Believers called to prayer at a mosque will wash their hands and feet in the pool before entering.

THIS BEAUTIFUL WORLD VOL. 52

MALAYSIA

HARALD PETTELKAY

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Shadow puppet photos by Ryō Matsumoto

Kuala Lumpur

I HAD COME to Malaysia, I think, mainly with the idea of just relaxing, of lolling indolently in the glorious Malaysian sunshine and dreaming dreams about lush green jungles and daring pirates in the South China Sea. Yet here I sat, not in the sun but in the back seat of a careening taxi wedged between two fairly corpulent Sikhs, one of whom spoke English rather well but with an unmistakably Indian lilt and a lot of questions on his mind. Once, however, I had supplied as many answers as I could —about where I had come from and where I was going and why and how and when—a contented silence prevailed while the cab raced frantically down the road toward Kuala Lumpur.

Our driver, obviously, was determined to reach the city before sundown—and we did just that, and all in one piece too, though several times I shut my eyes wondering if I was ever going to open them again. I soon discovered that my frenzied taxi ride was fairly exceptional in the Malaysian scheme of things: as a general rule, hustle and bustle are not merely frowned upon, they are virtually unknown; and lolling indolently is considered a suitable occupation for any man.

Despite half a million inhabitants, Kuala Lumpur seems to suffer very little from those unpleasant neurotic symptoms that the pressure of life in a contemporary metropolis usually produces

in its population. The largest city in Malaysia, and the capital as well, Kuala Lumpur celebrated its hundredth birthday only very recently. It was in 1857 that a small fleet of boats carrying eighty-seven adventurous miners sailed up the Klang river seeking deposits of tin to be exploited. The expedition was the brainchild of an impoverished sultan named Mohammed, who had persuaded some Chinese businessmen to finance the venture and who hoped thereby to make enough out of it not only to pay off his depts but also to enable him to live in the manner to which sultans are, or would like to be, accustomed. I do not know whether Mohammed was eventually able to buy himself a new set of wives or whatever his sultanic soul hankered after, but I do know that at the junction of the Klang and Gombak rivers the miners unloaded their supplies and began their prospecting, thus incidentally founding the city of Kuala Lumpur; and I also know that tin is now one of the two chief sources of Malaysia's wealth. The other is rubber; both are in demand on the world's markets, and the price of both, of course, rises daily.

When Mohammed's expedition set out, most of the peninsula was governed by sovereign rulers. But the British commercial and administrative machine was already present in the island of Penang, in Province Wellesley (a strip of land opposite Penang), in Malacca (obtained from the Dutch, who in turn had replaced the Portuguese), and in Singapore—the key port to the south. Within twenty years a British "resident"—in theory an adviser, in practice often a ruler—was in Kuala Lumpur; and by World War I the country was either under direct British rule or at least subject to its protection.

With the outbreak of World War II, Malaya fell to the Japanese, and, after the war, reverted—not without problems—to British rule. When the independent constitutional monarchy of Malaysia was founded in 1963—the eleven states of Malaya

uniting with Singapore, Sarawak, and Sabah (formerly North Borneo)—the land looked forward to a period of relative tranquillity. But trouble came; within two years Singapore withdrew, and remains a separate state; ethnic jealousy led to periodic eruptions; and there was the confrontation with Indonesia. But recently the united country has enjoyed a rare degree of peace, stability, and prosperity under a duly elected government headed by a prime minister as well as a constitutional monarch chosen by the rulers of the thirteen states. It welcomes visitors (including, of course, foreign investors) and does its level best to make them feel very much at home. As I soon learned, Malaysian hospitality leaves absolutely nothing to be desired.

The lush tropical peninsula, with its gentle highlands, has been a scene of intense activity for many thousands of years, folk migrations drifting not only up and down but also out across the seemingly boundless South Pacific to remote green islands and coral atolls. The race that has been longest in the peninsula is the pygmy Negrito, but later Mongoloid immigrants speaking Malayo-Polynesian languages came, spread their neolithic culture, and set the pattern for a succession of newcomers. In a land as rich as this, it was inevitable that traders (Chinese and Arab and European) would arrive, as well as unskilled labor (mainly Indian) to work the tin mines and the rubber plantations.

