

It will be remembered that Li Maing, the first Dusun to guide white men up Kinabalu, embarked on the venture with considerable trepidation. On St. John's first ascent he carried a huge bundle of charms and performed a two-hour incantation before the actual climb.

St. John in his account does not mention the slaughter of a fowl as part of the ceremonies; possibly that was not done on that occasion, or not done in his presence, but in all later accounts this essential sacrifice is never omitted and it is still customary today. Sompat, a successor to Li Maing as a guide, who like him lived at Kiau, used to offer seven eggs and two fowls.

Certain taboos must be strictly observed as well as the sacrifice.

During the climb the names of streams and other places

may not be mentioned, nor the name of the sacred mountain itself. (This, by the way, is not usually 'Kinabalu' when the natives are speaking among themselves, but 'Nabalu' or 'Kini'.) According to Evans, if it should be necessary to speak of the mountain when going up it the words used will be *agayoh ngaran*, the Big Name.

When the approach from Bundu Tuhan was discovered to be easier and the Kiau route generally dropped out of favour, the chiefs of the former village were not slow to seize their chance to become guides; and certainly they became good ones. Chief Gunting of Bundu Tuhan has won for himself the reputation of being a great guide. A short, stocky man with a bullet head, humorous face and legs as strong as a horse, he is known by a long succession of hundreds of climbers as the Old Man of the Mountain. Now his son carries on the tradition.

A climber today is expected to give a present of so many yards of cloth or a blanket—a custom which probably dates from the days of St. John and Low who, as we know, brought many bales of cloth with them on their journeys in order to meet their expenses.

The killing of a cockerel—if possible a white one—and the careful setting of its tail-feathers in a row in the ground is in a rather different category, since it forms an important part of the *menghaji*. So too does the firing of shots, first from the bottom of the mountain, then at a point higher up, thus warning the spirits of the approach of a climbing party.

It is not entirely unknown for a white man to get himself up and down Kinabalu without having recourse to the recognised guides—though probably never without their knowledge. I know of at least one instance where this was apparently done with the express intention of flouting the *menghaji*. I personally feel that such an action is particularly mean and reprehensible. Call the customs of the Dusuns ignorant super-

stitions if you will, they are none the less part of their way of life and their traditional religion, and as such have a right to be respected. Of course, if a Dusun should choose to renounce his traditional beliefs and become, say, a Christian, that is entirely another matter. But as long as the majority of the people believes as it does, and feels that certain ceremonies ought to be carried out under certain circumstances, it seems to my mind to be mere discourtesy to ignore them. Especially so in the case of the mighty Kinabalu. If Dusuns demand that it be shown the traditional respect, then by all means let the respect be shown.

After all it is their mountain.

15

Veneration for *agayoh ngaran,* the Big Name; the worship of old jars; an intense belief in the reality of demons and spirits and in the importance of dreams and omens—all this does not preclude some notion, albeit rather vague, of a supreme Deity. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the notion is that of a kind of primal being rather than an absolute Creator.

The Dusun has his God and his traditional name is Kinarangan. The name of his wife is Munsumundok. Refusing (except for a tiny minority) the religion of Islam, the Dusuns have preserved some age-long folk-tales about the origin of things, of themselves, and of their near neighbours, the Bajaus.

A good example is the following, which is recorded in Evans' *Religion, Folk-lore and Customs in British North Borneo and the Malay Peninsula.*

In the beginning there was no earth, only a great rock standing in the middle of the sea. The rock opened its mouth and out of it came a man and a woman (Kinarangan and

Munsumundok). They looked round and saw only water.

"How can we walk, for there is no land?" they asked. They found, however, that they could walk on the surface of the water. So away they went and eventually, very far off, they came to some land made by Bisagit (the Spirit of Smallpox).

"Give us some of your earth," they said, and Bisagit gave it to them. They then went back to the rock, where they pounded it up, mixing it with Bisagit's earth. Out of this combination came the land.

Subsequently Kinarangan made the Dusun people and his wife Munsumundok the sky; afterwards they together made the sun, the moon and the stars.

Kinarangan and Munsumundok had one son and one daughter. When Kinarangan's Dusuns wept because they had no food it was decided to cut up the daughter, and from the different parts of her body came all those things that are good to eat. From the head came the coconut (and you can trace the eyes and nose on the coconut to this day). From the arm-bones came sugar-cane. From the fingers came bunches of bananas. From her blood came the paddy.

When Kinarangan had made everything he said: "Who is able to cast off his skin?" Unfortunately only the snake heard him say this and he promptly replied, "I can." So the snake alone does not die, unless it is killed by man. Had the Dusuns themselves heard Kinaragan's question they would have cast off their skins and there would have been no death for them; as it is, they die along with all creatures except the snake.

After Kinarangan had made the Dusuns he washed them in the river, placing them in a basket. One man, however, fell out and was floated downstream—he was the father of the Bajaus, the people who live near the sea and are clever at making and using boats. Kinarangan also performed a religious ceremony over the Dusuns in his house, but one man missed

it through going off into the jungle—he was the father of all the monkeys.

As well as the sly dig at the Bajaus there are several interesting points about this rather complicated story.

It seems to recognise, for instance, that until the Europeans brought modern medical aid to their country one of the concomitant conditions of human existence was the scourge of smallpox—and it is surprising that cholera is not mentioned as well. There is a traditional notion among the Dusuns that Bisagit, the Spirit of Smallpox, is let loose to work evil among them every forty years, when a high proportion of the people would expect to be wiped out. Thus the human race is kept down. Cholera was possibly more frequent in the coastal areas —Brunei, we know, used to be decimated by it from time to time—but undoubtedly it did affect the inland Dusuns to a certain extent. Today, after many years of medical attention, neither disease is a threat to the country, while malaria, that other great killer, is being resolutely tackled.

The point is that all disease is traditionally thought of as being caused by a spirit, perhaps actuated by jealousy. Kinarangan apparently allows this. There does not seem to be much evidence of direct prayer to him; no temples are built in his honour nor is there anything like a regular priesthood. Like the somewhat shadowy Supreme Being of their neighbours, the Sarawak Dayaks, the Dusuns' God is too remote from everyday life to be of great importance. Everything centres round offerings of food and drink and animal or bird sacrifices to the many spirits—as indeed it does in all primitive animism. The demons must be propitiated, all kinds of devices must be practised to keep the evil spirits away from the houses, the ancestors and the ancient jars must be worshipped and above all, the 'rice soul', the blood of Kinarangan's daughter, must be preserved and kept friendly to man. It is the 'rice soul' (represented in actual fact by a small bundle of the rice-

stalks) which plays such a large part in the Dusuns' predominantly agricultural life; round it so many of their ceremonies revolve, for it carries on from crop to crop and from year to year. Without the 'rice soul' man's life would fail.

Such a traditional religion, tied closely to an existence in small village communities wedded to the growing of rice, must naturally involve a good deal of anxiety—fear would perhaps be a better word. There are a thousand and one things that ought to be done—or ought not to be done—if you would keep on the right side of the spirits and not have them harming you. That being so, one would rather expect the average Dusun to be a worried, fear-ridden individual, showing all the signs of supernatural dread with which his animistic religion might be supposed to fill him. In actual fact, if you meet him in his house, in the fields or in some little coffee-shop he turns out to be something very different: rather slow, as I have said, for he is a countryman, but on the whole a remarkably sane and cheerful person.

16

The pagan animists at the present time number about three-quarters of the total Dusun population. The remaining quarter, roughly 36,000, declared themselves to be Christian at the last census. Roman Catholics form the great majority.

Since the earliest days of the Chartered Company both Roman Catholic and Anglican missions have been active (the former indeed tracing its descent from Father Cuarteron of pre-Company times) but until recently the Anglican Church confined its attention to the Chinese of the coastal towns and to chaplaincy work among the Europeans. In the last few years it has been able to establish missions to the hitherto isolated communities up the Kinabatangan, Labuk and Segama rivers

and thus make some contact with the Dusuns. Certain other religious bodies, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, claim a small number of adherents.

The old-established centres of Dusun Christianity are on the west coast, in the plains and valleys not far from the sea. Here live forty per cent of Sabah's people and the density of the population is sixty-six persons per square mile—the average for the whole country is only sixteen persons per square mile and in remote districts such as Kinabatangan and Pensiangan the density is as low as two. It is in the flat lands around Penampang, Putatan and Papar that one may find whole villages where the people have been Catholic for three and even four generations.

At the time when the Chartered Company took over the administration of the country the only areas about which anything was known were those through which the early explorers had passed, the Tuaran and the Tempasuk. The rest of Sabah was an unknown quantity. As soon as the grant of the territory had been negotiated (before the actual issue of the Charter) steps were taken to establish some kind of framework of government and stations were opened at Sandakan—which shortly became the capital—Tempasuk and Papar.

To the undoubted relief of those in charge of them it was found that the new administration was welcomed. No opposition came from these settled Dusuns such as later developed among the Moslems of the coast. Unlike the Bajaus and Illanuns, who soon became restive, they had little to lose and everything to gain by the coming of a stable, white-controlled government. For hundreds of years they had lived in the lowlands and all that time they had been subjected to oppression from their Brunei overlords, as well as to the ravages of marauding pirates and slave-raiders. They themselves had very few customs which the new administration would be likely to suppress; even head-hunting had grown to be some-

thing that could be left to their more distant brothers in the hills, and to people such as the Muruts.

Contacts with the outside world had up to then been almost entirely through the Bajaus and the Brunei Malays. With the Bajaus especially they had traded, but the traditional attitude towards them was that they were best viewed with caution. The Moslem faith was best resisted. It was not advisable to embrace the religion of a man who was always after your buffaloes!

In these rich rice-growing districts, therefore, the Chartered Company happily found itself *persona grata*. The people were affable, law-abiding, responsive to the interest being taken in them.

One particularly successful feature of the new government's policy was the re-establishment of the authority of the village headman, an authority that had been broken down by the power of the absentee landlords in Brunei and by various feudal chiefs who battened on the villages. Such moves as this, and the knowledge that protection from depredations was being given to them, must have gone a long way towards infusing fresh heart into these primitive agricultural people. They might have had the Americans or the Germans or the Spanish or the Dutch in exchange for their Brunei masters; as things turned out they got the British, just like their neighbours in Sarawak.

Certain provisions about the natives were of course specified in the Charter. It provided that the Company should undertake to abolish slavery, to administer justice with due regard to native customs and laws, and not to interfere with the religion of the inhabitants. In this it was following the normal provisions of nineteenth century British colonial rule. British governments, and to a large extent the British people as well, believed firmly that it was wrong to interfere with the religion of native peoples, Missionaries could not be stopped

from going, but this seemed the right attitude for *governments* to take, and the Chartered Company was decidedly a government. In practice, however, difficulties always cropped up when it came to the question of education.

The Company was in no position to spend large sums of money on this. It had its responsibilities to its shareholders and was concerned to declare some dividends—something, by the way, that it could not always contrive to do. It was even less inclined, therefore, than the normal colonial government to provide schools for all the native children of its territory, while at the same time it recognised that something ought to be done over and above purely economic development. The answer to this problem lay in the encouragement of mission schools.

It was found that the Catholic Fathers and other missionaries were ready to come. In fact a Catholic mission was established at Limbahau, near Papar, in 1881, the very year in which the first Governor of North Borneo took up his duties. This is the oldest existing mission station in the country. The first school was opened at Sandakan in 1887, a Roman Catholic venture, and this was followed by an Anglican one, also at Sandakan, the next year. Soon schools reached such important Dusun centres as Penampang and Putatan.

Like the young and enthusiastic district officers who were left more or less on their own to administer enormous districts, the Fathers too found that they were welcomed. They worked hard and learned the language; they took an interest in the children; they did not steal buffaloes! After a time it dawned on the Dusuns that these white Fathers (they were mostly not Englishmen) and the Sisters who came to work with them were in Sabah to give and not to take. Their religion, which did not give the impression of being dull or puritanical, might well be worth considering.

And certainly the children did consider it. In time there

grew up in the plains and valleys of the west coast large and flourishing Catholic congregations. In such an area as Penampang, which is really a string of villages, whole communities came to be Christian-educated and through the schools to embrace the Christian religion. Later the work was extended into the Keningau and Tambunan plains and to villages such as Bundu Tuhan at the foot of Mount Kinabalu. In eighty years a quarter of the Dusun people has been won over to Christianity.

While government officials concentrated on the learning of Malay—and in this both the Chartered Company and the more recent colonial administration held an excellent record—the first writing and reading of the Dusun language was done under mission auspices. After many years the first Dusun dictionary appeared, compiled by a Roman Catholic priest. Through these and various other ways a Dusun culture has emerged which is not the old pagan culture and not merely a pale imitation of the west; rather, it has drawn from both sources. It is of course quite distinct from the Islamic culture of Sabah's coastal fringe, though it probably commands a certain respect from the stricter Moslems because it has been purged of its grosser, pagan elements.

Everyday life in a Christian village is not so vastly different from life in a pagan one. The same activities of course go on, the same cycle of preparing the ground, planting it and reaping the paddy crop. Because of their proximity to western influences the Christian communities tend to be rather more advanced, their houses, for example, often being built of more solid materials than those in the remoter districts, and generally speaking there is more money for modern gadgets and appliances.

To a large extent the Church festivals fill the place of the older pagan ceremonies. Certain customs, however, which are definitely pre-Christian in origin are suffered to continue and

are usually regarded with a kind of amused tolerance—as in fact is the traditional attitude towards Mount Kinabalu.

In this, the Church authorities have, I believe, acted patiently and wisely. Similar conditions in different countries occur over and over again, and experience in one area is invaluable when dealing with another. As every missionary knows there is always a grandmother in the background! A young generation of Christians may be enthusiastic but where there are pagan grandparents their feelings should be dealt with gently. One Roman Catholic priest who discussed this question with me in a Dusun village remarked, " I never throw my weight about at funerals . . ."

Another matter over which the Church has taken a sensible line is that of traditional Dusun dancing.

While many of the younger people like to dance in western style there is still a great deal of interest in ' old-time ' dancing —which means in effect dancing that has come down from head-hunting days, though the distinctive Dusun dance is, as we shall see, of a more peaceful character. Among the Sarawak Dayaks dances are often marked by a kind of wild turbulence; in Sabah the Malay type of rather monotonous stepping backwards and forwards is more favoured. Compared with some western steps this is positively sedate.

It is by no means true that all ancient Borneo dances are unrestrained, savage affairs. Certain rules must be strictly observed and though, both among the Dusuns and the Muruts, all kinds of allusions can be made in the impromptu chanting that accompanies the dance, actions must be controlled. What is sung may contain the broadest humour but there are prescribed punishments for certain types of misbehaviour —for example, clutching a woman's breasts.

Actually, nothing could be more innocent than the distinctive Dusun dance, the *sumazau,* for the actions are based on the scaring away of the birds from the fields. Music on tradi-

tional instruments accompanies the dance. These are of bamboo, cut to different lengths and shapes, which are either blown like flutes or beaten with a small hammer like a dulcimer. The dancers stand in pairs facing each other, the girls in their black velvet skirts and jackets trimmed with gold, the men in their traditional best, with the addition of the *sasandangon,* a red band worn over the shoulder. In each hand they carry a bundle of rice-straw.

The music begins, first with the sound of one instrument, then of the others as they join in one by one and becomes louder and louder. The dancers spread out their arms, waving them up and down in bird-scaring gestures, fluttering their fingers and balancing on their toes. Occasionally loud, harsh cries are emitted. No predatory bird could stick it for two seconds. If the dance is held on a bamboo dancing-floor, as is generally the case, this rises and falls with the action as the lines of dancers draw close together, almost touch, and fall back again.

The *sumazau* is usually performed as one of the main items in the celebrations following the harvest and will often be kept up for two or three days.

With the dancing, especially after the harvest, goes the traditional drinking of *tapai.* Here the Church has had to tread with some caution. To encourage traditional dances is one thing; excessive drinking is quite another. Certain missionaries advocate the abolition of all forms of native rice-wine, a thing which no government has of course ever attempted. Large quantities of rice and *ubi kayu* (tapioca) are undoubtedly turned into *tapai* when they might well be put to better use. On the other hand it is claimed that there is nourishment in the drink which, taken in reasonable quantities, may well be beneficial to health.

The real difficulty lies in the native conception of drinking. The approach to it—not only among the Dusuns but among

the indigenous peoples generally—is that you take an intoxicating drink to get intoxicated. Water is suitable for everyday use, *tapai* is for feasts; and on those occasions you get drunk—intentionally. Comparatively steady and hardworking most of the time, the Dusun feels that when he celebrates he must really go the whole hog.

It is, moreover, considered inhospitable not to do the best for your visitors on these special occasions. Weddings are a notable example. I have only twice found myself at a Dusun wedding party—once by invitation and once by accident. It seemed hardly to make any difference: on each occasion *tapai* was pressed upon me to such an overwhelming extent that I soon realised my host's intentions. Out of pure politeness he was doing his level best to make me drunk.

There is no easy solution to this thorny problem and one can only hope that the obvious ideal of use without abuse will eventually prevail. Meanwhile the Fathers wisely counsel moderation, hoping that the stimulus of new and wider interests, together with a proper pride in their best traditions, will help the people to adjust themselves to conditions which are rapidly changing.

In the past the Dusuns knew only their own separate villages and sub-tribes and were conscious that they spoke dialects more or less similar to those of others around them. They acknowledged no horizon wider than that of their own small kampong or valley. Now they are coming to regard themselves as a whole. At one time, if any of the young men decided to leave the fields it was usually to join the police force. Now, though they still make good policemen, they are to be found in other walks of life, and some—though these are still few in number—have joined the ranks of overseas students and are receiving higher education and specialised training in the United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere. And when they go, they like to be known not as Dusuns but

as 'Kadazans' carrying the suggestion of 'indigenous' or 'true sons of the soil'.

Thus we come back to the name which, it will be remembered, was first noticed by the old missionaries in the Putatan and Penampang districts as far back as the end of the last century. It is a name that has caught on and has come to stay.

17

For some years there has been in existence the Society of Kadazans with its headquarters at Penampang, centre of a group of villages nine miles from the capital. I remember seeing the words (in English) over a door wedged in between two Chinese shophouses, and wondering what it was all about.

The Society of Kadazans aims at preserving all those features of Dusun culture that are in danger of becoming lost; to help on education, and generally to infuse a spirit of community amongst the people. It has been fortunate in its leader, Donald Stephens, whose impeccable English name is apt to be rather misleading. He is English on his father's side, Kadazan on his mother's—and he will tell you with pride that his grandfather was a head-hunter!

Donald Stephens, who became Sabah's first chief minister, was educated at a Roman Catholic school and is himself a practising Roman Catholic. It is interesting to note that in Sarawak the first locally-born governor was likewise a product of a mission school (Anglican). Such facts are a tribute to the part played by missionary education in both territories.

The rise to power of leaders in these newly-independent states of Malaysia was, by most standards, remarkably peaceful, presenting a strong contrast to the careers of, say, the general run of leaders of the new African countries. In Borneo there has been an absence of hysterical and intemperate out-

bursts, subversive activities, records of imprisonments. By African standards certainly it has all been somewhat tame. Sabah's transition from a British colony, a status it enjoyed for seventeen years, to a self-governing state could hardly have been accomplished more smoothly. But it is early days yet to see how democracy will work.