Today, it has been estimated, Malayans constitute some forty percent of the population, Chinese about thirty-eight percent, native Borneans perhaps seven percent, and mainly Indians the rest, with a generous sprinkling of other Orientals as well as Westerners. The present capital of all these abundant green states, with their varied ethnic groups, is the comparatively new city of Kuala Lumpur—or K.L., as just about everybody calls it. (And unlike La Ciudad de Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles, or L.A., no one seems to resent the informality.)

The tip of land at the confluence of the Klang and Gombak rivers was once an ancient Malay burial ground; now on its site stands what many consider to be the city's loveliest mosque, the Masjid Jame. Situated in the very heart of the capital, its cool serenity provides a happy refuge from the active street life that surrounds it.

Just across the muddy Klang is a spacious parking lot, where in late afternoon, once most of the cars have left, food stalls move in. K.L.'s modest "rush hour" having subsided, the stalls open up for business, one after the other; cooks with their numerous assistants prepare the most exotic delicacies; and the scent of just about every spice imaginable suffuses the entire neighborhood. Many a time I have sat there at sundown, slowly savoring something strange and wonderful, and listened to the muezzin calling the faithful to the final prayer of the day. After the Jame's muezzin ceases, the call is taken up by another muezzin in another mosque, farther off, and then the sound rises from yet another mosque, more distant still, until the whole city seems to echo with the call to prayer. Since independence, Islam has been the state religion of Malaysia.

The small stalls sell not only food but many other necessities of life and abound throughout the city and indeed throughout the whole country. They spring up like mushrooms at roadsides and bus stops and are often run by entire families, each taking his turn so that no single member of the family has to work too hard. I remember a tiny stall in one of the narrow lanes off Jalan Sultan (*jalan* is Malay for "road" or "street") whose manager, at the time I passed it, was a young girl. The happy possessor of a rare infectious smile that made everyone smile back at her, she purveyed nothing but fried bananas! Next door was a pancake vendor who claimed that Britain's Prince Philip, when he was a young officer, came there regularly. To substantiate his boast,

the vendor showed me a faded scrap of paper bearing some quite indecipherable scrawl.

I suppose by far the densest accumulation of food stalls, shoe stores, electrical appliance shops, dispensers of Oriental medicines, along with just about anything else that can be used, worn, or otherwise consumed, lies along Jalan Petaling. It is a true paradise for the curious, and one I delighted in exploring. Making my way toward a food stall I particularly favored, one that specialized in variously prepared chicken, I passed a woman elegantly clad in a *cheong-sam* shouting something incomprehensible in what I assumed to be Chinese, then a pair of Indians arguing volubly—and also incomprehensibly, at least to me—over the mysterious contents of a large, shabby paper bag. Stray dogs chased each other harmlessly through the slow-moving traffic.

After I had sat down at my favorite chicken stall, which was really quite a modest establishment, I noticed two very well dressed gentlemen, clearly men of affairs, engaged in what seemed to be an extremely important discussion. Idly, as I awaited my soup, I wondered what had brought them here, since the surrounding noise, as so often in the East, was of such shrill intensity as to make discussion seem impossible. From a music shop across the street boomed the Rolling Stones—a single record apparently, for the moment it ended it began again. And judging by the cacophony that issued from the kitchen behind me, I imagined there must be at least a dozen cooks in the hot little room wrangling over the question of what spices to use. If so, I decided—after my fragrant soup finally made its appearance—too many cooks, in Malaysia at least, needn't spoil the broth.

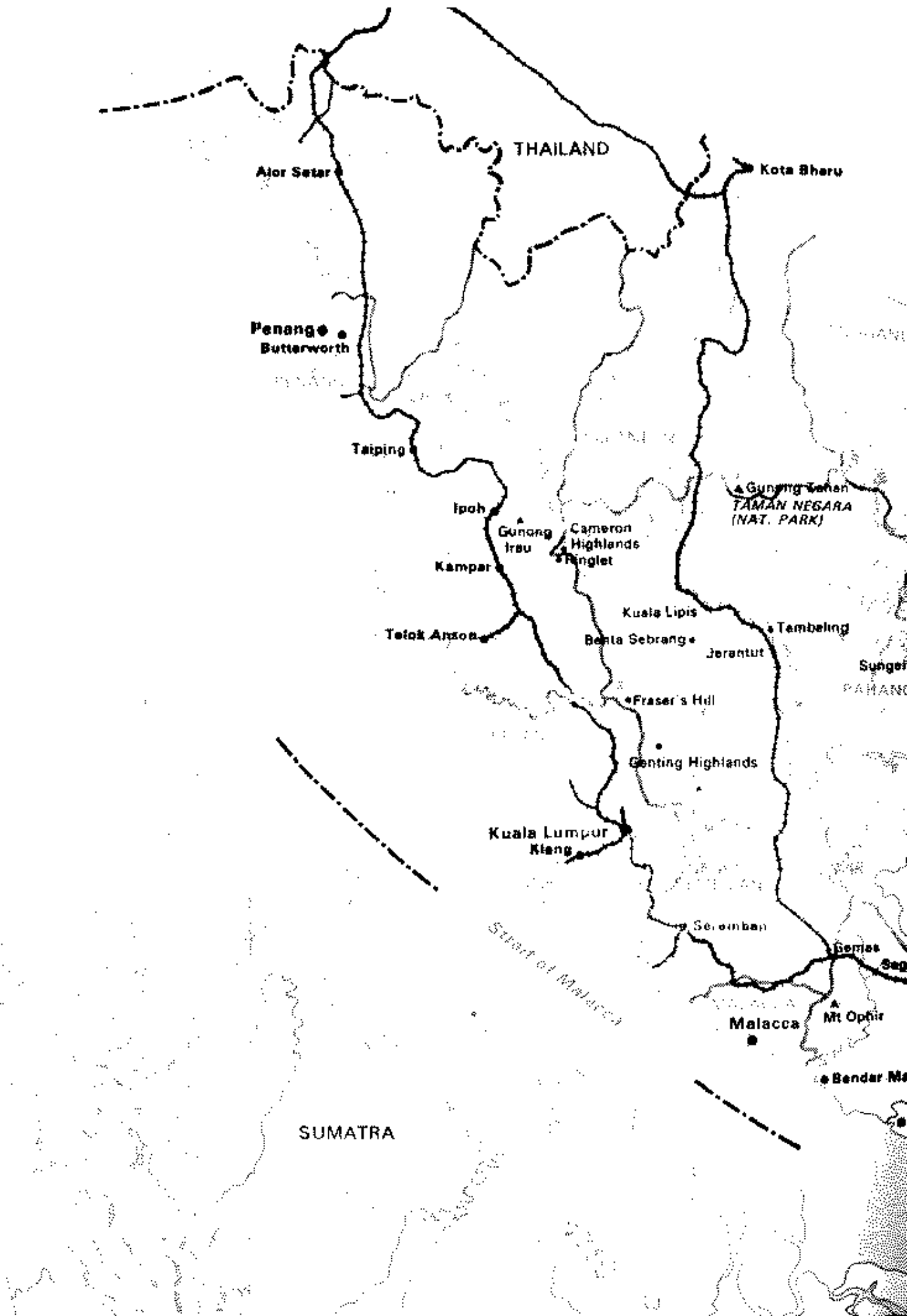
With nightfall, the traffic in Jalan Petaling vanishes, and in its place rise still more stalls, row after row of them. Pale gas lanterns weirdly illuminate glass cases in which cheap wristwatches and