Donald Stephens, who is short and rather bulky, with a broad, genial face, is completely devoted to the Kadazan people and to the country of his birth. He first used his education to help fellow Kadazans who could neither read nor write, interpreting and penning letters for them, drawing up petitions and advising in various ways.

In 1953 he founded a daily newspaper, *The North Borneo News and Sabah Times*, which he also edited. Mostly in English and Romanised Malay (not Chinese since there were already papers catering for that language), it included a 'Kadazan Corner' giving news and correspondence from all parts of the country for the first time ever in this vernacular tongue. The newspaper sold primarily in the shops and offices of the towns, but it also found its way into remote schools and kampongs. At last literate Kadazans felt that their mother tongue was being put on the map and they read *The Sabah Times* widely to hundreds of their less educated companions.

All kinds of people came to regard Donald Stephens as their friend. Often they would seek him out in his little office in Jesselton where, in his shirt sleeves, he would proffer advice on some particular problem. No one was better able to interpret the mind of the indigenous people.

For one thing, he was not a 'Government Tuan'; he could maintain an independence of outlook that could be very valuable. At the same time, though he occasionally criticised the Colonial Government—though more especially its predecessor, the Chartered Company, which he maintains held back the development of the country—he was nevertheless

a loyal supporter and served on many official and unofficial committees. Much of his work was concerned with the advancement of education.

Another step which helped to foster a sense of community amongst the Kadazans was the development of Radio Sabah.

This venture was Government-sponsored and it made the most enterprising efforts to cater for the widespread, multilingual audience of the colony. Kadazan programmes, including traditional music, were regularly broadcast and recordings taken in villages all over the country and at the big *tamus*. A very popular programme was 'Down Your Way', in which different kampongs were visited in turn and material collected from them. In 1958 the first Kadazan gramophone records were made—ten-inch discs each carrying two favourite Kadazan songs or tunes—which sold like hot cakes.

All this tended to give the 145,000 Kadazans, Christian and pagan, the feeling of belonging to a common culture. Distant villages really began to feel that they knew something about one another.

Then, with what to most people must have seemed extraordinary suddenness, political parties began to be organised. Sabah had never been very politically conscious—in fact it was the least so of the three Borneo territories. But the proposal to create a Federation of Malaysia which would be a sovereign member of the Commonwealth sparked off, first, much lively discussion—in the bazaars, the clubs, the coffee-shops and the people's homes—and then the formation of political parties. The earliest, and as it turned out, the most successful of these, was the U.N.K.O., the United National Kadazan Organisation, of which Donald Stephens became president.

The steps that led up to Sabah's independence within the Malaysian Federation are now part of the history of South-East Asia; but a brief outline of the events is worth recording.

On 27 May 1961, Tunku Abdul Rahman spoke at a Press

luncheon in Singapore and put forward some constructive proposals for a possible wider political association, to include Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo and Brunei. It was not a new idea. Various proposals for a merger, especially between the three Borneo territories, had often been discussed before. But this time things began to move quickly.

In July of the same year Tunku Abdul Rahman visited Brunei and was able to say that he had reached an agreement in principle with the Prime Minister of Singapore that their two countries should merge and invited the peoples of British Borneo to join in. In November he came to London at the invitation of the British Government for discussions in which the proposal to create a 'Federation of Malaysia' was examined. As a result, the British and Malayan Governments made it publicly known in a joint statement that in view of a study of the problems involved, which had been going on for some months, they considered 'Malaysia' a desirable aim.

In Borneo some people welcomed the idea immediately, others were critical—while still more had no notion at all of what it would entail.

It was men like Donald Stephens who set out to tell them more about it. Leaders from the different countries met first in Singapore to exchange ideas. Out of the Singapore meeting came the formation of a representative body with the somewhat formidable title of Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee, with Stephens as chairman. The aims and objects were fourfold: to collect and collate opinion about the project of Malaysia; to disseminate information on the question; to initiate and encourage discussions; and to foster activities that would promote and expedite the realisation of the idea.

Here was an opportunity for Sabah to achieve that independence which would one day inevitably come, and at the same time to join a wider political unit that would be

strong enough to stand by itself. On her own as a small independent state Sabah would have been far too vulnerable.

The next, and vitally important, step was to test public opinion in the Borneo territories, and for this purpose the British and Malayan governments appointed a five-man Commission under the chairmanship of Lord Cobbold.

The announcement was made on 16 January 1962, and its terms of reference were as follows:

"Having regard to the expressed agreement of the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Federation of Malaya that the inclusion of North Borneo and Sarawak (together with other territories) in the proposed Federation of Malaysia is a desirable aim in the interests of the peoples of the territories concerned—

(a) to ascertain the views of the peoples of North Borneo and Sarawak on this question; and

(b) in the light of their assessment of these views to make recommendations."

The Commission began its work the following month. All persons who wished to do so were invited to submit written memoranda, and altogether some 2,200 letters and memoranda were received. These came from town boards, district councils, associations of many kinds, political parties, chambers of commerce, trade unions, religious leaders, members of executive and legislative councils, native chiefs and community leaders, and large numbers of individual members of the public. North Borneo's share of the paper bombardment amounted to nearly 600 items—much less than Sarawak's.

The position of Brunei, since it was an independent sultanate under British protection and not a colony, was rather different; the members of the Commission, however, paid an informal

courtesy call on His Highness the Sultan who graciously received them with his principal ministers.

In Sarawak and North Borneo fifty hearings were held at thirty-five different centres (fifteen in North Borneo), and over 4,000 persons appeared. All the hearings were conducted in private and assurances were given that evidence and memoranda submitted would be treated as confidential to the Commission. Travelling extensively over the country, the members visited the coastal towns of Sabah; Papar, Beaufort and Tenom on the railway line; Keningau and Kota Belud; Labuan; and places far up the Labuk and Kinabatangan Rivers.

The result of all this was embodied in what is now known as the Cobbold Report. 'Malaysia' was unhesitatingly recommended, and all the many problems involved before it could come into being were dealt with in great detail.

Among the most important and interesting of these are, I think, the nature of the Federal Constitution and the questions of religion, education and language in the new state. The view of the Commission—which has since been adopted—was that the existing Constitution of the Federation of Malaya should be taken as the basis for the creation of Malaysia. Under that Constitution the indigenous people, i.e., the Malays, had special privileges and opportunities; in Sarawak and Sabah the native witnesses naturally asked that the same conditions should apply to the indigenous people of their territories.

The Chinese opposed any suggestion that this privileged position should be written into the Constitution. Nevertheless they agreed that 'in practice the native races should be given, at least for a period of years until they reached a more competitive level, the favoured treatment which they have in fact enjoyed under Colonial Government'. That surely was a well-considered and tolerant judgement. The Commission finally

recommended that the provisions in the Federation of Malaya's Constitution should apply to the natives of Borneo, and that the question should be reviewed after ten years in the light of the progress made by the native races.

Religion was admitted by the Commission to have been a thorny question. Malaya is overwhelmingly a Moslem country; Sarawak and Sabah are not. The majority of people in Borneo, however, having expressed their desire for Malaysia, could not very well demand of the people of Malaya that Islam should officially cease to be the national religion. In the new Federation the Borneo peoples only amount to fourteen per cent of the population.

It was, of course, no problem to the Sabah Bajaus and other Moslem tribes; misgivings were expressed mainly by Chinese and Kadazan representatives of Christianity. Here the Malaysia Solidarity Consultative Committee was particularly helpful and in its Memorandum it stated that it had given a great deal of attention to the question of Islam as the religion of the Federation and was satisfied that this would not endanger religious freedom within Malaysia. "No person," the Committee pointed out, "will be compelled to pay any special tax for purposes of a religion other than his own. Every religious group will be assured of its right to manage its own religious affairs, to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes and to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with the law. There would be freedom to establish and maintain institutions for religious education. No person in the Federation of Malaysia will be required, except in accordance with the laws of his own religion, to receive instruction, or take part, in any ceremony or act of worship of any religion. All these rights which are in fact universally enjoyed at present in the Federation of Malaya will be enshrined in the Constitution of the Federation of Malaysia." When Tunku Abdul Rahman,

himself a most broad-minded Moslem, invited representatives over to Malaya to view things for themselves the result was general satisfaction. In the same way misgivings were overcome about the use of English and indigenous native languages as media of instruction in schools: such use in no way conflicted with the acceptance of Malay as a national language. The Committee was confident that English as an international language would maintain its place in Malaysia.

In due course elections for 'Member' government were held in Sabah. Several parties had now been formed, mostly in favour of the new proposals, though one or two were against. As a result, the Kadazans, probably for the first time, came to realise that they were the largest racial group in the country.

That is not to say, of course, that they are racialistic.

In this respect Sabah has been particularly fortunate, for it has inherited an excellent tradition of racial tolerance and goodwill. Somehow, after centuries of fear, its diverse elements have developed the happy knack of living together in an atmosphere free of fanaticism and extremes. The Society of Kadazans, for instance, is proud to number among its members Chinese, Sino-Dusuns and Eurasians. Its attitude towards its Moslem neighbours is tolerant and friendly. No other country in South-East Asia, it can be safely said, is possessed of a better or more peaceful spirit among its population—a great asset to bring to a new political venture. Friendship with Britain is still highly valued. Indeed, with the crackle of rifles on its jungle borders such friendship is at present vital to its very existence.

The Cobbold Commission, having weighed all the evidence, recommended that Malaysia should come into being within twelve months. Accordingly the date 31 August 1963 was set for its inauguration by the British and Malayan Governments. Since it was the birthday of his own Federation 31 August was a date specially dear to the Malayan Prime Minister.

But in the end, though he need not have done so, the Tunku argreed to a special United Nations enquiry, and thus the date was postponed till 16 September.

Donald Stephens, deservedly, became Sabah's Chief Minister when the British Governor withdrew, though, due to a crisis caused by inter-party rivalries, he relinquished the post as from 1 January 1965 and became Federal Minister for Sabah Affairs. He had frequently declared that he did not expect independence to come to his country for at least fifteen years.

Sabah has thus been launched on its first, perhaps rather uncertain steps at democratic rule. Beautiful, in many ways backward, it is a fascinating land whose colourful peoples have in the past been subjected to the most extraordinary vicissitudes of government. They will need to pull together, to keep their treasured spirit of fraternity, if they are to survive in face of a future fraught with the tensions and conflicting pressures of a Far East in perpetual danger of a widespread war.

A Kadazan village at the foot of Mount Kinabalu

Tamu—native market—at Tamparuli

Three Kadazan women. *From left to right:* an old lady from Penampang weaving a basket; a girl from Kota Belud in typical dress; and a farmer's daughter harvesting rice

Part Three
THE HILLS OF THE MURUTS

18

SOUTHWARDS from Sabah's small capital runs a small but romantic railway—the only one in Borneo.

For the first fifty miles or so it clings to the coast, skirting patches of jungle and swamp, varied by mangrove and sago palm, paddy land and dark rubber forest. To the right lies the South China Sea, though one has to be content with occasional brief glimpses, glimpses of incredibly calm bays with beaches fringed with feathery casuarina trees. To the left, the knobbly blue-green spurs of the long mountain ranges slope down to the plains, while in the far distance mighty Mount Kinabalu lifts its head against the eastern sky.

This is Dusun—no, let it be Kadazan, country. As the train pursues its unhurried way you pass through tiny stations where the platform is thronged with peasants. You cross shady streams where brown, naked children splash and shout in their play. All along the route are many quiet, palm-thatched kampongs in groves of coconut trees.

Then, at Beaufort where the railways meets the north bank of the Padas River, you leave the lowlands and swing away abruptly into the Interior.

The track follows the winding course of the Padas which at times rushes and tumbles over enormous mounds of boulders and fallen logs and debris, cascading in torrents of creamy foam. The steep slopes of the narrow gorge are thick with matted jungle growth and are crowned by forest giants. You

pass close to the mountain side, brushing the damp, sprouting vegetation, crossing perilous-looking bridges; and in the intervals marvelling at the exhilarating views that come and go in a kaleidoscope pattern through a maze of grass and ferns and bush and fantastically trailing tendrils.

By the time you reach the pleasant, mountain-ringed town of Tenom at the top of the gorge—thankful not to have been flung from your train or railcar into the swirling depths of the Padas—you have passed through the Crocker Range and are some 700 feet above sea level. Surrounding peaks rise to 3,000 feet.

To meet the Muruts in any numbers the traveller must come up at least as far as Tenom, where many of these primitive people get temporary employment on the rubber plantations and smallholdings. They come into this comparatively developed area in groups—often after days of walking. They offer their services, the men learning to tap the rubber trees and to make themselves useful in other ways, the women cooking and generally looking after the menfolk. They work for a time and then depart in the same group, just as the fancy takes them, a constant source of worry to their temporary employers. Some have not been further than Tenom and have had very little contact with any kind of civilisation.

But the real Murut country is further to the south. Scattered all over a wide area—round and beyond Kemabong and Tomani, down to Meligan on the Sarawak border, on the upper Padas and the Tagul River and deep in the mountains towards Pensiangan near Kalimantan—most of their homes are so remote as to be inaccessible except by native trails.

Tenom is a sort of gateway—a gateway into one of the least-known parts of Borneo.

Such roads as there are do not take you for any great distance. An earth track leads to Keningau, where the Muruts rub shoulders with the Kadazans of the upland plains, and

which brings a certain amount of Interior produce to the rail-head. Another track goes down to Tomani; while a long, long bridle-path winds to Pensiangan (nine days' ride on pony back) via the Sook River.

The country consists of fold upon fold of thickly-clad mountains where the valleys sweep upwards to the steepest of razor-back ridges and where the trails are a severe test of wind and stamina to even the hardiest of walkers. On and on goes this inhospitable terrain into the vast heart of Borneo. To open it up even to jeeps would be a costly business. The answer to the problem of transport probably lies in the air, in strips cut out of the jungle where a small plane or helicopter can land.

The Muruts, unlike the Kadazans who are confined to Sabah, extend over the State borders and are to be found both in Sarawak and Kalimantan.

Over on the Kalimantan side the number of Muruts is unknown, but in Sabah the 1960 census gives them as 22,138. On a map boundaries look definite enough. In the actual jungle-ranges it is another matter and the people have been used to coming and going until the present emergency. The various sub-tribes are not dissimilar, for little was known about them when the line was drawn in co-operation with the former Dutch Government of southern Borneo.

In Sarawak the border was adjusted with perhaps more understanding of tribal differences. The Chartered Company first acquired and then handed back to the White Rajahs a stretch of territory in the south-west where the inhabitants are a virtually different people. Head-hunting feuds were common at one time between such villages as Meligan and the Muruts just over the Sarawak border.

There is in fact still a good deal of confusion about names. It seems to be the fate of most Borneo natives to have been called something which they do not use of themselves.

'Dusun', as we have seen, is a word in point. A Sarawak Sea Dayak when he is at home will not call himself a Dayak but an Iban. A Murut is far more likely to describe himself as a Tagal or a Timogun or a Bukan or a Semambu.

The word 'Murut' was introduced by our old friends the Bajaus. 'Belud' in their language means a hill, and when certain men came down from the hills to trade with them, or were produced as slaves (Lawas was at one time a centre of the slave trade) they called them 'men of the hills'. 'Belud' became corrupted into Murut, and an *Orang Murut* is thus a man of the hills.

In Borneo there are no aboriginal negritoes such as, for example, the Semang tribe of Malaya. Its most primitive people are probably the Punans who inhabit the country round the headwaters of the Baram River in Sarawak. These folk roam about in tiny bands hunting the game and supplementing the meat with what they can find in the way of jungle roots. They never live in anything more than temporary shelters put together with a few poles and leaves, and they shy away from contact with other human beings.

The Muruts (the name to which I shall adhere) are not quite as primitive as this, but they must be reckoned as the least developed of Sabah's tribes. Though the language forms a common bond and does not vary much from village to village there is little sense of community as a whole. The small, particular group is the unit.

The typical Murut is slight, though often very wiry. Like the Kadazan, he is short—about five feet four is an average for a man, while the women are several inches shorter. With a somewhat harsher expression than the Kadazan and a hair-style which is indistinguishable from that of a modern pop group, he is not exactly an overwhelmingly attractive character.

In 1931 the Chartered Company, to commemorate their fiftieth anniversary, issued a special series of stamps which are

now of considerable value. It begins with a 3-cent denomination showing the head of a Murut, followed immediately by a 6-cent head of an orang-utan. Luckily the colours provide a satisfactory contrast, for the two heads themselves hardly do so and could very easily be confused. One wonders whether some impish sense of humour somewhere or other was not responsible for the remarkable juxtaposition.

The *chawat,* or traditional long loin-cloth, is still the only dress of many of the men, red and black being the favourite colours. On special occasions a feathered headgear is added. Others who have done a spell of working on the rubber plantations or who have come in touch with outside influences in one way or another usually adopt a shirt with shorts or trousers. The women wear a drab black dress, though sometimes their straw hats, woven like those of the Kadazans, are picturesque.

Every Murut carries his *parang,* or working knife, which is indispensable to him; and when travelling—as many do for days on end—both men and women carry a *bongon* or basket for the few possessions or for the goods which are being traded.

Hunting is a popular and time-honoured occupation, for which spears and a blowpipe, or sumpitan, with poisoned darts are used. It is interesting that the Borneo natives never discovered the use of the bow, for much thought and skill goes into the making of hunting traps and of such weapons as the *sumpitan*. This is made from a special jungle wood and averages from five to six feet in length. It is most carefully and painstakingly bored, starting with a block through which the hole is drilled with primitive chisels and which is then shaped and polished. A short mouthpiece is then fitted, and a spear-blade is bound to the end which is used to finish off the prey and to cut away the area of flesh affected by the poisoned dart. The darts are shaped from the rib of a palm leaf and a plug of pith at the end fits the bore. The black

poison is prepared from the sap of the *upas* tree; it spreads rapidly and if fresh will cause death in a few minutes. The blowpipe is fighting a losing battle with the gun in Sabah's jungles, but it is still common enough to be the typical Murut weapon.

The Muruts as a whole have not yet accepted a settled form of agriculture. Like most primitive peoples of the tropical belt they are wedded to a system of shifting cultivation which means in their case a seven-year cycle of hill paddy. This is both wasteful to the ground and only half as productive as the cultivation of rice in the wet fields.

It is impossible to go far out of a Murut village before coming upon evidence of hill paddy-growing. The clearings on the hillsides are frequent because despite the sparse population they are never used twice running. The undergrowth is burnt off, most of the trees are hacked down and the clearing is left for a time. The ash from the burnt wood fertilises the soil to a certain extent, but later the heavy rains carry the top soil away. The seeds from the previous year's harvest are planted by the women, who simply make small holes with a stick and drop them in. Sometimes it is necessary for the area to be roughly fenced to keep out the wild pigs and other animals. Then of course it must be weeded and the birds must be scared off as the crop begins to ripen.

Hill rice forms the staple diet, but almost everywhere, especially if the crop has been poor, it is supplemented by tapioca, the ubiquitous *ubi kayu,* which is similarly grown in clearings on the hillsides.