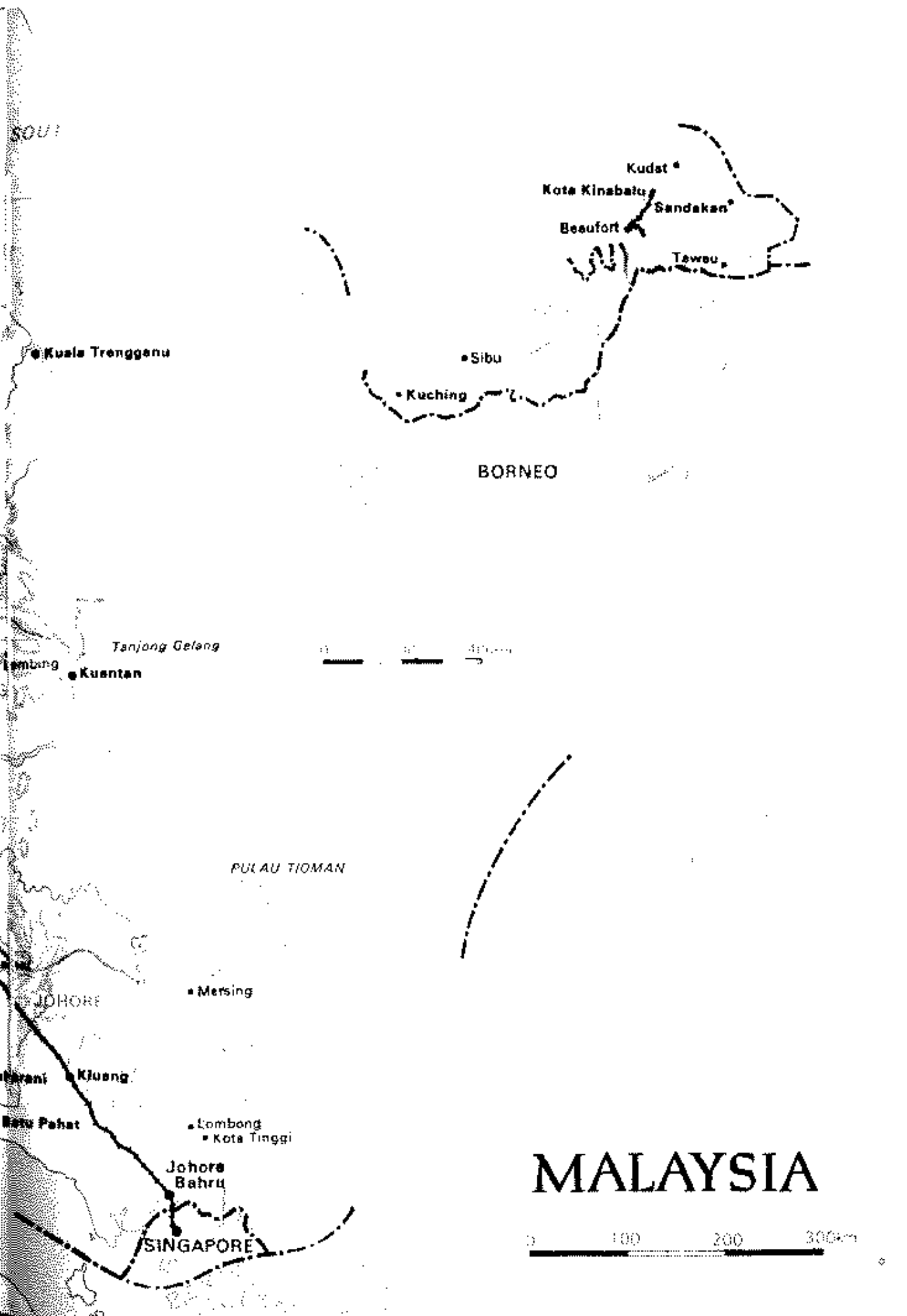
gimcrack jewelry sparkle obsessively. If the visitor stops to peer at something, he is immediately informed in wheedling tones, "For *you*, sir, we can reduce the price!" And as he wanders on, he wonders at the irony behind the words. At the same time, one who knows the arts and crafts of the East can, if he is diligent, unearth great and rare treasures there at bargain prices. Another place to bargain-hunt and eat is the Sunday Market—which takes place, with typical Malaysian insouciance, on Saturday night.

The other side of the Klang reveals an altogether different aspect of Kuala Lumpur, for here stand many of the federal and municipal government buildings, some of them of a flamboyantly arabesque character reminiscent of Scheherezade and the *Arabian Nights*. Here are the Supreme Court, the Federal Secretariat, the imposing City Hall, the very fine National Museum, and many others. A little further on rises a huge marble structure of great beauty, the National Mosque (Masjid Negara). When its foundation stone was laid in 1960, few could have foreseen so awesome and splendid a result. The polished tiles and the pools of water reflect the ornamental marble, while the splashing of the water adds a kind of constant rhythmic background. Here in this magic world, visitors seem like wraiths flickering among the rows of tall columns, disappearing behind the richly ornamented partitions that divide various parts of the mosque from the main hall, where prayers are chanted.

On national holidays visitors come here from all over the country to pay homage to the God of Mohammed, and one might see a group of schoolchildren from a remote village praying alongside the sultan of some other state, accompanied by his retinue. The white marble glows, the fountains dance, the tiles and the pools glitter in the sparkling light, and the voice of the muezzin is heard from atop the minaret that soars nearly two hundred and fifty feet into the sky.

And on national holidays and other important festivals the streets around the mosque are the scene of parades and floats and bands and marching, flag-waving children. The band plays the national anthem; the children try to compete with the musicians by humming the tune as loudly as they can; then many of the spectators begin to sing—and one realizes that the Malays, the Chinese, the Indians, and the others are all loyal citizens of Malaysia. Their animosity has hopefully been forgotten in their new national identity. The symbols of it, the white, blue, and red flags, flutter gently in the late afternoon breeze.


THAILAND
Alor Setar
Kota Bharu
Penang
Butterworth
Taiping
Ipoh
Gunong Irau
Cameron Highlands
Ringlet
Kampar
Gunong Tahan
TAMAN NEGARA (NAT. PARK)
Kuala Lipis
Tembeling
Telok Anson
Benta Sebrang
Jerantut
Fraser's Hill
Genting Highlands
Kuala Lumpur
Klang
Seremban
Strait of Malacca
Gemas
Mt Ophir
Malacca
SUMATRA


Kudat
Kota Kinabalu
Sandakan
Beaufort
Tawau
Kuala Trengganu
Sibu
Kuching
BORNEO
Tanjong Gelang
Kuantan
PULAU TIOMAN
Mersing
JOHORE
Kluang
Batu Pahat
Lombong
Kota Tinggi
Johore Bahru
SINGAPORE
MALAYSIA
100
200

The Singapore Express

Then came the day when I realized I had been so fascinated by K.L. and the many wondrous sights roundabout—gardens and zoos and caves and pleasant little villages—that I had quite forgotten my lolling project. I decided to head south to Johore Bahru. So I took a spur of what is sometimes known as the "Singapore Express," although it is not really an express and there is no better reason to call it the "Singapore Express" than to call it the "Bangkok Express" since it does actually ply, three times a week, between those two great cities, traversing dense jungle and rubber plantations, mountains and plains. It is also, somewhat more accurately, known as the "International Express." Running the entire length of the peninsula, it was considered one of the wonders of the world when it was finally completed—and in my opinion it still is.

My plan was to stop first at Segamat, about halfway between K.L. and Singapore, where I had been invited to stay with a friend. I was looking forward to another brief visit, for I had been there before. K.L.'s railway station looks not unlike a mosque itself, with glowing white towers resembling minarets; visitors are invariably surprised to discover that it is actually a rail terminus, not a place of worship. The building was constructed during the time of the British administration, and the

story goes that the plans, drawn up by a local architect, were at first disapproved in London because inspectors discovered that the roof would not sustain three feet of snow!

Be that as it may, the station, when I arrived toward sundown, seemed quite deserted, so I figured there would be no problem about seats. I took my time buying my third-class ticket and even hesitated for a while about disturbing the somnolent young lady who was in charge of the kiosk where I wanted to get a weekly news magazine. Finally, however, feeling rather guilty, I made my purchase, then boarded the train to find—to my surprise—that it was so crowded there seemed to be not one third-class seat vacant. I took temporary refuge in a first-class compartment, delighting, as we chugged southward, in the early-evening views of jungle and plantation. Soon a conductor appeared, and after I had explained my problem to him, he was very friendly and helpful in finding me a seat in the class to which I was legally entitled.

Opposite me sat a young Indian, perhaps a student on a visit to his family in the country, and an elderly Malay couple. The woman wore the colorful and charming *kebaya laboh*, traditional Malay dress, while her husband made do with an ordinary Western-style shirt and a pair of dark gray trousers. Beside me slept a little boy aged (as I discovered later) four, while his very attractive young mother, on his other side, peered dreamily out of the window. Her dress was a brightly hued *baju kebaya*; so we made, I thought, rather a colorful little group. As the evening deepened, I could see the reflections of my companions' faces in the windows. I was quite sorry when at Seremban, a third of the way to Segamat, the young Indian and the elderly Malay couple all abandoned us.