Murut villages never contain more than a few hundred people and until recently each one housed its families—as is still common in parts of Sarawak—under one huge roof. Longhouses of the old pattern may still be seen in some places. A central passage known as the *tatengah* gives access to the individual family quarters. It opens out half-way into a wide,

springy dancing-floor, the traditional focal point of community life.

But habits are changing even among the Muruts. The long-house system was necessary for protection and was general as long as head-hunting continued; a single house, perched like a fortress on or near the top of a steep hill afforded the best defence against enemy raids. Since that time the trend towards individual dwellings on the lines of those of the Kadazans and the Malays has been constant.

The contrast between a Murut settlement and the villages of the plains as he knew them over fifty years ago has been well drawn by Owen Rutter in his *British North Borneo*:*

" In the Murut country," he writes, " the longhouse glowers from its sharp ridge over the steep hillsides which slope steeply down on every side. The whole picture, with its background of solid jungle still uncut, seems lifeless. In the lowlands, on the other hand, the scene is alive. Buffaloes and pigs graze and root in herds, while the villagers with their women and children pass to and from the little shelters on the edge of the rice-fields. In this scene the thought of war and danger is so long past that it might never have been . . ."

While the Kadazans have had many years of settled life in which to follow their peaceful pursuits, the Muruts have only comparatively recently emerged from a long nightmare of internecine strife. A Kadazan of today may have had a head-hunting grandfather; a Murut may have had a head-hunting father. He may even perhaps have taken a head or so himself, for there was a return to the practice in 1946, when towards the end of the Japanese occupation of the country numbers of Japanese troops were attacked in the Interior.

At one time even the cocks as they roosted beneath the houses had their beaks tied up during the night hours lest they should

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give away the position of a longhouse to a party of enemy raiders.

Background to all Murut life and ways of thought is the strange custom that has made Borneo notorious—the custom of cutting off another person's head and cherishing it as the greatest trophy that a man, or a community, could possess.

19

But before condemning the natives of Borneo let it be remembered that they have by no means been the sole exponents of the art of head-hunting. At one time or another it has been an almost universal practice.

The British Isles and Western Europe were no exceptions. It persisted here and there in the remotest parts of Ireland and the Scottish marches until well on into the Middle Ages. There was a case in Eastern Europe, in Montenegro, as late as 1912, which was approximately when the Muruts gave it up. Wherever peoples remained primitive, cut off for geographical reasons from contacts with the outside world, it was the kind of thing likely to linger.

There are many misconceptions about head-hunting, most of which do injustice to the tribes concerned.

To take one example—it did not, as is sometimes supposed, invariably go with cannibalism. Cannibalism has been found to exist in a number of parts of South-East Asia but it is practically unknown in Borneo. There is nothing to suggest that the Muruts, Kadazans, Dayaks and similar folk, however barbarous they may have been until recent times, ever indulged in cannibalism.

Another erroneous notion is that the taking of heads was a quite undiscriminate business with no rules governing it of any kind. A Murut chief could not go round like the Queen in *Alice in Wonderland,* just shouting "Off with his head!" If

he were to conduct the feuds in which he was constantly involved with any success he would need the heads of all his own people safely on their shoulders.

Heads could not be taken merely as the result of a savage, blood-thirsty whim, but were captured in arduous and carefully-planned raids. Put in its best light, head-hunting was an exercise on the part of the men of the tribe in bravery and skill. But the practice of collecting such gruesome war-trophies had also what can only be described as religious overtones.

In primitive belief, the soul or the 'soul matter' on which life depends, rests in the head. Possess yourself of a person's head and you have somehow gained a portion of that 'soul matter' which can be both spiritually and materially of great benefit to yourself and to the group to which by ties of birth and kinship you belong.

Thus heads hung up in a village longhouse have a deep and absorbing significance. They are not there merely to be talked about and admired, like the trophies of a big-game hunter; they are to be brought down at certain special times, revered and feasted. To avert sickness in the community, to promote fertility—both among the human population and the crops—heads were considered to be essential.

Such was the age-long belief. And in the case of the Muruts it probably lingers stubbornly on in more than one remote mountain village although the practice of head-hunting has now ceased.

Apart from a few isolated instances in other places—and the outbreak at the end of the Japanese occupation of Sabah—the last districts to give up raiding were Rundum, just over fifty miles south of Tenom, and Pensiangan. Feuds were fierce and frequent in those jungle-ranges up to half a century ago.

A feud might be in existence between one village and

another, or between sub-tribes, or between the dwellers along different rivers. It might have been started as the result of some quite minor incident—such, for instance, as a man from one tribe getting drunk and causing trouble in another village. Formerly there was no law to deal with these cases. Outside the small village community there was no government. Among the Muruts even the fiction of a nominal suzerainty on the part of the Sultan of Brunei, as with the lowland peoples, did not exist. The only answer was the vendetta.

Once begun, a typical feud could drag on for a long time, perhaps even for generations; meanwhile other, fresh feuds might develop from different quarters. Thus life for a particular small group of people, entrenched in their fortress on a razor-back hill, would have to be one of constant vigilance, with the beaks of the cockerels tied up, as I have mentioned, at night and even the cultivation of the crops needing to be done under guard by day.

The training of Murut boys to go on the war-path would begin at a tender age. First steps were in the use of the *sumpitan*, special short models being made for children who would practise shooting at birds and small animals. Later a boy would join in hunting-parties in the jungle and learn the use of the sword and spear from his father. It was customary for all young lads to become warriors soon after reaching the age of puberty.

Head-hunting raids would normally be led by the headman of the village or group unless he had grown too old. War dress consisted of a special short jacket decorated with shells and a small round hat adorned with cockerel or hornbill feathers. As in all other departments of life many taboos and omens had to be observed in connection with a raid. The call of a certain bird, for example, heard under certain conditions would be taken as an encouragement to go on; the call of another bird as a sign that the attempt should be abandoned.

War dress was reserved strictly for the occasion. At other times men normally wore only the *chawat*, as many Muruts still do. But among certain of the tribes there seems to have been the custom of adding a short mat—useful when squatting down in the damp jungle—which hung down from the back of the waist. This, together with another custom in some quarters of wrapping a monkey-skin round the waist and allowing the tail to hang down behind, undoubtedly must have given rise to the belief which was current at one time that men with tails existed in the Borneo forests.

The war-cry of the Murut head-hunters was "*Koi!*" or "*Kukoi!*". Shouted in their own village or as they marched single file through the jungle, armed with sword, spear and blowpipe, the cries must have sounded blood-curdling. But as soon as enemy territory was reached stealth at once became the order of the day.

Sometimes a raiding-party would crouch for hours hidden in the bush, waiting either to capture an individual or a small group of people passing near the house, or to make a direct attack on the house itself in the early hours of the morning. Surprise was the essence of head-hunting skirmishes. Once a head or a number of heads had been taken the party retreated with all speed to its own ground.

It must not be supposed that everything was always in favour of the attackers. If the objective was a longhouse they would have a steep slope to climb and the approaches would be well defended by sharp bamboo stakes driven into the ground and usually skilfully hidden which could pierce a man's foot right through. An unlucky victim of one of these *sudah*, or caltrop traps, was unlikely ever to reach home and his head might well adorn the house of his enemies.

The return of a raiding-party, provided of course that it brought back heads, was an occasion of tremendous rejoicing.

While awaiting the return, the womenfolk would have had to observe certain customs and taboos. They were not allowed, for instance, to sleep in the daytime nor to drink *tapai* or eat certain foods if they had a husband, an unmarried son or a brother whose mother was dead, on the raid. Each woman was expected to light a piece of *damar,* or jungle resin, and set it on a stone at night so that the men might 'see clearly'; and they had also to run up and down the long *tatengah*, or central passage of the house, singing a chant or prayer for the warriors' safe return.

The actual heads were received into the longhouse by the older women and placed triumphantly in the centre of the dancing-floor—the signal for feasting and dancing to begin. To the younger women the return of a raiding-party was of special interest since a young man who had taken a head thereby became eligible for marriage. His first head marked a definite stage in a young man's life and subsequently he received certain tattoo marks and was reckoned among the warriors of the community. Naturally therefore the young ladies wanted to see who had 'scored'.

Treatment of the heads before 'final hanging' varied from district to district. At Rundum it is known that they were boiled in a pot, and after the skin and brains had been removed, the skull was smoked. During the smoking process it was customary for pigs to be sacrificed by the older women or priestesses. When the heads were finally hung from the rafters of the house above the centre of the dancing-floor they would often be decorated with tufts of dried grass. This grass was of the type known as *silad* and was of special significance. It was used to decorate the house and played an important part in the ceremonies when from time to time the shrunken heads were taken down and feasted. The *silad* grass was thought to be a kind of *ubat*, or medicine, which did the heads good. Without such treatment, it was believed, they might become offended

and through their spirits bring harm to the community which possessed them.

There may be seen amongst the Muruts today a dance known as the *dindang*, which consists simply of jumping up and down on the springy floor of the house to the accompaniment of music supplied by brass or bamboo dulcimers—and of much *tapai* drinking. The greater the number of people who gather on the floor the greater the springing action and the dancer is lifted up to touch an embroidered ball hanging from the centre of the roof. There can surely be no doubt as to the significance of this.

Singing, dancing and the drinking of *tapai* went on continuously after a successful raid, sometimes for a week. It was a convention that in the chants no direct reference to the heads was ever made. Just as in climbing Mount Kinabalu the natives of that district would not, and still will not, mention its name or the names of streams in the immediate vicinity, so the Muruts spoke of the captured heads as 'coconuts' or 'red hibiscus flowers'. The chant was sung by the raiding-party and the women of the house in alternate stanzas.

It must have been a lively scene. But looming behind the fun and games and the delights of the *tapai*-jars there was always in any house that had taken heads a horrid spectre—the spectre of retaliation. Sooner or later the enemy would strike back. Thus when the moment of glory was over and life returned to its normal round of struggling to scrape together food and essential produce from the unwilling jungle, fear would come once more into its own. Even had conditions been favourable, a settled system of agriculture would have been out of the question.

Of course the reputation of being fierce head-hunters may have saved the Muruts from interference by invaders from the coast—though their mountains gave them that protection in any case. But against this must be set the appalling losses to

an already sparse population that the practice involved. Head-hunting effectively kept the people small in numbers and divided. Yet ironically enough it was believed that the heads promoted fertility and increase!

There was, however, one recognised traditional method of settling a feud. This was for the two warring groups to meet at an agreed place and to strike a balance of heads taken; if one side was so many heads up, it could pay *basah* or blood-money to the losers to account for the difference. *Basah* would be paid in slaves: a man for a man's head, a woman for a woman's and a child for a child's. It must be remembered that these were savage communities—the slaves were sometimes, though not always, slaughtered.

The present writer was told by Maxwell Hall, who spent a lifetime in the Chartered Company's service and was once district officer at Rundum, that he believed the taking of women's and children's heads among the Muruts to be a comparatively late and degenerate development. In some parts of Asia a woman's or a child's head was, it is true, valued higher than that of a man, since special skill and cunning would have been necessary to penetrate the enemy defences and effect such captures. A woman's head may also have been considered particularly valuable because the death of its owner probably meant fewer children being born to the opposing tribe. However that may be, Maxwell Hall is of the opinion that in the Murut country the stray taking of women's and children's heads was a cowardly custom which marked the decline in manliness on the part of the warriors.

The slaughter of slaves, which was a form of religious sacrifice, was a ghastly business.

Some would be slaughtered not only at the termination of a feud but on other occasions, such as the death of an important chief. Their spirits would then accompany the dead man to the spirit world where, together with the souls of those

Tagal marksman with blowpipe. Note the dart behind the ear

Murut with the indispensable *parang*—knife—adorned with human hair

Midday snack for workers in the fields : cold cooked rice wrapped in banana leaves

On Sebatik Island : a British officer briefs a Malaysian patrol

whose heads he had taken, they would form a body of followers and supporters.

The nastiest of all practices among the Borneo tribes, which unfortunately seems to have been most common among the Muruts, was that of *sumunggup*. This would often have been the fate of a slave. He was imprisoned in a bamboo cage which was suspended from the rafters of the house; the whole community then danced round him, prodding him with the tips of their spears and knives—each prod representing a message to be delivered to a relative or friend in the spirit world. The victim would either die in the cage or, at the whim of his torturers, be released to run the gauntlet and thus be speared to death.

Mount Kinabalu did not of course have any great significance in the Murut country, but its place was taken to a certain extent by the two highest peaks in the far Interior, Antulai and Mulundayoh. These hills were considered sacred and, like Kinabalu, the homes of the departed spirits. To one or other of them would go the soul of the sacrificed slave when death mercifully released him from his sufferings.

20

When the Chartered Company took over the administration of Sabah hardly anything was known about the country.

The only travellers to have ventured inland were Low and Spenser St. John and a very few others. One of these others had been, surprisingly enough, an American businessman, Joseph W. Torrey. His interest in this almost unknown part of Borneo came about through his buying for a small sum certain concessions there from the former United States consul in Brunei. These concessions had been obtained from the sultan and dated from 1865. They were in the form of leases for ten years and were renewable.

It was on the strength of these that the 'American Trading Company of Borneo' was founded and Torrey became head (actually with the title of Rajah) of a tiny colony on the coast at Kimanis. Neither the company nor the colony lasted long, and were in fact, after many negotiations, superseded by the Chartered Company. But during his short time in Borneo, Torrey made an adventurous trip over the mountains behind Kimanis and reached Keningau, where it seems that he was the first white man to see the Muruts in their home surroundings. Unfortunately he died not long after returning to the coast.

Apart from these early ventures it was left to the officers of the Chartered Company to make the first great inland journeys of discovery. For all the authorities of the Company knew, the Interior might have been populated by millions of natives—natives from whom in time they could have drawn all the labour they required for the opening up of the country. Probably such thoughts were in Torrey's mind when he undertook his trip to the Keningau plain. But in time the facts became known; Sabah was a very sparsely populated land.

Any man who took service with the Chartered Company in those early days must be reckoned a remarkable pioneer.

But of that small band the most outstanding was a Hungarian by birth, Francis Xavier Witti, who has rightly been acclaimed as North Borneo's best-known explorer. He had formerly been an officer in the Austrian navy. His interest in Borneo was aroused by Baron Overbeck, himself an Austrian, who had done a deal with Torrey in the matter of the concessions and had been active in the negotiations which finally led to the establishment of the British company.

Witti joined the handful of administrators under the territory's first governor, W. H. Treacher, and was sent to make what he could of conditions at Marudu Bay. Pages of his diary, now in the Public Record Office, London, record his

wise and friendly relations with the people on the coast. His letters to the governor report conscientiously on the problems involved in the handling of his little staff.

He had a leading policeman at twelve dollars a month, assisted by three at ten dollars and three more at eight. The rest of his staff consisted of a gatekeeper and house-coolie, a carpenter, two garden-coolies and two other coolies for general work. Witti records with regret that one man had to be discharged on account of an incurable disease, another for misbehaviour on an excursion up-country, and his cook for habitual drunkenness. He was able to recruit others, for his good humour, tact and consideration for the native people quickly made him *persona grata*.

But Witti was by temperament unable to stay and develop a district. He had to be off into the unknown. In 1880 he made the first of three lengthy journeys on which his reputation as an explorer rests. This took him from Marudu Bay to the upper waters of the Sugut, into country south and east of Kinabalu. This was far beyond the explorations of Low and St. John. By traversing the unknown area where the older maps had placed 'Lake Kinabalu' he proved beyond all doubt that no such thing existed. Continuing westward, Witti finished this first journey at Papar.

The next year he made another great journey—overland from Marudu Bay to Sandakan. Then, in 1882, he began his last and uncompleted venture. He went up the Kimanis River, as Torrey had done before him, and crossed what is now the Crocker Range. On reaching the Keningau plain he explored it extensively and established friendly relations with the peoples there, even settling some head-hunting feuds. "The Law of Retaliation," he writes in his diary, "reigns supreme." Witti set himself to teach better ways.

From Keningau he went on to the Tambunan valley and there he met another adventurous Company officer, von

Donop, who had come up from Papar. He was the last white man to see Witti alive. In spite of orders from the governor recalling him to the coast, the intrepid Hungarian pushed on in the opposite direction, travelling south towards the range of mountains that now bears his name. He had thus penetrated further into the Interior than any European before him.

Sometime in March 1882 he stayed in the hut of a Peluan chief, a sub-tribe of the Muruts, who showed him the head of a Chinese trader whom he had murdered. By June he reached the Lagungan or Pensiangan River. The streams that rise in this mountainous district all flow eventually into the Sembakong which winds its way south-eastwards towards the coast and reaches a complicated delta just north of Tarakan. Witti was now only a few miles from what later became the Dutch border. He had come to some difficult rapids known as Luminggi and while his boats were being dragged across he was attacked by Muruts. First wounded by darts from blow-pipes, he was speared to death, though he fought to the last. Of his party of followers, which was seventeen strong, only three escaped.

The Murut interpretation of an 'enemy' used to be a very wide one. Any person who had been in territory with which a group happened to be at war could be considered under that head and might therefore be attacked. This was a possible explanation put forward later to account for the murder of Witti—he had appeared from a district engaged in a feud with the people along the Lagungan.

On the other hand, it may simply have been that his head was taken as a curiosity. No white man had ever been seen before on that river, and moreover, Witti's beard—black and of immense growth—was particularly handsome. It may well have struck some headman as a specially desirable prize, since the custom of decorating the scabbard of a hunting sword with human hair was common.

Nothing certain was ever known, and it was impossible for the new Government of the country to take any action. Witti's head has remained an enigma in North Borneo. From time to time travellers have claimed to have seen it and there is a persistent story that its eye-sockets were decorated with pieces of coloured glass. But no definite evidence has ever been produced.

21

Occupied as it was with its small coastal settlements, its efforts to provide a framework of stable government, and its drive to develop the economy of the new territory—especially by encouraging the growth of tobacco estates—the Chartered Company nevertheless did not forget the Muruts completely.

Murut country was wild and daunting and could never be expected to be anything but a liability, but an occasional hand was stretched out towards it.

In 1885 an administrative officer named Daly settled a long-standing feud between two important sub-tribes, the Timoguns and the Peluans. The Timoguns lived near the area which is now Tenom and round the middle reaches of the Padas River, where their descendants still live today. Because of this geographical position they had had more traditional contacts with the Brunei Malays than any other Murut people. The Peluans, on the other hand, were more remote, occupying the hills above the Padas and extending eastwards towards the Dalit River and westwards over the divide between the Padas and the Mengalong.

Daly contrived to arrange a meeting between representatives of the two warring groups on 21 June 1885. He has left a lively account of it in a paper read before the Royal Geographical Society in 1887—the first recorded account of the settlement of a feud.

The score was: Timoguns 26, Peluans 31.

The Timoguns collected on the banks of the Padas River and in due course the Peluan chiefs arrived. One, a chief from the west bank named Si Dolamit, had ten followers "all carrying spears, blowpipes and sheaths of poisoned darts". He was "a fine able-bodied fellow" and apparently a great deer and wild boar hunter. As well as the traditional weapons this chief possessed two old-fashioned muzzle-loading rifles, so not surprisingly he evinced a great interest in the district officer's guns.