I started to read my magazine but suddenly became aware that I was hungry. Happily, the train boasted a dining car, and the

young mother very kindly offered to keep an eye on my luggage while I was away. The dining car was very nearly empty, and the only dish being served at that hour was bacon and eggs, so I was not away very long. Returning to my seat, I was soon deep in conversation with the young lady.

She lived in Singapore and was returning from a visit to the northeast, where her brother kept a shop. She was, she told me, bringing back a number of batik sarongs to give as presents to relatives and friends in Singapore. It turned out that she was quite an authority on the subject, and she explained the difference between Javanese and Kelantan batiks, in preparation, use of color, and design. The most beautiful of all, in her opinion, was the sarong called *kain benang emas*, or the cloth-of-gold sarong. Complicated to make and expensive, it is worn only on very special occasions.

Then, with an impulsive gesture, she dug into her collection and brought out a very handsome Javanese-type sarong and presented it to me. Of course I refused, but she insisted, saying that its colors—dark green foliage on a glowing ocher background—would go wonderfully well with my blond hair. I felt much embarrassed at accepting so splendid a gift from a complete stranger, particularly since I had nothing to offer her in return. But she continued to insist, so finally, and with some diffidence, I promised to send her a copy of this book.

So interested had I been in her batik lore that I was quite surprised to discover our train had stopped. We had reached Gemas, where trains from Kota Bharu, in the northeastern corner of Malaysia, connect with the International Express heading toward Singapore, so here we waited. The time was by then around midnight; the coach was silent save for a few subdued voices; then someone softly began to hum a Malaysian song. Outside, dim lights threw a lonely glow over the deserted gravel platform.

I started to feel restless and impatient at the delay, for we were only eighteen miles from Segamat.

At last the Kota Bharu train appeared, the connection was made, we continued on our way. Relieved at the thought of soon reaching my destination, I began to take my bags down from the luggage rack. To pass the time, I showed my new friend the cameras and various accessories I was carrying. And then at last we had arrived at Segamat. I waited on the platform so as to be able to wave good-bye to that young and attractive lady who had been so generous and who had transformed what might have been a long and boring ride into a fascinating journey. The few other passengers who had descended with me climbed into a car and drove away. Then the train picked up speed and disappeared into the night. Silence fell, and I stood for a moment alone on the platform, enjoying the warm, gentle, tropical night.

Then I started off on the twenty-minute walk toward my friend's house, and as I walked I thought about Segamat's strange birth some four hundred years ago. It seems that a certain Bendahara Tepok, a relative of the sultan of Malacca, realizing that the state was about to fall to the Portuguese, fled into the jungle with a group of followers. After a few days in the wilderness, he fell ill and decided to set up camp beside a river. Once he had bathed in its cool waters, he felt a great deal better, so he chucked a stone into the river, saying, "Only if that stone rises again will I return to Malacca." He called the place Segamat, which now, with a population of over ten thousand, is the second largest town in the state of Johore.

All the shops and stalls were by now closed, but I was surprised at how often I heard as I walked the clatter of mahjong tiles from second story windows. A group of young men crossed the street in front of me, talking at the tops of their voices, obviously caring not a fig if they happened to wake some sleeping towns-

folk. A mangy dog rummaging through a garbage can fled at my approach. A local movie house advertised an Indian film, a sugary and sentimental one from the looks of the posters. The two-storied mosque on my right was dark and quiet; the yellow crescent and star on the roof, illuminated (as I knew from previous visits) earlier in the evening, were no longer to be seen.

As I continued onward, the neighborhood grew more residential, more middle-class, and every house now had a watchdog, so a chorus of barks escorted me to my friend's house. It was a joy to arrive, for like many country houses of Malaysia this was an engagingly simple stone building with a small garden that offered refuge to as many wild flowers as cared to take root there. All the floors were of cool stone, and under the eaves was a row of carefully contrived, ornamental bricks for purposes of ventilation. Nature was inside the house too: on the high ceilings little house lizards poised waiting for foolhardy insects, birds flew through the openings under the eaves to pick up breadcrumbs or grains of rice that had fallen to the kitchen floor, and one morning there was a fine black cobra waiting in the kitchen. It had escaped, so everyone decided, from a nearby oil-palm estate, where the snakes are released as a means of controlling destructive rodents.