Another Peluan chief was Si Ongandey, "a bold, warlike-looking fellow, carrying his blowpipe and spear as though he was afraid of no man". Encircled by bead necklaces, his breast hung with birds' beaks, shells, bears' claws, teeth, and bones of vampire bats—all potent charms—he must indeed have looked striking. This chief had fifteen followers and a few women and girls. The bringing of the latter was an excellent sign, as it always indicated peaceful intentions; the women however would not cross the river and join the conference until Si Dolamit had sent two of his wives across in a boat to fetch them.

The ceremony of taking oaths of peace and friendship then began.

It was the kind of scene in which lone British administrators often took part in the nineteenth century. The high bank of an up-country river. The North Borneo flag hoisted on a staff beneath a wide-spreading *langsat* tree, "the clusters of its luxuriant fruit hanging like huge bunches of grapes". Three constables stood behind the flagstaff, the district officer in front supported by a few chiefs and traders. Cross-legged in a group sat the Timoguns, their ancient enemies the Peluans facing them across the grass.

First a chief from one side took the oath, then a chief from the other; and as they did so they chopped at a stick or sapling

until it was finally cut into little pieces. It was a lengthy procedure.

Daly summarises the oath which each party took as follows:

"I follow the authority of the British North Borneo Company." (*Chop*) "The Sandewar (i.e. Timogun) people" (*chop*) "and the Peluan people" (*chop*) "are now of one mind." (*Chop*) "If I kill a Sandewar/Peluan man" (*chop*) "when I go to the water may I not be able to drink." (*Chop*) "When I go to the jungle may I not be able to eat." (*Chop*) "May my father die." (*Chop*) "May my mother die." (*Chop*) "May my wife die." (*Chop*) "May my children die." (*Chop*) "May my house be burned down." (*Chop*) "May the paddy not grow in my fields." (*Chop*) "May a crocodile swallow me." (*Chop*) "May my eggs never be hatched in my fowl-house." (*Chop*) "May I never catch a fish when I go fishing." (*Chop*) "May my life be ended." (*Chop*)

"I cut this stick" (*chop*) "as if I chopped my own head off." (*Chop*) "The Great Spirit is my witness;" (*chop*) "may this stick grow into life again" (*chop*) "if I ever kill or take any more heads" (*chop*) "and I follow all the customs of the British North Borneo Company" (*chop*) "and I take this oath with a sincere heart" (*chop*) "and I shall pay the poll tax of the Company." (*Chop*)

While the principal chief, or *panglima prang*, of the Timoguns was taking the oath—repeating each part of it in a loud voice and chopping vigorously at his stick—he stopped short on coming to the part "may my wife die".

"I have no wife," he explained with a grim smile. "You Peluans cut off her head long ago!"

The Peluans gave a shout of laughter in which the *panglima* joined. The crowd went into hysterics and rolled about on the grass convulsed with merriment. It was a tremendous joke, the hit of the day—and it probably did as much for the cause of peace and friendship as the oaths themselves. Like the coastal

Bajaus, the distant Muruts were not without their sense of humour.

We are not told what happened about the balance of heads which the Peluans owed to their former rivals. Presumably an arrangement was made which satisfied all concerned.

A few years after this a terrible incident was perpetrated by a white man among Muruts of a different district.

Raffles Flint, an employee of the Company, was a descendant of the famous Sir Stamford Raffles, founder of Singapore. He had a long experience of Borneo and seems to have been regarded in general by his contemporaries as an affable character. Charles Bruce describes him as an incomparable host, noted for his fabulous Sunday curry tiffins.

Unhappily his brother had ventured, like Witti, too far into the unknown Interior and had been murdered by a group of Muruts—somewhere, it was thought, near the upper waters of the Kalabakan River.

This was a fantastically remote spot. The Kalabakan rises in the westernmost hills of the Brassey Range and flows down into Cowie Harbour, very near the Kalimantan border. The inhabitants of the headwaters are more or less similar to the people of Pensiangan. Out went Raffles Flint into the jungle, leading a small body of Dayak police, intent on avenging the murder of his brother.

The expedition was quite unauthorised and should never have been undertaken. Later, every effort was made to ensure that it received as little publicity as possible; but it was not possible to suppress the truth entirely. On one ghastly morning just before dawn, Flint, seized by a kind of madness, attacked a longhouse and he and the Dayaks between them shot over a hundred Murut men, women and children. The actual figures vary between 110 and 130. It was a truly shocking page in the history of white men's dealings with the peoples of Sabah.

Entirely different was another incident which took place five years later, in 1896.

Following up the pioneering journeys of Witti and others the Company had by now managed to introduce a district officer into Keningau, beyond the Crocker Range, and some of the tribes there had already taken the oath of allegiance.

One sub-tribe, however, known as the Kwijaus, had not yet done so. These people are an instance of that occasional overlapping of the groups—mainly through intermarriage—that I have previously mentioned. They are half-Kadazan, half-Murut; yet they have their distinctive characteristics, including a slightly different language, and are recognised as a separate people by both groups. To the south, their villages merge with those of the true Muruts who live round the Dalit River and the Witti Range. To the north, they are more like the up-country Kadazans and have for long been much more in touch with the coast on account of the trail leading over the Crocker Range to Kimanis and Papar. The Kwijau villages thus form a kind of wedge between the two main indigenous tribes.

In May 1896, the D.O. at Keningau discovered that armed bands of Kwijaus had blocked the paths to Kimanis and the coast. Shortly afterwards he was informed that the people, under their chiefs, were preparing to attack him.

Fortunately the Company had realised the value of the telephone and had just established communication between the coast and Tenom. This enabled the D.O. to get a message through; but meanwhile he would have to wait several days while a relief party wended its way up through the hills. The Mat Salleh troubles were on at the time and the D.O.'s position, cut off in the Interior, could not have been an enviable one.

Luckily he took the advice of some of the loyal Murut chiefs who urged him to attack the enemy as the best chance

of saving his station. Taking his small available body of police he promptly surrounded one of the Kwijau villages. The people refused to surrender when called upon to do so and the village was successfully attacked. The D.O. moved on and repeated his treatment on a second village; then he gave out a notice calling on the remainder of the tribe to capitulate within a week.

This bold and prompt action proved so successful that the incipient Kwijau rebellion never materialised, and by the time reinforcements arrived (under Mr. Wise, whom we have already met in connection with other and more serious troubles) the D.O. could report that the whole district was peaceful.

Keningau has remained peaceful. Today it is a prosperous area of the country, in touch with the railhead at Tenom and at the same time linked by air with the larger coastal towns, and it is developing very rapidly. The old native trail still goes down over the mountains to Kimanis, carrying with it old memories of disturbed times.

22

The first governor to make a trip into the Murut country was Sir Hugh Clifford. He came to North Borneo from Malaya at the end of the Mat Salleh revolt, when one of his first actions was to ship back the rebel's widow to her Sulu home. He set about restoring order and confidence in the country generally. Unfortunately, however, owing to a disagreement with the directors on matters of policy he resigned after only six months. It was a great blow to North Borneo, for he was undoubtedly an excellent governor.

Sir Hugh went on to a distinguished career in the British Colonial Service, a career which he managed to combine with writing, and his short experience among the Muruts provided

him with some interesting material which he used in more than one book.

Few of his readers would have been aware even of the existence of the Muruts before the publication in a well-known magazine of his *The Quest of the Golden Fleece*, which was subsequently included in a collection of his stories entitled *Malayan Monochromes*. A hunt for murderers based on true happenings and an appallingly vivid description of a *sumung-gup* practised on a white man are the principal ingredients of this exciting yarn. The only pity is that it pilloried the Muruts and did them a disservice.

The Quest of the Golden Fleece is the story of two young Europeans employed in North Borneo who fall to brooding over the murder in the jungle of a man whose name, the author tells us, doesn't matter. But the fact that " in life the explorer had been noted for his beard, a great yellow cascade of hair which fell down his breast from his lip to his waist "—a fine piece of artistic licence—gives a pretty obvious clue. And when the body is recovered, minus the head, on a sand-spit near the mouth of a river it is described as " the only thing with a European father and mother which had ever travelled across the centre of North Borneo, from sea to sea, since the beginning of time ". Only Witti had done that.

The two young men, Bateman and O'Hara, had the effect of " some six years of crushing monotony to work off ", for they had lived in " the merciless heat " and " the faint exhausted air ". Deadly solitude had rendered them savage and they had learned to look on the Muruts as their natural enemies.

So the author sends them off into the farthest jungle to avenge the murder and to retrieve, if possible, " the Golden Fleece " which, shorn from the explorer's chin by some " truculent savage " was ornamenting the knife-handle of a Murut chief in the heart of the island.

Of course preparations for the expedition had to be made in secret, and when the two young men enlist "a dozen villainous little Dayaks from Sarawak to act as their punitive force" there can be doubt as to where this idea came from. Bateman and O'Hara were both very young and not overwise. The author feels that he must make it plain that he is not concerned to justify their doings—"merely to record them".

And record them he certainly does. The trip up-river until rapids caused an abandonment of the boats. The clambering painfully up sheer ascents and the slipping down the steep pitches on the other side. The aching limbs and sweat-blinded eyes. The jungle-leeches and stinging insects. The necessity of tramping on day after day because "prudence forbade a halt". Why was this? The answer is as follows:

"The Murut of North Borneo is a person of mean understanding, who requires time wherein to set his slow intellect in motion. He is a dipsomaniac, a homicide by training and predilection, and he has a passion for collecting other people's skulls . . .

"Whenever he encounters a stranger, he immediately falls to coveting that stranger's skull; but as he is a person of poor courage, it is essential to his comfort that he should win possession of it only by means that will not endanger his own skin. The question as to how such means may be contrived presents a difficult problem for his solution, and it takes his groping mind from two to three days in which to hit on a workable plan. The explorer, as Bateman and O'Hara were aware, had lost his life because, overcome by fatigue, he had allowed himself to commit the mistake of spending more than a single night under a hospitable Murut roof-tree, and had so given time to his hosts to plot his destruction. Had he only held steadily on his way, all might have been well with him: for in a country where every village is at enmity with its neigh-

bours, a short march would have carried him into a stranger's land . . ."

The two youthful raiders with their Dayaks keep on therefore on the " everlasting, clambering tramp ".

" Often the filth and squalor of the long airless huts—each one of which accommodated a whole village community in its dark interior, all the pigs and fowls of the place beneath its flooring, and as many blackened human skulls as could find hanging space along its roof-beams—sickened them, and drove them forth to camp in the jungle. Here there were only wild beasts—self-respecting and on the whole cleanly beasts, which compared very favourably with the less attractive animals in the village huts . . ."

It is at dusk one evening that O'Hara, having wandered from camp to shoot pigeons, hears the crackle in the undergrowth that sets him on the alert. Before he fully realises his danger something smites him heavily in the back and he falls to the ground. In a flash, as he skews his head round trying to see what it was which " tumbled and writhed upon his back ", he catches sight of " a savage face, brown yet pallid, grimed with dirt and wood ashes, with a narrow retreating forehead, a bestial prognathous snout, and a tiny twitching chin ".

The Muruts gather round, the victim is bound and gagged and carried to the longhouse. When he is placed in the middle of the floor there is a moment of silence from the entire community before they all, men, women and children, set up a diabolical chorus of whoopings and yellings. The prisoner is of course an excuse for the *tapai*-jars and the Muruts soon become semi-intoxicated.

I will not attempt a *prècis* of the next part of the story, in which the white man is placed in the bamboo cage and his tortures begin. The horrors of the *sumunggup* ceremony are extremely well portrayed, and the dramatic escape when

O'Hara had given up all hope makes exciting reading.

As far as O'Hara is concerned, that was the end. Though he had seen the "Golden Fleece" through the bars of his cage—a trophy on the knife-sheath of the Murut leader who staggered about in front of him, "his eyes bloodshot with drink"—he claims no recollection of what followed. Bateman tells it all to a friend one night in a solitary up-country outpost. O'Hara "stumbled into the centre of the camp, stark naked and pecked almost to bits by those infernal Murut knives; but the wounds were not over-deep, and the blood was caking over them. He was an awful sight, and I was for tending his hurts without delay; but he pushed me roughly aside and I saw that his eyes were blazing with madness."

In what follows—the dawn attack on the longhouse, the burning and shooting and slaughter which Bateman could not prevent—the author has obviously drawn freely on what he knew of the Raffles Flint case. "The Dyaks took no heed of me," relates Bateman, "and the volleys met the Muruts like a wall of lead . . . I saw a little brown baby which had escaped unharmed crawling about over the corpses, and squeaking like a wounded rabbit. I ran forward to save it, but a Dyak was too quick for me, and before I could get near it he had . . ."

Through the smoke and flames comes a terrific yell from the very heart of the fire and O'Hara is seen to grapple with the Murut chief. "In one scorched arm he brandished a long knife . . . in the other was the sheath, blazing at one end and decked at the other by a great tuft of yellow hair that was already smouldering damply."

"God forgive me," mutters O'Hara, as he rises up from the dead body and looks round on the destruction that he has wrought. "Mother of Heaven! What have I done? What *have* I done?"

At his best Sir Hugh is as good as Conrad, and it is sur-

prising that a story like *The Quest of the Golden Fleece* has never caught the eye of a film director.

All the same, it is less than fair to the Murut people and nothing, as far as I am aware, has ever been written since to restore the balance of the picture.

23

Very slowly, but with the pace quickening a little in the first decade of this century, the patient work of a handful of administrators was rewarded by the diminution of the head-hunting feuds. By just before World War I the Chartered Company could claim with pride that head-hunting in North Borneo had been suppressed.

Many of the natives of the Interior were by then paying the customary one dollar a year poll tax. A few, especially from the more progressive sub-tribes such as the Kwijau, had enrolled with the police force, supplanting the Dyaks of earlier times; while many more began to work on and off at the new rubber estates which were rapidly making the west coast of Sabah more important than the east.

The Company tried hard to extend its sway over even the remotest corners of the Murut country, opening new stations and sending out district officers.

The year 1911 saw the opening up of the Rundum district. As the crow flies, its distance of just over fifty miles from Tenom does not seem particularly long; but in Borneo, and especially in the Murut country, one cannot think of distances as the crow flies. The track out to Rundum led up and down, up and down all the way. A few visitors would get as far as Tenom; Rundum was another matter altogether. It is said that when the natives there first saw a district officer riding on a pony they were terrified and thought that they were one being, a new kind of man hitherto unknown to those parts.

But however further south the officers of the Company pressed, there was always the next hill—and after that the next hill beyond. A boundary with the Dutch was supposed to have been delineated in 1890 but actually there was still a great deal of uncertainty about it.

For example, there were some head-hunters on the Selalir River, beyond the border, in what was rather hazily recognised as Dutch territory. In a short time the Rundum Muruts were persuaded to give up head-hunting (the slaying of buffaloes and the planting of stones had by now become the approved method of rounding off a feud), but nothing could be done about the Selalir River folk who came across and attacked them.

This was specially hard on the Rundum Muruts, since they themselves had taken the oath, were paying poll tax and had put their trust in Government protection. But there was little that the district officer could do. The Dutch Government took no action. The D.O. dared not go over the border and attack the Selalir people for fear of international complications. He could only send friendly messages.

These scarcely received the replies that the patient D.O. hoped for. On one occasion Mukang, the leader of the Selalirs, sent back a message saying that if he caught the D.O. he would make hairpins out of his shin-bones. Another time, in response to an invitation to come over and meet the Company representative, Mukang replied that he would not come over, but if the D.O. cared to come to see him he would be very pleased —since it would give him the opportunity of gouging his eyes out and he had always wanted to see what a white man's eyes looked like. Presents were treated in the same affable manner as the messages; they were returned with a communication to the effect that when he wanted them he would ask for them.

Meanwhile this delightful character continued to make

sudden raids, took heads, and always contrived to evade the company's police patrols.

At last the boundary came to be properly delimited—and it was discovered that after all Mukang and his people were in fact on the North Borneo side of the border! It speaks well for the administration that no hasty action was taken against him.

Indeed, it was not till 1914 that Mukang's eyes met those of a white man—a district officer named Baboneau—and surprisingly enough the supposed ogre turned out to be "a mild-mannered little man" who soon settled up his feuds. There was no more talk of gouging.

Unfortunately things did not continue to go on swimmingly for Mr. Baboneau.

The Murut country was now considered to be settled; all the tribes had taken the oath of allegiance and the Company was beginning to congratulate itself that, apart from an odd occasional raid, head-hunting was a thing of the past. Pushing southwards from Rundum, the Government planned a new outpost. This was at Pensiangan, which is now reached, as I have already mentioned, by bridle-path through Sook and the Witti Range, but was then in touch with Rundum via the Tagul River and a jungle-track.

By early 1915 a few temporary bamboo buildings had been erected at this remote outstation and the D.O. was on his way to see them. At dawn on 13 February, just as he was leaving his camp on the Tagul River, some rifle shots came whistling out of the jungle. His orderly fell dead at his feet. Baboneau and the two native police who were with him immediately returned the fire. One of the police was wounded. Meanwhile the baggage-carriers had fled.

His ammunition almost exhausted, the D.O. decided to withdraw with the few men left. They hacked a way through the jungle and reached the river at another point, where they

were forunate enough to secure a boat in which to carry on to Pensiangan.

As they paddled towards the little station they saw huge crowds of natives collected on the river banks. There could be no doubt that it was the intention of these natives to attack Pensiangan, which was manned only by a handful of police. But the unexpected appearance of the district officer seemed to deter them for the time being. It was obviously only a brief respite; the attack would still come, if not at the next dawn, then at the next. The best plan was to abandon the station.

Back through the jungle went the unfortunate D.O.—not by the usual recognised track, which was entirely in hostile hands, but by an unknown route over hills—his party now somewhat increased by the addition of the few Pensiangan police, some of whom had wives, and also Dusun prisoners.

It was a ghastly trek, through the worst and least-known terrain of Sabah, and they had no proper provisions. The whole countryside had risen in rebellion; every village was now hostile. Under these circumstances the arrest of a Murut headman named Kawah, to be pressed into service as a guide, was justifiable. An attack by a marauding band was beaten off. Then Kawah escaped. At last, however, the tiny party struggled into Rundum where there awaited them, not rest and safety but only the certainty of a much stronger and more ferocious attack.

When he heard that the D.O. had been ambushed, a native lance-corporal named Impenit had taken five police and marched after him—an extremely courageous action. But by the time Impenit reached Pensiangan it had already been reduced to a heap of ashes; the few shops had first been looted, then, together with the courthouse, the barracks and the rest of the flimsy bamboo buildings they had been completely destroyed. Now it was Rundum's turn.

What was behind this sudden fierce outbreak in a country

which was thought to have become settled? Why should a wide-scattered collection of sub-tribes who by tradition had always fought among themselves and had never before combined against a common enemy now choose to do so?

The reasons that have been advanced for the Murut Rebellion are various: dislike of poll tax, dislike of work on bridle-paths and telephone-lines (yet this work was paid for by the Government and in any case only affected a fraction of the population), fears that ancient agricultural methods were being interfered with, fears that *tapai*-drinking might be suppressed, unseen influence from German sources, the fanatical dreams of a Tagul River headman.

We can discount the theory of German influence, for there is no evidence of any sort. The other reasons may be reckoned valid ones. But deeper than these, it was the spontaneous expression of protest by a still-uncivilised people who suddenly realised that they were frustrated.

Head-hunting had been forbidden, but somehow it left a vacuum that could not be filled. Religion and football might have helped, as they do today; but in 1915 it was not easy to provide either. The Muruts were still a wild, virile race who had never seen more than a handful of white men. Can we not guess a little of what the young women, and perhaps the old ones, whispered in those dark longhouses? What names did they call their menfolk who had no use for their swords except for cutting jungle creepers?

It only needed some extraordinary person or event to spark off a revolt.

Owen Rutter in his *British North Borneo* gives some first-hand notes about the affair supplied by the district officer.

"What apparently happened was—Ingkun, a Tagal headman, had a wonderful dream in which he was told that if he made an enormous underground chamber, all the Muruts'

relations who had ever died would collect there and a new era would dawn."

On 27 February 1915 he also wrote, "I readily admit that it appears almost incredible that these natives, many of whom had hitherto appeared so friendly and trustworthy, should have combined in a universal rising against us, but to no one can it be more difficult of belief than to myself who, for the past fifteen months, have visited almost every part of the district, and established apparently friendly relations with nearly every chief and headman."

Nevertheless that was the position, and Baboneau reported that he had fully sixty villages opposed to him and not a single native on whom he could rely.

The word *rundum* means 'cheerless', and certainly nothing could have been less cheerful than waiting in that deep valley surrounded by forbidding jungle-covered hills for an attack on the tiny outpost of civilisation by several thousand primitive natives, athirst once more for human heads.

Things were not made easier for the D.O. by the attitude at headquarters, which seems persistently to have underestimated the seriousness of the situation.

The telephone line from Rundum to Tenom followed the bridle-path, staggering over the hills, taking occasional short cuts at the bends, and drooping dismally across the deep, dank valleys, just as the lines still do in many places today. At best of times never very clear, it now developed a disconcerting habit of going completely dead. The Muruts cut the wire, not because they attached much importance to whether messages got through or not, but because it was the wire itself they wanted. Cut into convenient-sized little pieces this provided them with bullets.

The rebels allowed the line to be repaired as often as the Government wished. If iron wire was used it meant more bullets; if copper, the women took it for bracelets.

The most that headquarters seemed able to do for its beleaguered outstation was to send a small party of Indian police headed by a Jemadhar and under the command of a Mr. Pearson—not the Pearson who was involved with Mat Salleh but a younger officer. With their arrival the little garrison now numbered twenty-four.

It had to wait until 6 March for the long-expected attack. On that date, just before dawn—the favourite attacking hour—some thousands of screaming Muruts, brandishing spears, swords, guns and blowpipes, unleashed themselves on Rundum. They had massed secretly during the night, and although the garrison had always felt sure that it would come, the attack still held an element of surprise. As the Muruts came down those steep slopes that morning it must have seemed inevitable that the station would be overwhelmed.

The best type of Indian soldier, however, is as cool and unflinching in danger as any in the world. The defenders knew their job. Divided into small posts each containing from three to seven men, the police held up the attack with a steady fire.

The strategy of the Jemadhar was magnificent.

At the end of about fifteen minutes from the first alarm, when the Muruts' initial assault on the police-posts had failed and the element of surprise had been lost, they began to mass in the river-bed. Holding the attack himself from the nearest post, the Jemadhar sent three men creeping along the bank till they reached a bend. From there they brought an unexpected cross-fire on to the Muruts which threw them into a panic.

Fighting continued for a further two hours and included a second determined attack from another direction. But surprise was the essence of the Murut fighting technique; once this had gone, their hopes and courage had gone with it. They contented themselves with looting and burning the few Chinese-owned shops and then withdrew to the hills.

In this attack, Ingkun, the Tagul headman, was killed, together with nineteen others, and many more were wounded. The exact figures at the 'Battle of Rundum' do not seem to be known. The Muruts said later that their casualties amounted to two hundred. Only one of the defending side was wounded.

Unfortunately much further loss of life was soon to follow.

The next phase of the Murut Rebellion centres round the extraordinary underground chamber which had been constructed as a result of Ingkun's dream. This was about two days' march over the hills from Rundum, towards the Silangit River, and thither the remaining leaders and the bulk of the Muruts repaired. Oddly enough, the excavations do not seem to have been undertaken at first with any warlike intent. Ingkun apparently dreamed of a millenium for the Murut people. He may not have been originally anti-Government; indeed, he had himself been helped by the Government when he had suffered attack from a neighbouring village.

But once the contraption had been begun, and especially after it had been seen by certain Dayak traders who suggested that it might be turned into a useful fort from which to defy authority, it quickly became a focus of rebellious intentions. A brief description of it has been left by the then Resident of the Interior. It stood on a steeply-sloping hill and consisted of seven interconnecting underground houses. In at least one of these the central passage had rooms leading out of it—rooms dug out of the hillside. The excavated earth was piled up on either side and a roof of bamboo, earth and wood was placed over it. There were many additional bamboo huts with pits dug under them, and loopholes covering the approaches to the fort. The whole work extended for a distance of about three hundred yards. All over the hillside were *sudah*—sharp bamboo stakes set in the ground. A short covered trench gave the garrison access to a small stream.

Into this fantastic jungle rabbit-warren assembled a force

said to number nearer two thousand than one, but it included women and children. It is strange that the Muruts made the identical mistake made by Mat Salleh and put their faith in a fort. Had they dispersed in guerrilla bands they could probably have defied the forces of the Chartered Company almost indefinitely. Guerrilla warfare, however, was something that was to come later to the jungles of Malaya and Borneo.

As it was, preparations to attack the stronghold took several weeks. On 9 April an expedition left Rundum under the resident with a 7-pounder—the same old gun that had been dragged out against Mat Salleh. Besides Indian and Native police there were seventy fighting Dayaks and native chiefs and about three hundred carriers.

On 13 April they reached the enemy's position and set the gun on a plateau covering it. At the same time steps were taken to cut off the enemy water-supply.

The following morning the 7-pounder opened fire and soon produced a great deal of consternation among the Muruts. They were able to reply, though, with a heavily-built muzzle-loader which returned to the Government vast quantities of its telephone wire which came across in showers, together with nails, stones and broken insulators.

By 15 April many of the defenders had had enough; about three hundred of them bolted in heavy rain. The resident wisely forbade an assault on the fortress, since the loss of life would certainly have been very great.

On 17 April white flags appeared and two loyal native chiefs went up unarmed to talk with the rebels. They did not succeed in bringing about an end to hostilities but somehow managed to persuade the leaders to give up some of their arms and ammunition. It is not easy to see exactly what was in the Muruts' minds. Their leader, Antanun, who had taken over after the death of Ingkun and had a very wide following though he was not a chief, came out from the fort with two

other men and went to the Government camp. It seems likely that at this stage the Muruts could not agree amongst themselves as to the best course to adopt. On the Government side this approach on the part of Antanun does not seem to have been recognised as a legitimate truce move. Possibly there was the suspicion that the Murut leader merely wished to spy in the opposing camp. The only account that we have is from those in the employ of the Company. At all events, Antanun and the other two men were arrested and handcuffed. Antanun himself presently attempted to escape; he was caught; then the three men were tried on the spot, sentenced to death and shot.

The main body of the defenders refused to surrender, and on 18 April the police set fire to some of the bamboo huts which surrounded the main fort. This, together with the knowledge that their water-supply had been effectively cut off, drove the Muruts to break out. Fearful confusion followed. So far it had been largely a matter of loss of morale among the defenders due to the 7-pounder gun. Now the heaviest casualties occurred as the people rushed from the flaming, crackling bamboo and desperate police-posts found themselves surrounded. Over four hundred Muruts were killed. From the Government side some seventy men were treated for wounds received from knives and *sudah*-traps. A native chief was hit by blowpipe darts, but subsequently recovered.

On 19 April the resident called off the operation. About three hundred of the Muruts still in the fort refused to surrender, though they had little fight left in them; they were advised to report to Rundum and make their submission.

Thus ended a tragic affair—the Rundum Rebellion.

In his report to the directors the Governor deplored the loss of life, while commending the resident for holding his hand in regard to the last three hundred rebels. The severe lesson that the Muruts had been taught would, he considered, have the effect of confirming the loyalty of any waverers and

of bringing the rising to a speedy termination. Some of the other leaders involved were deported to Kudat, where they served various periods of imprisonment.

It took some months before the district settled down again. But from then onwards the Muruts gave no more trouble. The smoked heads still hung from the rafters of the longhouses but the white man's law was accepted. A way of life that had existed for centuries came to an end.

Rundum today, as cheerless as ever, is virtually deserted. The old Chartered Company bridle-path still goes down that way but the station was withdrawn—wisely, in view of the unhappy associations of the place. At a later date the headquarters of the Interior Residency came to be transferred from Tenom to Keningau.

Sabah natives do not take kindly to change.

Japanese rule aroused the fiercest resentment, though the Muruts were powerless to express it. One of the greatest concentrations of Japanese troops in North Borneo during World War II was in fact in the Interior, at Pensiangan. When the war ended the 6,000 Japanese there were ordered by the Allied authorities to pile their arms and march down to Beaufort—a distance of some 150 miles. The Muruts waited for them. How many heads were taken at that time will never be known. But the number was not inconsiderable, and old ceremonies, too, were revived—as indeed they were by the Dayaks in Sarawak. The Muruts had grown accustomed to having white men in authority.

It is interesting that their attitude to change was particularly noticeable in 1962 when the proposals in regard to Malaysia came up. It was the Murut groups of the Interior who expressed the greatest uneasiness. However few and remote the White Tuans, they did not wish to change the set-up which had by then become familiar to three generations.

So when the talk about Malaysia was put to them, almost

all the Muruts hesitated. And yet at the same time there was a readiness to agree to whatever their European rulers thought best for them. The Malaysian proposals, thought the Murut spokesmen, were admittedly very difficult to understand; but if they came with the recommendation of the British Government—why then, they must surely be right! How could they be other than in the truest interests of the people? *Tuan bilang.*

24

Once any primitive people have been 'pacified' they are in danger: the danger of extinction.

In the years following the 1915 Murut revolt the whole country was quiet. But quiet Muruts, as it proved, were not necessarily healthy or progressive Muruts; on the contrary, they began to decline and for nearly half a century their numbers went down steadily.

It is impossible even to try to estimate the total of all the various Murut sub-tribes prior to 1921, the year when the first reliable census of North Borneo was taken. But the figure given at that date was 30,355. By 1931 this had dropped to 24,444, and in 1951 to 18,724. By then it was obvious that unless some definite steps were taken to ensure their survival the extinction of the Murut people was only a question of time. It could very well happen by, say, the end of this century.

Such an occurrence would be a sad reflection on our present age and on many of the things on which we in the West like to pride ourselves. In particular, it would do little credit to the British—the first and only white people to have had dealings with the Muruts.

Imagine these most primitive of South-East Asian tribes as they existed for generation after generation in their impossibly remote Borneo hills, cherishing an evil tradition whereby a

certain proportion of their population must inevitably suffer an early death by decapitation. From time to time their villages would be swept by smallpox and other disastrous diseases. And yet for century after century they managed to survive—until at last a company of white men came along and acquired 'sovereign rights' over the inhospitable territory which they had so long inhabited. Then these same people languish and die, becoming extinct after one short century of contact with 'civilisation'.

Put in this way the matter may sound cynical; but the danger to the Muruts is very real. Fortunately, as we shall presently see, there are one or two hopeful pointers for the future.

Taken as a whole the indigenous races of Sabah have certainly increased since 1921. The Moslem tribes of the coast, though still prone to a variety of tropical diseases, have shown no loss of fertility. The Bajaus, for instance, increased from 34,099 in 1931 to 44,728 in 1951, and again to 59,710 in 1960. The Kadazans, the most populous element in the country, also showed an increase, though their rate was appreciably slower than that of the coast tribes. These people, it will be remembered, are not different from, but are of the same fundamental stock as the Muruts and therefore presumably subject to the same diseases. When every allowance has been made in the above figures for those natives who, like Captain Macmorris in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, said "What ish my nation?" and were therefore put down in the census returns under the heading of 'Other Indigenous', it nevertheless remains a fact that the Muruts have fallen sadly behind in numbers.

The problem of Murut decline had begun to exercise the Chartered Company authorities in the period between the world wars, a period in which the country prospered and medical and social services improved.

The great difficulty was that so few people had any on-the-spot knowledge. Contact depended very largely on a succession of district officers, all of whom had immense areas to cover and who tended to be increasingly burdened with heavy administrative duties. Charles Bruce, who after leaving the Tempasuk as resident in the Interior for a short time, lamented that the day was already passing when a D.O. could go leisurely among his people, spending long nights in their houses, chatting with them and understanding their ways, as he as a young man had done among the Kiau Dusuns.

The Pensiangan station, rebuilt after the troubles and opened up again in 1917, was the remotest in the country—and remains so today. So many other problems pressed upon the Government that life in the Murut hills did not receive the time and attention which, officially at any rate, it was agreed it required. It was exceptional, for example, for an officer such as the late G. C. Woolley (a brother of the well-known archaeologist) to be able to acquire a knowledge of the Murut language and to make a detailed study of Murut custom or *adat*.

The problem was taken over by the new Government of North Borneo in 1946 when the Chartered Company handed over its rights and the territory became a British colony.

What was the trouble with the Muruts?

One fairly obvious trouble was that excessive drinking seemed to be on the increase—a habit which proved deleterious to the communities in two ways: it undermined health directly, and thus rendered the Muruts more liable to disease; and it tended to use up available supplies of food and so made for malnutrition. This undermined health indirectly.

Life in the Murut country is in any case a constant struggle for food.

Nature has the food up her sleeve but will only pay it out grudgingly, little by little in response to hard and wearisome

toil on the hillsides and in the jungle. In comparison with the up-country Kadazans, for instance, the people are at a decided disadvantage, for very few of them are able to come down from their hills and settle permanently in the more profitable occupation of growing wet-paddy. The necessary flat land is just not available.

Turning large quantities of this hard-won rice into *tapai* is, of course, as traditional as the practice of head-hunting itself. In the old days the return of the warriors from a successful raid provided a major occasion for a 'brew-up', the other occasions being marriages, deaths, the harvest in-gathering and the welcoming of visitors to the house. All these remain more or less as in former times.

Betrothal and marriage customs vary a good deal even within the Murut sub-tribes.

In general, a string of beads is considered a suitable gift from the man to the girl to mark a betrothal. He will take it from his own neck and hang it round the girl's. Or he may give her a bracelet.

Nothing corresponding to a religious ceremony marks the actual wedding; the emphasis is entirely on the feast, though the all-important *berian,* or present from the bridegroom to the father-in-law must be made. Gongs, jars, clothes, beads or cash are all acceptable and in some areas it is customary for the prospective father-in-law to indicate beforehand what he wants. Sometimes the mother-in-law, too, will expect her share of presents.

There are many curious and picturesque traditions in various parts of the country. Among certain tribes it is customary for the *berian* to be paid by instalments: first a headcloth, a loincloth and other small articles are handed over, then—after everyone has drunk together—another loincloth is paid. Sometimes twenty strings of beads and a gong are given by the bridegroom to the bride as he arrives at her house. He then

hands her a knife with which she cuts down a stick of sugar-cane which her father has planted in front of the house, and the knife, together with a second gong, is retained as part of the *berian*.

But the feast itself always marks the wedding. With the Rundum Muruts the bride and bridegroom must stand holding hands in the centre of the dancing-floor while all the relatives and guests circle round them singing; after which everyone imbibes as much *tapai* as he can.

With the Peluans the bridal pair are made to drink together. With their heads just touching, they drink through bamboo reeds from the same jar of liquor and later they eat together from the same plate or bowl.

At a death, drinking and feasting invariably follow the burial which, according to the tradition of most Borneo tribes, takes place in a jar if possible. Often the jar is not placed in the grave at once but is kept in the house up to seven days, and during this time enormous quantities of *tapai* are consumed.

The Keningau Muruts, who look to Mount Kinabalu as the abode of the dead rather than to the high mountains of the true Murut country, are said to hold the belief that the more food and drink a man's relatives can consume at his funeral the more provisions he will have in the spirit world! Even without this comforting doctrine, however, there is no doubt that a death everywhere provides an excuse for drunkenness in which sometimes a whole village will be involved.

The harvest, especially of course if it is a good harvest, is by tradition a time of very widespread drinking, though in fairness it must be remembered that this custom is by no means confined to the Muruts. But everyone who has travelled in those Murut hills will testify that it is not uncommon at this time for many communities to be more or less 'out' for days.

As for the welcoming of visitors, one can only say that, the

excessive hospitality which custom demands—and particularly if the visitor should happen to be a *tuan*—has literally been the traveller's headache. Every Government official stationed in a Murut district and anxious to pay his calls and press on and complete his rounds has bemoaned it.

Apart from the above 'set occasions' it is safe to say that a good deal of drunkenness takes place in the ordinary course of events. The Murut, with his old way of life now partially broken down, has tended to resort to the *tapai*-jars without the time-honoured excuses. In his head-hunting days there was excitement. Life, moreover, had to be lived on the alert if you were to survive.

But the past fifty years have brought about a state of comparative safety; and with the safety has come stagnation. It is true that the Chartered Company had its fair share of small wars and rebellions, but against these episodes there must be set long periods of real peace and what was on the whole very stable government. The colonial period which began at the end of World War II was an even more outstandingly peaceful and contented time for North Borneo. But of all the tribes, only the Muruts failed to benefit from the general prosperity.

Among their problems must be reckoned such factors as the nature of their traditional territory which, as I have said, does not lend itself easily to improved methods of agriculture, or to the development of such pursuits as cattle raising. The Muruts were the last of the warriors, and when they ceased to be warriors they somehow could not adjust themselves easily to a more constructive way of life.

In other parts of the world other primitive peoples have declined. Sometimes they have drunk themselves to death as a result of contact with the white races. With the Muruts of today the allurements of drink are undoubtedly strong. In their case, however, that is not the whole story. It does not account for the simple fact that for far too long, far too few babies have

been born and reared among them to catch up with the high death-rate.

Some years ago I was talking to a young district officer at Tenom about this question. (The exigencies of the Service required his transfer to another part of the country after less than a year, but at the time he had some contact with Murut conditions and was taking a real interest in the people.) I myself had no standing other than that of a sympathetic enquirer, since my work was confined almost entirely to the Chinese.

"The Muruts are to be pitied," remarked the D.O. "Apart from everything else they have their own peculiar methods of birth control, you know. And that's why they are a declining race."

As it was proved shortly afterwards, this estimate of the situation was not exactly correct. But at least the D.O. was on the way to getting somewhere near to the actual truth.

25

With the best will in the world, governments can only achieve certain results, for resources are always limited. The Chartered Company Government was in this respect in a particularly difficult position, though towards the end of its time it did commission one of its medical officers to undertake some research into the problem of Murut depopulation. Then came the war and nothing further could be done until several years afterwards.

In 1953 the Colonial Government, following up the earlier research, invited over from Malaya a doctor with experience among the aborigines of that country. He first spent three months with the Muruts, then revisited them the next year. He confirmed what the Chartered Company doctor had indicated: that these folk were indeed dying out, and that how-

ever complicated the contributory causes, the plain fact seemed to be that the women were not giving birth to babies—or at least that they were giving birth to extremely few. It was a rather specialised matter.

Two years later the Government of Singapore loaned to the Government of North Borneo a woman doctor, Dr. Mary Saunders. Her special purpose was to work among the Murut women and to try to gain their confidence—no easy task, but at length out of her investigations came the following interesting, though distressing, conclusion.

The position, it appeared, was *not* that the women never conceived. Frequently they became pregnant—sometimes at a very early age—but none of the children lived. A normal delivery proved virtually impossible to find. Many women died in childbirth, and always with a fatalistic acceptance of death as a perfectly natural consequence of conception. Pelvic infection was a common condition, and background diseases such as malaria, malnutrition and debility were all found to play their part in this tragic loss of life.

Dr. Saunders reported one horrifying case of a young girl in labour. She was about sixteen and had come down from the hills with a group of workers who were on contract at Sapong, a famous rubber estate near Tenom which has since been sold and divided up. The conditions in the house where she was undergoing her confinement were absolutely filthy; the floor covered with cigarette-ends and strewn with the remains of food and other litter. People and dogs all came in and out of the place freely.

The girl sat on a minute bamboo log, facing one corner of the room. For support she rested her arms in a loop of rope which hung from the roof—a common traditional practice in confinement among the indigenous people. Most of the time a woman sat behind her, enabling her to lie back and relax, while in front of her squatted three ancient crones who made

intermittent 'examinations' by inserting an unwashed hand into the uterus. The doctor watched this going on for some time and after sixteen such examinations she lost count. At the end of five hours, she says, they began to come "thick and fast" and the girl was obviously on the point of exhaustion.

At the husband's request the doctor herself then made an examination and found "a pulseless, prolapsed six-inch loop of cord protruding from the vulva and an arm presenting in front of the head, so that it was impossible for the child—now dead—to be born".

Not without some hesitation the girl agreed to being taken into hospital at Tenom, a comparatively short journey though it involved the crossing of the Padas River by ferry. At about midnight she was attended to, and, after manipulations, the dead child was delivered by forceps. The mother lived. She would not have done so had she not come into hospital.*

No doubt such cases could be found almost everywhere in the remote Murut country. The answer to the problem is of course an extension of the health services and in particular of maternity and child welfare clinics. Old, unhygienic practices handed down by Murut tradition need to be replaced by the methods of properly trained and qualified midwives.

The need is clear but the obstacles remain—from the one side the ignorance and fatalism of the people, and on the other the stark fact of their rain-soaked forests and everlasting hills where transport is possible only on foot. The razor-back ridges which have for so long kept the Muruts primitive and isolated still hold back progress towards better standards of health and hygiene.

Nevertheless, when the results of the 1960 census became known it was heartening to learn that the downward trend in Murut population had been arrested. Their numbers had risen

* Related by K. G. Tregonning, *North Borneo*, Corona Library, H.M.S.O., 1960

from 18,724 to the figure I have quoted, 22,138—an increase of eighteen per cent. Later unofficial reports have cautiously indicated that this figure is being maintained and that in some areas it is probably increasing.

The old scourges of cholera and smallpox now belong to the past. The commonest diseases throughout Sabah as a whole are malaria, tuberculosis and intestinal infections. As these are conquered and general standards of health rise, no section of the people, however neglected, should decline in numbers. Here, assistance has been received in various ways from such bodies as W.H.O. (World Health Organisation) and U.N.I.C.E.F. (United Nations International Children's Fund).

For some years an extensive anti-malaria campaign, sponsored by the Government with help from these organisations, has done a great deal to eradicate this disease. Under the supervision of medical officers young men have travelled all over the country spraying thousands of houses and often reaching the remotest Kampongs, while in many districts anti-malarial drugs have been administered to the people at the same time as the spraying.

Tuberculosis is undoubtedly widespread. Both Jesselton and Sandakan, the two largest towns, have T.B. hospitals and in the smaller places arrangements are made for the isolation of patients. During 1964 nurses of the American Peace Corps 'Heaf tested' thousands of indigenous children. In the regions of the upper Kinabatangan, where the remote Kadazans tend to 'shade off' into a type of Murut population, the nurses worked closely with an Anglican mission established at Tongud. Where the tests proved negative they gave the children BCG vaccine. It was found that in some of the smaller villages all the children were negative. Thus, if the positive cases could be removed the source of the disease would be largely eliminated.

For a good many years an extremely useful and well-run

voluntary society, the North Borneo Anti-Tuberculosis Association, has assisted the country's Medical Department in a number of ways. N.O.B.A.T.A., which has now inevitably become S.A.B.A.T.A., helps to educate the public by encouraging T.B. sufferers to report early for treatment and by disseminating warning propaganda against such habits as spitting—a habit which unfortunately seems dear to the hearts of most people, apart from the small Eurasian and European communities.

The third serious health problem, intestinal infections, is, I imagine, general throughout much of South-East Asia; the result of low standards of sanitation and hygiene. Whilst it can be tackled in the towns, it is by no means so easy to deal with in remote rural areas; and this of course applies specially to the remotest of all the peoples, the Muruts.

When in 1963 the Colonial Government handed over its responsibilities it had the satisfaction of having completed a substantial programme of hospital rebuilding. In the seventeen years in which North Borneo was a British colony large, well-designed and well-equipped modern hospitals replaced impossible wood and palm-leaf structures hastily erected after the war. In rural centres smaller buildings went up; and among the latter was Tenom Hospital.

Potentially this should be of the greatest value to all the Murut country, though at first it was far more appreciated by the progressive, hardworking Chinese community of the immediate vicinity; a community which is rapidly developing the rich resources of the Tenom district. The Murut mind is slow-moving, not given to any swift change of habit or of custom. But here at least is a helping hand held out by civilisation, and time will show to what extent it will be accepted. The present Health Service is now the concern of the State Government jointly with the Government of Malaysia.

Malaya's very successful programme of rural development is well-known—this is another direction in which a great deal can be done for Sabah. Indeed, the expectation that this same kind of vigorous development which has taken place in Malaya might be extended to the Borneo territories was for many of the indigenous people one of the attractions of Malaysia. The U.N.K.O. (United National Kadazan Organisation) listed it as an important point in their programme and expressed the hope that it would give the people a new inspiration to work for themselves and their country.

Health, rural development and, of course, education—all these present the new Federation of Malaysia with a tremendous opportunity and challenge, deserving of the support of all who desire to help on the peoples of the more backward parts of the world. Something of what has already been accomplished in the Malay Pensinsula can also be accomplished in Sabah, a remoter and much more difficult land. But given time and—most important—freedom from outside interference, the new state should be able to extend these benefits into its very farthest corners. Even into the Murut hills.

26

It was fashionable at one time among certain Western intellectuals to tilt at Christian missions. The misguided missionaries undermined the nature of the 'noble savage'. By clothing his fine physique in unbecoming and quite unnecessary garments, and in many other ways, they spoilt him.

Lack of first-hand knowledge of the actual work of missions never deterred the critics and they do not seem to have realised that it was the traders far more than the missionaries who provided the unbecoming garments. However, this attitude in time began to percolate quite freely through most strata of British society, with the result that many people who really

knew very little about conditions in, say, Africa or Asia came to form unfavourable judgements on the Church's activities in those continents.

Today, whatever may have been the justification for the original criticisms, the climate of opinion has altogether changed. Any voluntary agency which is able to make a contribution to the desperate needs of the world's under-privileged peoples—provided that it isn't trying to push some completely crackpot religion—is at least accorded a measure of public respect. In any event, the old image of the 'noble savage' has long since disappeared.

The Muruts themselves are an outstanding example of this.

In their case the tragedy is surely that so little has been done for them by way of missionary activity. There was no mission within many miles of Rundum at the time of their revolt. Only one attempt had been made to introduce work in Murut country of the kind already familiar to the people of the lowlands, and that, curiously enough, was as far back as 1896, when an Anglican mission was established among the Muruts at Keningau.

If the resources of governments are limited, the resources of missions are even more so; the Keningau mission lasted for a few years, then closed down for sheer lack of funds and staff. The formidable hills of the Crocker Range, practically unknown to Europeans at that time, proved too much for a diocese that had to stretch from Singapore to Sandakan and to exist on a shoe-string. Thus fizzled out an important pioneer project. It is idle to speculate now on what might have been. But had it prospered and spread further inland to the south and south-east—the natural course—the whole history of Anglo-Murut relations would undoubtedly have been very different.

About this same time the Roman Catholic mission was putting down strong roots among the Kadazans of the west

coast plains. Into this work went practically all its resources —with what results we have already seen. It was not until after the last war that the Roman Catholic Church in Sabah was able to make a great deal of impact even on the hill Dusuns; and when it did so it involved skirting the Murut country and moving into such districts as the Tambunan valley and towards the villages at the foot of Kinabalu. The Muruts perforce had to be left to their own devices. Their country, from a missionary point of view, became a kind of vacuum.

Into this vacuum there moved, in about 1952, a remarkable organisation, the *Sidang Injil Borneo* (Borneo Evangelical Mission). Working from a headquarters at Lawas in Sarawak where it was founded by Australian missionaries in 1928, the *Sidang Injil Borneo* has developed largely as a native movement.

The first and most successful converts were from among the Sarawak Muruts, just over Sabah's south-western border. Not long before the outbreak of the Japanese war and the subsequent occupation of Borneo the mission was visited by Rajah Brooke, who declared that it had done more good for the Murut tribe in a few years than his government had done in forty—an amazingly frank admission from a head of state.

As in so many places during the Japanese occupation, Christianity tended to go underground; but afterwards native preachers began to cross from Sarawak into the territory of their former head-hunting enemies, the Sabah Muruts.

Here we come up against the usual Borneo confusion over nomenclature. The Sarawak Muruts—who seem to have no objections to their name—prefer to call those of Sabah, whom they do not much resemble, Tagals. In this they are quite correct, since many of them do in fact call themselves Tagals, though the Sabah Government still continues to call them all Muruts. The position is further complicated by the existence of

another tribe of Tagals in Sarawak, where they are officially listed by the government among its tribal peoples.

Anyway, the *Sidang Injil Borneo* began to spread into Sabah; first into the Meligan area close to the border, then along the upper reaches of the Padas River. European missionaries followed in 1954 to assist with formalities, and about that time official permission for the work to proceed was obtained from a government still rather hesitating about its Muruts.

While the ethos of the mission has of course been stamped upon it by its founders and white workers, these have always insisted that they are only 'scaffolding' to be taken down in due course. No large institutions such as schools or mission hospitals that would require a considerable measure of outside help have been built up. The indigenous Christians must be self-supporting. The movement must spread to natives by natives—and fortunately in Sabah the term 'native' has no derogatory associations.

The task of acting as 'scaffolding' has, however, proved a far from unexciting one.

Since the war a remarkable feature of the mission has been its use of tiny aircraft, able to land on pocket-handkerchief strips in the heart of the jungle. This began by Australian pilots flying two tiny single-engined planes; later these were replaced by somewhat larger ones—gifts to the cause—though they still look small beside the planes of the commercial airlines.

As can be imagined, flying in a country like Borneo is not without its difficulties and dangers, but these pilots, except in emergency, largely choose their own times and no night flights are ever attempted. Distances which on foot would take several days' hard trekking are covered in an hour. Prayer is offered before every take-off.

Though not called upon to work in hospitals, quite a high percentage of the staff is medically trained, whilst others have

had a short medical course. Valuable service can thus be rendered in the most outlying places, both by direct treatment with a well-chosen selection of drugs and by the teaching of general hygiene. Dangerously ill patients have often been flown out from the remote interior to the hospitals of the coast.

All this has in recent years had a distinct bearing on the vexed problem of the Sabah Muruts.

From villages in the Padas district which have turned to Christianity, and eastwards through the Dalit country as far as a small place called Biah, come reports of a phenomenal increase in the number of surviving babies. The claim of the *Sidang Injil Borneo* to be playing a vital part in reversing the trend of these once-dying tribes would seem to be incontrovertible.

The mission is also involved very deeply in the question of literacy.

As with other Borneo languages, Murut had never been written. The traditional method of sending messages was by means of knotted strings. For example, the delivery of a string with ten knots by one chief to another would mean, "I will come to visit you ten days after you receive this," and the recipient would then untie a knot a day.

Until 1954 the Murut (or Tagal) language had scarcely been written and was far behind that of the Kadazans. Illiteracy was almost universal. Even by 1960 only one Murut had completed a secondary school education. Out of 16,000 Muruts aged ten and over, only 1,500 were literate in the sense that they could read and write a simple letter in some language —in practice English or Malay. In 1954 a beginning was made by missionaries and native Christians on the translation of the New Testament into the Murut language. This work is still in progress, it being reckoned that a period of fifteen years is required where a dialect has hitherto been unwritten.

To become a Christian, to embrace a new religion, is of

course a vast change for anyone such as a primitive animist; for a Murut perhaps specially so. Age-long beliefs about the supreme importance of omens—the notes or the flight of birds or the noise of the barking-deer—do not fall away easily. The spirits that have always affected life in a thousand ways cling with the strength and tenacity of jungle creepers.

Even after conversion it appears that the old influences are by no means dead and there has been a number of apparently well-authenticated cases of Muruts who, having accepted the Gospel, later met with terrifying visions of spirits. Mostly these have occurred on lonely paths and have been of a threatening character; a few caused their victims to drop their new faith.

Apart from the general belief in spirits, some of the Murut sub-tribes have a traditional notion, not shared by most other Borneo people though common to much Asian thought—namely, a belief in the transmigration of souls. It is believed that at death a human soul will sometimes enter the body of a deer.

G. C. Woolley has an interesting story about a Murut who borrowed an axe and a chisel from a neighbour and died before he could return them. Shortly after his death the neighbour came round to the man's house to claim the tools but they could not be found. As there was nothing else suitable that could be offered instead, the neighbour exercised what was undoubtedly his right—to claim the dead man's son as his slave.

Accordingly this boy went to live with his master for a time. He was not badly treated and sometimes they went out hunting together. One day the master shot a deer. He cut up the carcase and gave the slave-boy the head to carry home.

As they walked the head became very heavy and the boy lagged behind. Suddenly the head spoke.

" Child," it said, " you are my son."

Amazed that the voice came from the deer's mouth the boy replied:

"Oh, father, if you had not borrowed that axe and chisel I should not now be a slave."

"Look in the roof of our old house, my boy," said the voice.

The son went to look in the roof of the house and found the missing tools; he handed them over and so regained his freedom.

What is the origin of such strange beliefs? Are they long, long memories from the mainland of Asia, retained among tribes for century after untold century? To this and to many other questions concerning the history and beliefs of the Muruts, it is extremely improbable that we shall ever receive a definite answer.

As with all primitive peoples, it is difficult for one or two individuals to make a change of religion. The tendency is much more for villages to do so as a whole. Though the communities are widely scattered, the sense of community in each one is strong. Chiefs and headmen still wield some influence, and agricultural activities—which demand accompanying religious or magical rites—must always be undertaken by the people as a body.

In certain ways Murut practice is remarkably close to the best in Christianity. For example, by tradition the hill Murut is as honest as daylight. Small, closely-knit communities cannot afford to tolerate thieving. One of the most charming of up-country Borneo customs, which still continues today, is the placing of fruit and other articles under little booths by the wayside so that travellers may take what they want and leave small coins in payment, to be collected later. The system is never abused.

With regard to the whole question of marriage, the Muruts, along with most of the other Borneo pagan tribes, are tradi-

tionally monogamous, or at least more inclined to monogamy than to any other custom. Wives are not multiplied and reckoned a form of wealth as in some parts of the world.

A Murut, therefore, should he decide to become a Christian, is not under the embarrassing obligation of having to choose which wife he will retain. Under tribal law divorce is allowed, but it is not all that common and is governed by a certain definite code.

It is worth noting that adultery, the commonest cause for divorce, was in former times punishable by death. In some districts the offenders would be placed together face to face on the ground and a spear thrust through them. If the adultery were of an incestuous nature the penalty would always be death, since natural disasters such as plagues, floods, drought or famine were thought to be due to some undetected act of incest.

A choice variety of fates awaited the offenders. Sometimes their heads were taken and their bodies flung into the river, sometimes they were buried in the same grave and sometimes they were actually killed in the river—up-stream, so that their blood might flow past the village and wash away the effects of the crime. Or again, their blood might be sprinkled all over the village. Death as a penalty for adultery, incestuous or otherwise, was abolished by the Chartered Company.

As with most of the Borneo tribes, pre-marital intercourse has usually been treated somewhat lightly. On the other hand homosexuality and all forms of unnatural offence seem unknown and no penalties are prescribed for them in traditional pagan law.

All this, despite—or rather because of—the barbarity of the punishments, does amount to a very strong respect for marriage as an institution. Compared with, for example, many African tribes the marital problems of the Muruts are on the whole fairly uncomplicated.

A final word on the vexed question of drinking.

Here the attitude of the *Bidang Injil Borneo* is absolutely uncompromising: no drinking of *tapai* at all, not even on the traditional occasions. Along with the prohibition goes a similar ban on every form of alcoholic drink. Smoking too is forbidden, as is the growing of tobacco for sale or barter purposes.

It may well seem a drastic line. But there is no doubt that in numbers of cases the turning from *tapai* works effectively and is faithfully accepted. If, as the authorities of the *Bidang Injil* claim, it is true that the average Murut has been in the habit of getting dead drunk for on an average a hundred days in the year, then obviously pretty drastic measures are called for. A period of rigid Puritanism for the Muruts may well be the only solution if as a race they are to survive.

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The places where really primitive man exists are now few, and nowhere is he likely to remain primitive much longer.

Whatever the shape of his future, we can be sure that it will not be like his past—unchanging. Already large slices of his history and culture have been preserved in museums; from some parts of the globe a few final instalments are due to come in. But he himself cannot be kept as a museum-piece. 'Reserves' for human beings are both unworthy and unsatisfactory.

We are in fact witnessing the last act of a drama, the end of a long process whereby every primitive people is being swept inexorably into a certain standard mould, which is the mould of present-day world civilisation. Distances and obstacles which hitherto had seemed so formidable now shrink with every moment of the space age. Every moment resistance to change becomes a little weaker.

The ideological differences within our world civilisation,

great as they are, are small compared with the differences which separate it from the culture of Stone Age men. Nevertheless the scattered living pockets of Stone Age culture that still remain are disintegrating rapidly. Survival of the particular tribes depends upon the possibility of their adaptation to the modern world pattern.

In the end, surely, something of value will be lost.

Governor Clifford of North Borneo, with the sublime confidence of the nineteenth-century Englishmen in everything his civilisation stood for, could see in the Murut only the " person of mean understanding," the " dipsomaniac " and the " homicide by training and predilection ". It was inconceivable that anything worthwhile could have been learned from such a low, primitive creature.

Yet there is, I believe, something to be learned from him, and it is just that which will be lost when the last Murut becomes ' civilised '.

How can one possibly define it?

Certainly it is most difficult to convey; but every traveller in the Borneo hills must know it. Even the experience of a short trek in the Interior, if it includes the privilege of staying in a remote mountain village, will to some extent reveal the secret.

Life among the up-country communities of Sabah is in many ways like a perpetual camp life, with the disadvantages of a camping existence but also with its rewards. After a day surrounded by forests, hills, valleys and endless winding tracks you come at last upon a welcome collection of scattered palm-leaf huts. The slanting sunlight touches the roofs and long shadows creep up the mountain-sides. Men come in from the jungle, lugging perhaps the carcase of a deer or a wild pig. Or they glide quietly up the stream in a canoe and pull into the muddy bank, bringing ashore a catch of fish.

The smoke of cooking-fires rises gently into the fading blue

of the sky; a golden light bathes the huts as they stand on their slender stilts against the backdrop of the hills. Inside, you are offered a few square feet of bamboo floor on which to spread your things—the traditional hospitality to the traveller, common to all the up-country tribes.

In the smell of the wood-fires and surrounded by the quiet sounds of the evening, you eat a meal of boiled rice, maybe with meat or fish. You share it with simple people, and you share too their talk and laughter. The dark night closes in and a dim lamp is lit and hung from the rafters. The traffic of men, women and children padding in and out of the house —up and down the rickety steps or the notched tree-trunk which serves as a ladder—dies down. Where the density of the population is so small—two persons per square mile in the Pensiangan and Kinabatangan districts—the human beings draw naturally together with the approach of night. All around lies the immensity of the jungle world. You are sharing, if only for a time, a life which is elemental. You try to understand the minds and attitudes of a simple people with whom the twentieth century is only just catching up.

There is dirt, of course. Beneath the house the pigs will grunt sullenly, waiting for the scraps of food that will be thrown down to them. The cocks may begin crowing at such ungodly hours that you will long for somebody to tie up their beaks as in the old head-hunting days. The morning may bring rain and you will squelch down to the stream for a wash. Soon the village will be reduced to a quagmire.

But rain doesn't last forever. You continue on your trek, walking like the Muruts who cover enormous distances on foot, secure in the knowledge that the flawless sunshine will once again capture the hills. At the end of your journey you realise that you have been sharing a way of life which cannot possibly have changed much in centuries. And for some that sharing brings with it a soul-satisfying peace.

It is curious that on the whole the peoples of Sabah have been so little studied. Sarawak, with its romantic background of the White Rajahs, is far better known and the literature on its colourful Dayaks is fairly extensive.

The Dayaks' northern neighbours are in no way less colourful but not nearly so much has been recorded about them, their history and their customs. The reason for this is probably not far to seek. Successive governments have been hard pressed by many urgent problems, economic and financial worries have often loomed large. Official encouragement of anthropological study has remained more or less a pious hope.

Today the country is economically flourishing. As twin states within the Federation of Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah are being drawn together as never before. For in the past there have unfortunately sometimes been frictions, rivalries and misunderstandings. Even until quite recently an atmosphere prevailed which could only strike the impartial observer as, to say the least, one of coolness. Now perhaps, in a new partnership and in face of a common outside threat, the two countries will become sisters.

Meanwhile, Sabah still awaits her anthropologists.

Part Four
THE CHINESE

28

No story of the peoples of Sabah would be complete without some account of the Chinese, to whom I have so far referred only in passing.

Though not in the true sense indigenous, they are nearly all very much at home in their adopted land, and indeed it would be difficult to imagine the country without them.

Wherever the Chinese happen to settle they always open their own inimitable shops. These shops make the towns of Sabah. In the main they are general stores selling a wide variety of imported goods as well as much local produce. Prominent among the latter you find open sacks of rice, trays of black preserved eggs and boxes of smelly dried fish—to name but a few of the lines. These commodities tend to sprawl out from the front of the shops and give an unmistakable atmosphere to the pavements. Occasionally, however, in the larger towns there is a grouping of certain crafts in certain streets in the traditional Chinese pattern.

Thus in one street are grouped the jewellers and goldsmiths; keen-eyed craftsmen who crouch, apparently all day, over tiny charcoal furnaces, blowing the bellows with their feet. An assistant serves behind the counter. In another street you see (and hear) the tinsmiths, from whose shops an incessant noise of banging and tinkering echoes from early morning till late at night.

Yet another street, or perhaps part of a street, is given over to the bamboo furniture-makers. These also ply their trade

under the public eye, twisting the *rattan*, or thick jungle creeper, into a cunning variety of useful or comfortable shapes. Similarly, tailors often work in the public part of their shops. A Jesselton or Sandakan tailor will produce shirts or white suits as cheaply, and with as much skill and speed, as in Singapore or Hong Kong.

Photographers' establishments—for the Chinese love of photography is obsessional—are very common. So too are bookshops and sports-shops; and there are few corner sites which are not devoted to that famous institution, the Chinese coffee-shop. In most streets the unrestrained hooting of jeeps and lorries competes, often unsuccessfully, with the blare of radios, all tuned in to endless programmes by nasal Oriental sopranos. But even this does not drown the shrill shrieks and squeals of the tiny children who play in and out of their parents' premises. No child can make its presence felt more effectively than a diminutive Chinese.

With few exceptions the trading families live above their shops, so that these premises are always known as 'shop-houses'. Constructed of wood, or more recently of steel and concrete, the buildings are mostly two-storeyed and can be more comfortable than a first glance would suggest.

At the back on the ground floor there is a kitchen and sometimes another small room for the use of the family. In the upper storey are the bedrooms and perhaps a secluded living-room where tired towkays can relax—if they ever do. At closing time the heavy wooden shutters are drawn across the whole width of the shop's open front.

The Chinese Chamber of Commerce is a well-organised and influential body. Among its members are a few extremely wealthy men, especially in the east coast towns of Sandakan and Tawau, with wide contacts throughout the East. Numbers of Chinese are engaged in the timber and building trades, or are rubber or copra exporters. Some are fishermen by calling

and a few are rice-farmers, working in the country alongside their Kadazan neighbours. Others run rice-mills in agricultural districts.

But far more are market-gardeners, growing vegetables, and to a lesser extent fruit, on smallholdings near the towns and rearing pigs and poultry. Their simple wooden houses often rise from a green sea of neat vegetables, a witness to the patient industry of the Chinese market-gardener. Early in the morning he will take his produce into market on a bamboo pole slung across the shoulders, carrying it with that half-walk, half-trot which is peculiar to his race. And for the rest of the day he will bend his back to the long rows of beans and other vegetables or 'chungkil' his ground with his characteristic Chinese hoe. Life is a ceaseless round of producing and selling. He does not make a fortune; but he is sturdy and independent, the owner of his house and land.

Here and there, in remote villages or on the banks of some distant river, you find that rare adventurous character, the lone trader. He is a man prepared to take risks and to forgo the usual gregarious life of his fellow-countrymen in the quest for money. It was such a man who in the early days sometimes lost his head; as a result, a fear of the Interior grew up in the Chinese communities and it still exists to a certain extent today.

Among the Chinese generally there is great enthusiasm for education. Everywhere they have organised schools.

Of those who in the past two or three generations have received their schooling in English (almost without exception in a mission school) some work in one or other of the many government departments, while others are employed as clerks in the offices of the big Far Eastern trading companies. Thousands of children receive their education in Mandarin, in schools run on traditional Chinese lines. But today the opportunities of higher education for such children are limited.

There are far more openings for those with a knowledge of English. Hence the demand for English education, which in the case of outstanding pupils can lead to periods of further training overseas.

There are 104,542 Chinese in the State. At least that was the 1960 census figure. This makes them the second largest racial group.

But the true significance of the figure becomes apparent when it is placed alongside those of earlier years. Their number in 1921 was 38,000; in 1951 it was 74,374. The Kadazans' figure for this latter date was 117,867 and they increased in 1960 to 145,229. Thus the Chinese are not only the second largest racial group, but the most rapidly-increasing community. None of the indigenous groups is increasing so fast. In time there must inevitably be a Chinese majority.

Several tribes and dialects are represented in Sabah: Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochow, Hailamese and Shantung. By far the most numerous are the Hakkas (57,338).

When the rule of the North Borneo Company was established, one of the most pressing problems was that of labour. Somehow immigrants had to be induced into the country. The extent of Chinese penetration of Sabah in the distant past will probably always remain a mystery; but certainly at the time (1881) there was only a handful of Chinese.

The authorities might have found their immigrants elsewhere—indeed, they made approaches in other directions, notably Ceylon and India. But in the end it was the Chinese who came.

The handling of the problem was not at first very successful. The wrong types were encouraged to sail; townsmen with no experience of working the land—especially land of swamp and jungle. As a result the Company spent a good deal of money on immigrants who only returned.

Then in 1882 it had the luck to find a number of Hakkas

from Kwantung Province in China. Fourteen families comprising a total of ninety-six persons made up the pioneer party, which settled in the Kudat peninsula. These folk were sturdy and industrious, and they needed to be. The challenge of clearing and working virgin land was tremendous. Tropical diseases decimated their numbers. The attitude of the natives in Borneo's unknown hinterland was an uncertain factor. Nevertheless the little Hakka community battled on, and in time it prospered. It is from this community that the North Borneo Hakkas are descended.

While the Hokkiens and the Cantonese form the main body of the urban traders and the Hailamese, who are excellent cooks, usually run the coffee-shops, the Hakkas have on the whole remained wedded to the soil. Their broad honest faces are to be seen everywhere in the Kudat district, and in many other areas as well: on coconut plantations, on rubber plantations, on market-garden smallholdings, in workshops and in tiny fishing villages. And wherever you find the Hakkas they are as hardworking as ever.

It would be difficult, as I have said, to imagine the country without the Chinese. It is to them that Sabah largely owes its present prosperity. It depends upon the Chinese.

There are two obvious dangers inherent in this situation.

The first is the possible growth of jealousies and antipathies between the various racial groups. The Chinese have a background of thousands of years of high civilisation; the indigenous peoples have had a very different past. Through no fault of their own the latter naturally find themselves at a disadvantage in the 'modern world' which is pressing with such rapidity on the more backward parts of South-East Asia. The Chinese have inherited a gospel of work; the Malayan people and those tribes ethnically close to them, have always tended to laugh and take life easily. One would be surprised indeed if the Chinese did not go ahead and prosper.

I have mentioned that by 1960 one Murut only had completed a full secondary school education. It is interesting to compare the number of Chinese who at the same date had achieved the same standard of education: 1,178. Many Chinese are, of course, still illiterate. But the proportion is much less than in the case of any indigenous tribe.

Taking literacy to mean the ability to read and write a simple letter, in some language, by a person of ten years or over, the figures for the Chinese and the Kadazans are as follows: literate Chinese, 38,158, illiterate, 30,691; literate Kadazans, 9,671, illiterate, 86,545.

Many of the more enlightened Chinese fully recognise that this gulf exists and strongly support the advancement of education for the indigenous tribes. They also accept with a good grace that their position in law is somewhat different from that of the natives, who for long have had certain reserved privileges, especially in regard to land. Priority has also been given in recent years to native children in the matter of scholarships overseas. It is an encouraging sign, though individuals may grumble, that the Chinese generally are prepared to be broadminded on such issues.

Another hopeful factor is that the Chinese will often marry with the indigenous peoples.

According to the 1960 census figures there were about seven and a half thousand 'Sino-Natives' in Sabah, the majority of them offspring of Chinese and Kadazan parents. These attractive folk often happily inherit the best characteristics of both races; many families are Christian, and certainly they are an asset to the country. If this trend towards inter-marriage is continuing, and it seems that it is, people such as the Sino-Kadazans should go a long way towards cementing the very satisfactory race relations which so fortunately exist.

And this perhaps is after all Sabah's greatest inheritance. It is a country where no one looks askance at another man's

skin. It has a wonderful tradition of racial tolerance and understanding and an immense fund of goodwill—a gift which, as Tregonning has put it, is "more valuable than all the oil in Brunei". While in every mixed community there is, of course, the germ of possible racial troubles, there is good reason to hope that in the case of Sabah that germ will not become active as the body politic grows. Her neighbours have been far from free in this respect. Sabah may well provide a microcosm of what the whole of Malaysia could be.

The second problem, though not unconnected with the first, is rather different and is of much greater magnitude. The big threat throughout South-East Asia today is Communism and the attitude of the Chinese who belong to South-East Asia's 'Dispersion' is of vital importance. The future of many of the lands of their adoption is undoubtedly in their hands.

In the case of North Borneo the period right up to the outbreak of the Second World War saw a good deal of 'come and go' with the Chinese mainland a thousand miles to the north. Afterwards, and especially from 1949 onwards, the situation changed rapidly and the colonial Government had to exercise a strict control over Chinese immigration. Into the bottle-neck of Hong Kong streamed hundreds of thousands of refugees, many of whom had suffered at the hands of the Communists. For most, their one aim was to keep alive, somehow. Others hoped, if possible, to begin a new life in a new land. A few were able to bring out a little capital with them.

To many of these refugees North Borneo appeared an attractive possibility. But to the receiving country the risk of undesirable infiltration was enormous; the most rigid screening of every applicant was absolutely essential and an effective organisation was set up to work it.

Despite this, however, large numbers of Chinese found themselves admitted, and with the same willingness and adaptability as the earlier immigrants they have settled down.

Some families have by now put down strong roots in the country. Employment was not difficult to find; indeed, some of the 'new Chinese' have already played an important part in opening up areas of Sabah which hitherto had had to remain untouched for sheer lack of population to do the job. The strict control of immigration from 1949 onwards proved very effective.

That is not to say that the country has been, or is, entirely free of Communism. However closely the net is drawn, a fish here and there will some time or other slip through. As everywhere in South-East Asia, the schools have been the danger spots. There have been some expulsions from Sabah—certain teachers from the Chinese schools were sent back to China. But the influence has never been strong. Compared with, say, Singapore, or even with her close neighbour, Sarawak, Sabah has been singularly fortunate.

Of the total of 104,542 which makes up the Chinese population seventy-seven per cent were locally born. If most of the new immigrants have put down deep roots, these have theirs even deeper.

Certain families have now been settled for eighty years, many for half a century. They are as much at home speaking Malay, the *lingua franca* of the country, as with their own particular Chinese dialect. They keep, of course, their own distinctive culture but they no longer crave for China as the homeland; they have created their own little China in a Borneo setting. Far from being dazzled by the blandishments of Communism some of the local communities have displayed almost fanatical anti-Communist sympathies and at one time the messages and gifts sent off to Chiang Kai Shek threatened to become an embarrassment to the North Borneo Government.

The Chinese suffered a good deal during the Japanese occupation. Every English-speaking Chinese was specially

suspect. It was the Chinese who in 1943 initiated a revolt, which although premature and unsuccessful, crystallised the feelings of the population in general. When British rule replaced that of the Japanese they were not slow to appreciate the advantages; for they, perhaps more than any other section of the community, were able to benefit from it. In 1962 some of them thought the concept of Malaysia premature and would have liked to have seen Great Britain continue as the ruling power for a few more years. Having gone with their country, however, into the Federation it is safe to prophesy that they will do their best to make it a going concern.

Those who have had any experience of the Chinese, who have lived and worked among them, know their solid, enduring qualities. This particular community—settled on the fringe of a vast land of jungle-covered mountains which, if man relented in his efforts to conquer it, would sweep back like an ocean and swamp all his hard-won gains—is no more than a tiny handful, a mere drop of the world's most populous race. But it has a task before it out of all proportion to its numbers.

The prospect is exciting because among all today's many political experiments Malaysia is one of the boldest and most imaginative. Nowhere before has there been brought together quite such a collection of peoples, with quite such a variety of religions, cultures and traditions. The task of the Chinese in this bold experiment is a unique and vital one. By their co-operation with all the many other constituent races of their country they will be given the opportunity of demonstrating that the new Federation is the best answer to Communism in South-East Asia.

In this one State they have to travel alongside Malays, the inheritors of a proud and ancient tradition; Bajaus, Illanuns and Suluks, the inheritors of a piratical tradition; Kadazans, Muruts and others with a notorious, head-hunting tradition, some of whom must still be reckoned among the most primitive

of all existing peoples, but nevertheless recipients with them of a new independence within a political structure of great significance and upon which the eyes of the world are focused.

Epilogue
CONFRONTATION

WHEN on 31 August 1963 North Borneo gained internal self-government and on 16 September joined the Federation of Malaysia, the new state at once found itself threatened.

Indonesia based her 'Crush Malaysia' policy on the latter's supposed neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism. Following the general pattern of our era both countries emerged from a colonial background but in vastly different ways: Malaysia smoothly and with the maximum goodwill towards the former ruling power. Indonesia in tension, bitterness and strife. Out of this contrast arose the situation in which Indonesia with her one hundred million people 'confronted' Malaysia's population of ten million.

To attempt a full analysis of the reasons behind 'confrontation' would be far beyond the scope of this book. A brief outline may however be helpful.

The Republic of Indonesia comprises the large islands of Java, Sumatra and the Celebes, the western portion of New Guinea and the southern two-thirds of Borneo—Kalimantan. There are many other smaller islands and islets, estimated to be in the region of 3,000 and covering in all an area of more than 700,000 square miles.

Before their discovery by the white races, Buddhist and Hindu culture spread from India to the most prominent of these islands. Of the architectural remains of that early period the most famous is the ruined temple at Borobudur in Java,

in which evidence of both religions has been preserved. But following this culture—and ultimately superseding it—came Islam; and although present-day Indonesia is a secular state claiming to offer freedom of religion for all, it is Islam that has remained the predominant faith of the area since the sixteenth century.

The same century saw the beginnings of that probing of the East Indies by the European sea-faring nations which in time led to all the islands being subjected to colonial rule.

The first tentative step in this direction was the establishment of certain 'factories' or trading posts by the Portuguese —later to be taken over by the Dutch. In the next century the process was speeded up by the Formation of the great Dutch East India Company, a company which for two hundred years exercised control over much of the present territory of Indonesia until its dissolution in 1798. After that date the dominions were administered directly from the Netherlands by means of a governor and council—a system which obtained right up to the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation of the East Indies.

With an Indian Empire to cope with, British interest in these islands had been rather sporadic. At Bencoolen in Sumatra there was, it is true, a British settlement that lasted for nearly a hundred and fifty years, from 1685 onwards; but it never enjoyed the volume of trade or the reputation of Batavia and was eventually exchanged for the Dutch settlements in Malaya. Gradually the pattern of the European empires in the East shaped itself. Both Java and Sumatra were briefly occupied by the British in 1811, when Sir Stamford Raffles became governor of Java. Afterwards, however, the islands were handed back to the Dutch and the respective spheres of influence remained more or less settled—though British interest in northern Borneo was always viewed with suspicion by the Netherlands.

Such briefly was the position when the whole region—Malaya, British Borneo and the Dutch East Indies—fell to the Japanese in 1942.

So far as Holland's empire was concerned, this was the beginning of the end. In August 1945 certain Nationalist groups, taking advantage of the confused situation, proclaimed an independent republic in Djakarta. The leaders were Dr. Soekarno and Dr. Hatta.

As the Japanese withdrew from the various islands it became increasingly evident that the Dutch were unlikely ever to return as rulers. They sponsored a number of autonomous groups in certain areas with a view to retaining influence, but were unable to reinstate themselves as the colonial power. There then followed several years of negotiations alternating with outbreaks of hostilities.

Demands for regional autonomy arose in many places. Even today, as revolts in some of the islands have shown, Indonesia is still far from being a homogeneous state. Nevertheless, in 1949—the same year in which India attained independence—the Republic was finally and officially created and it was shortly afterwards admitted to the United Nations.

Thus the difference in manner in which these two new countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, have emerged is a factor of immense importance in South-East Asia. Inevitably it has coloured their whole outlook on the world and towards each other. Indonesia fought and struggled to obtain independence; Malaysia—and this is specially true of the Borneo states—had to be almost urged to take it. When the last British Governors of North Borneo and Sarawak left, it was with deep and genuine regret on the part of their respective territories.

In contrast, the spirit of anti-colonialism runs strongly in Indonesia. Directed in the first instance of course against the Dutch, it soon became wider and much more general, so that compromise with anything savouring in the slightest degree of

neo-colonialism, anywhere, was the unforgivable sin—treachery to the emergent Afro-Asian peoples. Without this underlying feeling, which is undoubtedly widespread, the present official attitude towards neighbouring Malaysia would have been impossible.

Even so, the question of leadership has played a vital part.

Here the contrast has been most striking. In Malaysia the leaders, while by no means always silent on the short-comings of former régimes, have generally tempered their pronouncements with moderation and reasonableness; in Indonesia it has unfortunately been the reverse.

A nation's leader may at times serve simply as the mouthpiece of his people; on other occasions it may prove necessary for him to work up public sentiment. In this instance, despite the existence of the above feeling, and though many factors were involved—the size and influence of Indonesia's Communist party, for instance, was the major one—there can be no doubt that the particular sentiment of hatred for Malaysia required some working up.

None of the Malaysian territories had formerly been Dutch—at least not within recent times. Genuine popular feeling in Indonesia was in fact much stronger in the initial stages over the issue of West Irian, when the same word 'confrontation' was used in the dispute with Holland. Since the territory of West Irian had once formed part of the Dutch Empire its inclusion in the Republic was at least a logical demand. But in the 'Crush Malaysia' policy there was no such logic. Despite every effort of Malaya and Britain to ensure that the federation might be brought into being with the sympathy and support of its neighbours, including a 'summit' conference which Dr. Soekarno attended, verbal opposition increased, issuing eventually in active interference. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this second attempt at 'confrontation' was fundamentally a propaganda move—designed to divert the

attention of Indonesia's masses from the very grave social and economic problems which confront their own country. And the machinery of propaganda was, and still is, powerful and highly organised. If propaganda alone could have broken up Malaysia, here was the instrument with which to do it.

The situation resolved itself however into a struggle in which Indonesia was all the time the aggressor: infiltration and guerrilla warfare designed to spread uncertainty and alarm among the peoples who had, without the slightest doubt, entered freely into the new federation.

In this continuing struggle no area is more vital than Borneo. Until recently the quietest and remotest of lands, Borneo has become a focal point, an island of tension.

Between Indonesia and Malaysian Borneo the dividing line runs roughly from east to west right across the island, a land frontier of some seven hundred miles of mountainous jungle. In places the border is no great distance from the Equator. The great mountain ranges dominate most of the country, in Kalimantan as in Eastern Malaysia; though high open tablelands rise above the low-lying and often swampy coasts. From the central massif run a number of vast rivers, spreading out to the east, west and south. Such are the Kutei or Malakan River which flows down to the Strait of Macassar; the Kapuas which flows towards Pontianak, and the mighty Barito which leads down to Banjermassin and the Java Sea—rivers even longer than Sarawak's Rejang and Sabah's Kinabatangan.

With a mere four million people in a total area of over 200,000 square miles, Indonesian Borneo is very sparsely populated. Compare this with Java which has a population of sixty-three million in an area of only 50,554 square miles.

Java and Sumatra have in the past supplied a few immigrants into southern Borneo. Traces of ancient Hindu settlements have been found there, as in the more populous islands; but in general its early history is as obscure as that of the north.

Banjermassin has for long been the principal town. Like Brunei, of which it is something of a counterpart, Banjermassin is the traditional capital of a sultanate which retained its independence till 1857. A British 'factory' was established here in 1706 but was closed down through Dutch influence about twenty-five years later. During the remainder of the eighteenth century, after the British had left, neither nation had much contact with any part of Borneo. It was not until the coming of Stamford Raffles to Java, when the Sultan of Banjermassin invited him to send across a representative, that relationships were renewed. Raffles sent a commissioner-cum-resident who stayed on the island up to 1816, the year when the Dutch returned and Kalimantan finally became incorporated into the Dutch East Indies.

Thus Borneo has never been a political unity. Most of its varied and sparsely-spread inhabitants are still in a primitive stage of development, no more aware of living on and sharing an island than, say, the Aborigines of central Australia. The land is too vast, the horizons too limited. In the south as in the north, the unit of the tribes is still the village with its surrounding hills and particular local river. Apart from some development at certain points on the coast—the oilfields particularly—Kalimantan remains one of the world's great underdeveloped, under-populated territories.

We can now look a little more closely at the situation as it affects the State of Sabah.

In the first place, no frontier could be more difficult to patrol than the long chain of steep jungle-clad ridges which separates the country from Indonesian Borneo. In the upper waters of the River Padas, almost on Latitude four north, is a point where three countries meet: Sabah, Sarawak and Kalimantan. From this point the border hills continue eastwards in an irregular line right across to the island of Sebatik and the Celebes Sea. Even as late as 1959 the maps were not

quite accurate in regard to this extreme south-western corner of North Borneo, and in that year more accurate mapping showed the boundary to follow the contours of a range of hills near the Padas headwaters. The change of position—apparently reducing by about twenty miles a small wedge of territory jutting into Indonesia—made it clear at last that the whole of North Borneo lay to the north of the fourth parallel. Such a remote border is obviously ideal for infiltration and terrorism.

Indonesia did not however wish the world to think that she had wantonly violated the borders of a neighbouring state. The picture had to be presented in an entirely different light. Propaganda asserted that spontaneous guerrilla forces sprang up in Sabah as the result of popular opposition to the idea of joining Malaysia; the Indonesian role was merely to offer moral support for such a movement and training and supplies to dissentients who cared to cross the frontier.

This was the picture as the Indonesian leaders had hoped that it might be. Indeed, they had more than hoped, for numerous efforts were made to create a ' resistance movement ' from within when the country was still the Colony of North Borneo.

In January 1962 an Indonesian Consulate was opened in Jesselton—with an unusually large staff for the size of the population in which it was to function. It at once set out to secure control over the Indonesian community, the major part of which lives in the Tawau area. Once the proposals for Malaysia had been put forward as a practical proposition subversive activities increased. Military training facilities, it was whispered, were available in Pontianak and Djakarta. Weapons could be supplied to recruits to support an Indonesian-instigated uprising against ' neo-colonialism '.

By July 1963 the North Borneo Government was sufficiently aware of the potential danger to expel two leading members

of the Consulate and in September, when Malaysia came into being and Indonesia refused to recognise the new federation, it was closed down.

On what could the Indonesian leaders base their hopes of a successful uprising in Sabah? The only possible reason, surely, for imagining that there might be some dissatisfaction lay in the sudden revolt in Brunei under Azahari in December 1962. This was designed to bring about the state of *Kalimantan Utara*, or Northern Borneo (the name habitually used by Indonesia for Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei). But the Brunei affair proved to be nothing but an abortive *coup*; it completely failed to spread, and as far as Sabah was concerned there is no evidence of popular sympathy. The following year the United Nations Mission declared that free elections had been held in both the former British Borneo territories resulting in large majorities in favour of Malaysia.

Not surprisingly, when Indonesia attempted to persuade a number of Sabah's indigenous people to go south for military training the suggestion fell on deaf ears. Not a single indigenous person responded. It is true that some subversive, Communist-inspired activity among the Chinese in Sarawak has met with more success. But Sabah has remained obstinately unresponsive to the attractions of a *Kalimantan Utara*. The population could not be subverted to an anti-Malaysian attitude; they refuse to be trained as guerrillas; and they refused to commit acts of sabotage.

Confrontation, then, had perforce to be carried out by the Indonesians themselves.

Shortly after Malaysia had come into being there began a series of border incidents. From Long Pa Sia, five miles on the Sabah side, reports began to come in of villagers being harrassed and of damage done to their crops. This area is in the extreme south-west corner of the country, near the wedge of territory which juts down into Indonesia. The object of

the operation, small in itself, was to create uncertainty and alarm in a remote and sparsely-inhabited district.

Should Indonesia be rash enough to launch a large-scale invasion of her neighbour, this would be a vulnerable point and the town of Tenom, fifty miles from the border as the crow flies—though one must always remember the jungle ridges—would be a likely target. From Tenom, as we have seen, a railway leads through the Padas Gorge to Beaufort; while from Beaufort another fifty-six miles of line leads to the capital.

Beaufort—set amid knobbly green hills and rubber plantations, its low-lying streets subject to periodic floods—has had some experience of invasion. One day in January 1942 a telephone call came through from the dismal little port of Weston, sixteen miles away on the Bay of Brunei and linked with Beaufort by a single-line metre-gauge railway. The voice of the Japanese commander announced to an astonished station master that he had landed and he demanded a train for his troops! The station master resolutely refused to oblige. Resistance however was utterly impossible and for nearly four years Beaufort found itself occupied. When finally the Allied forces landed, a good deal of fierce fighting took place round the town before the Japanese surrendered.

Another very vulnerable point along the border is the valley of the Lagungan River, some forty miles east of Long Pa Sia. For here, where the river—fed by streams rising in the Maitland and Witti Ranges—flows through into Indonesia, is the most appreciable gap in the whole chain of mountains. Pensiangan, which is actually on a tributary of the Lagungan, is about ten miles inside the border; and here again, villagers have been attacked and crops damaged.

From Pensiangan the bridle path leads northwards through Sook and thence to Keningau and the rich upland plains of Sabah's west coast. In all this area, tough though the border

country is, there are countless possibilities for infiltration and for the build-up of forces in the hills.

But the most sensitive point of all, and the one which up to the time of writing has suffered the most frequent attacks, is right across on the east coast. Here the hills merge at last into the tangled mangrove swamps of a vast delta round the mouths of the rivers Serudong, Kalabakan and a smaller river which flows between them, the Silimpopon. Beginning in October 1963 a whole series of attacks has occurred in this south-eastern corner of Sabah.

To take one or two examples only. A Chinese shop was raided at Sungei Serudong on 21 December 1963 by armed uniformed Indonesians—who said, incidentally, that they were Azahari's men. A few days after Christmas a more serious attack was launched on Malaysian Security Forces and police posts at Kalabakan. There were casualties, and desultory warfare continued in the region from that time onwards. In this case certain villagers were later evacuated by the Sabah Government and re-settled in the northern (Malaysian) half of Sebatik Island.

The boundary, as it reaches this delta area, follows a *trusan,* or narrow waterway, between the islands and finishes up at Sebatik Island which it cuts neatly into two.

Across the narrow mouth of Cowie Harbour lies the important town of Tawau. Much of the northern sector of Sebatik Island has for long formed part of the Tawau Forest Reserve and is a valuable timber district. I have often stood on the high ground beyond Tawau and looked across the blue strait to the island and the Indonesian mainland. To the nearest point on Sebatik the distance is barely three miles; to the nearest point in Indonesian territory barely five miles.

Nowhere in the country has there been a greater concentration of labour from Indonesia than in this district where, up to the time of the Emergency, good wages at Tawau attracted

many workers, both on a contract basis and as permanent residents. This movement of labour has of course stopped, but politically the Tawau Indonesians have proved remarkably passive and it is significant that according to figures recently released by the Sabah Government, of 323 persons who up to the end of 1964 had applied for Malaysian citizenship 212 were Indonesians.

No roads connect Tawau with any other centre at present; such roads as it possesses lead out a few miles only to estates and various development projects. Cocoa, rubber, sisal, copra and timber are all exported in considerable quantities from this flourishing port. But access is possible only by sea or air.

Numerous small parties attempting to land in *kumpits*—the local type of boat, powered by outboard engine—have from time to time been intercepted and captured in this area. The evidence of these prisoners has thrown much light on Indonesian confrontation as a whole. Some have proved to be 'volunteers' recruited in the much-publicised drive all over Indonesia, launched in March 1964, to 'Crush Malaysia'.

Of the twenty-one million said to have responded (a liberal estimate has been given of two million actually registered—even allowing for the *en bloc* registration of whole villages and organisations) some were definitely press-ganged into service, others joined to escape imprisonment, unemployment, starvation or reprisals against their families, whilst others again were tempted by promises of jobs and land in Sabah and Sarawak once these states had been taken over.

Indonesia has now, however, dropped the pretence that all the border guerrillas were volunteers and has admitted—as the evidence of prisoners has shown—that each *pramuka,* or mobile unit, has been strengthened by a core of regular officers and troops. Indonesian naval forces have also been considerably involved. The southern part of Sebatik Island is a training base for guerrilla activities.

There can be no doubt therefore that Tawau is a danger spot for Sabah. A full-scale invasion by sea would, if successful, not only cut off the town but the whole of the peninsula as far as Darvel Bay. It might conceivably extend as far as Sandakan harbour, thus isolating the even larger peninsula which lies almost due north. An operation of this kind would presumably at once involve the Philipines.

Like Indonesia, the Philipines have been vociferous in their opposition to the formation of Malaysia. But at the same time the Government is mistrustful of Indonesian agression in north-eastern Borneo and the position is further complicated by a claim which the Philippines have been putting forward to this portion of the country. It goes back to the days of the sultans of Sulu—and fortunately for Malaysia has no real legal basis.

The north-eastern corner of Borneo was ruled—more or less nominally—by the sultans of Sulu up to the time of its cession to Baron Overbeck, and subsequently to the Chartered Company, for an annual payment of 5,000 dollars. The sultanate is now defunct but a number of heirs still receive moneys in respect of this settlement made nearly ninety years ago.

The Philippine claim is based on the notion that the last sultan, who at that time was fighting the Spaniards, did not cede but only leased the territory. The matter was actually brought before the United Nations Assembly by the Philippine Government in 1962. But the original document signed by the Sultan of Sulu, which has fortunately been preserved, states specifically that he *granted* and *ceded* of his own free will and on behalf of his heirs and successors *in perpetuity* to Baron Overbeck, Alfred Dent and their " heirs, associates, successors and assigns " all the rights and powers belonging to him in respect of the territories and lands tributary to him on the mainland of the island of Borneo. Sabah's sovereignty, and hence Malaysian sovereignty in this area, thus rests on an im-

peccable legal basis—neither the Spanish nor the American Governments when in control of the Philippine Islands ever questioned the position of North Borneo.

Such claims are nevertheless an indication of the kind of pressure, quite apart from the Indonesian aggression, to which the small state of Sabah is subject. Any forecast of the future pattern of this region of South-East Asia must be hazardous. But two things do seem reasonably certain. First, any wholesale reshaping such as the proposed 'Maphilindo' (to comprise Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Brunei) is unlikely at present; indeed the atmosphere is such that a federation on these lines would be an absolute impossibility, and the Sultan of Brunei, whose country does not at the moment form part of Malaysia, has revealed that he flatly rejects the idea. The second point is the vital importance of Malaysian Borneo. The protection of Malaysia, as Earl Mountbatten has declared, is the most urgent and demanding of British responsibilities east of Suez; it is also of course of the gravest concern to countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

When towards the end of 1964 the people of Sabah were preparing to launch their new Six Year Development Plan—a comprehensive scheme of economic and social devolopment for their country—President Soekarno chose to announce his astonishing threat that by cockcrow on 1 January 1965 ('God willing') Malaysia would be 'crushed'. It must have caused many moments of sickening anxiety.

That the threat completely failed to materialise is no guarantee that aggression will not be sustained and intensified in the future. Malaysia requires time to survive.* When once a senseless and wasteful policy has been adopted, the all important face-saving formula by which it can be brought to an

* How far the withdrawal of Singapore from the Federation on 9th August 1965 (as this book was going to press) will affect the issue remains, of course, to be seen.

end round the conference table is not easily found. But certainly no country longs more than Sabah for the day when peace will descend again on its border hills and confrontation become a memory only.

Perhaps I cannot do better than quote some words from the 1965 New Year's Message broadcast by H.M. the Yang di-Pertuan Agong:

"Malaysia has won friendship and support. We have made it clear on countless occasions that all we desire is to live in peace in this world, especially with our neighbours, but we cannot remain inactive or indifferent when our very existence is being challenged. Is it then too much to expect that Indonesia will realise that a policy of live-and-let-live, a policy of peace and goodwill towards neighbours, will be far more beneficial to the future of South-East Asia? Only time will tell."

GLOSSARY OF NATIVE WORDS

Adat	Custom, tradition
Agayoh Ngaran	Big Name, i.e., Mount Kinabalu
Attap	Fibre, palm-thatch
Bassah	Blood-money
Berian or *brian*	Bridegroom's payment on marriage
Berongsai	Bajau dance
Bilang	Speak, spoken
Bisagit	The Spirit of Smallpox
Bongon	Carrying-basket
Changkil	Chinese hoe
Chawat	Loin-cloth
Damar	Jungle resin
Dapang	Sailing craft
Dindang	Murut dance
Durian	Fruit with unpleasant-smelling skin
Gusi	Type of ancient jar venerated by Dusuns
Haji	One who has been to Mecca
Idaan	Village
Kampong	Village
Kendilong	Jungle tree
Kerbau	Water-buffalo
Kinarangan	The Great Spirit
Koi!	Head-hunting cry
Kris	Malay sword
Lagundi	Mythical tree
Langsat	Small, slightly bitter fruit
Lipa Lipa	Sailing craft
Menghaji	Religious ceremony

Munsumundok	Wife of Kinarangan
Nipah	Type of salt-water palm
Pagar	Fishing-trap
Panglima	Chief
Pantun	Traditional Malay song
Parang	Knife
Penigran	Malay or Bajau chief
Piasau	Coconut
Pomelo	Fruit similar to a grapefruit
Rambutan	Small red fruit with hairy skin
Rattan	Type of bamboo used for many purposes
Rundum	Name of village ('cheerless')
Sarong	Garment, rather like a skirt
Saroung	Woven hat
Sasandangon	Red band worn at Kadazan dance
Serip or *Sharif*	Moslem leader claiming descent from the Prophet
Silad	Grass formerly used in connection with heads
Sireh	Wild pepper plant
Songkok	Malay cap
Sudah	Bamboo stakes set in ground for defence
Sulap	A shelter
Sumazau	Kadazan dance
Sumpitan	Blowpipe
Sumunggup	Ceremony of spearing a slave to death
Tamu	Native market
Tapai	Rice-wine
Tarap	A kind of bread-fruit
Tatengah	Central passage of a Murut house
Tulun Tindal	A landsman
Ubat	Medicine
Ubi Kayu	Tapioca root
Upas	Poison

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