Oil palm, indeed, is one of the mainstays of the Johore economy, and as one continues on southward (which I did a few days later) one sees many such estates as well as rubber plantations and extensive pineapple groves. These are the riches of Johore.

The capital itself, Johore Bahru, connected by a rail and road causeway with Singapore, is not of great abiding fascination although it is pleasant enough for a short stay and offers a few buildings of interest. One is the Istana Besar, the Principal Palace of the Sultan, where the crown jewels and royal regalia of Johore are kept. Another appealing structure is the Abu Bakar Mosque.

The sultan's present residence is the grand Bukit Serene Palace.

Of greater interest is Kota Tinggi, an hour's drive away, the ancient capital of Johore and former burial ground of the Johore sultans. About ten miles north, at Lombong, are the popular Kota Tinggi waterfalls, with a lovely pool for bathing.

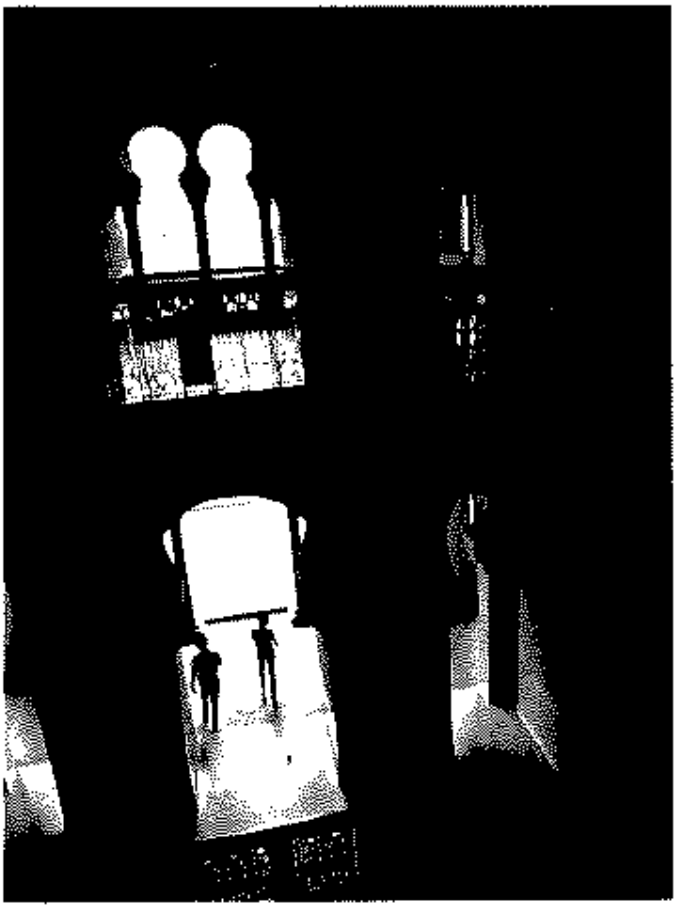
This was not, however, quite what I wanted for my lolling project, so I continued along the highway to Mersing, on the east coast, a small fishing village where time has virtually lost its meaning. There are a number of handsome beaches just out of town, but still more enticing are the offshore islands, and of these the most seductive is Pulau Tioman. Quiet, green, uncrowded, with white sandy beaches within a coral reef and extravagantly colorful underwater "gardens," it is probably as near paradise as a human sinner can get these days. It even boasts a reasonably tall mountain, Gunong Kajang, rising to a height of 3399 feet.

How did all this richness come about? Well, about a thousand years ago, or so, a lady dragon was making her way through the ocean to enter into the bonds of matrimony with a gentleman dragon who dwelt in the north. She was very eager for the consummation of the marriage, but abiding by dragon law she could travel only at night. Just before dawn, striding through the sea off what is now Mersing, she dropped an earring and her scarf. While she was searching for them in the darkness before daylight, the sun rose suddenly, and the lady dragon had to wait until nightfall to resume her nuptial journey. But by the time night fell, her feet had got trapped in the coral beneath the water and she was wholly immobilized. With the passing of time, earth covered her and so she became the island of Pulau Tioman.

I believe I could have searched very far and very wide and not found a better place for indolent lolling. Alas, the time came when I realized it could not go on forever: I had to continue my Malaysian voyage of discovery.

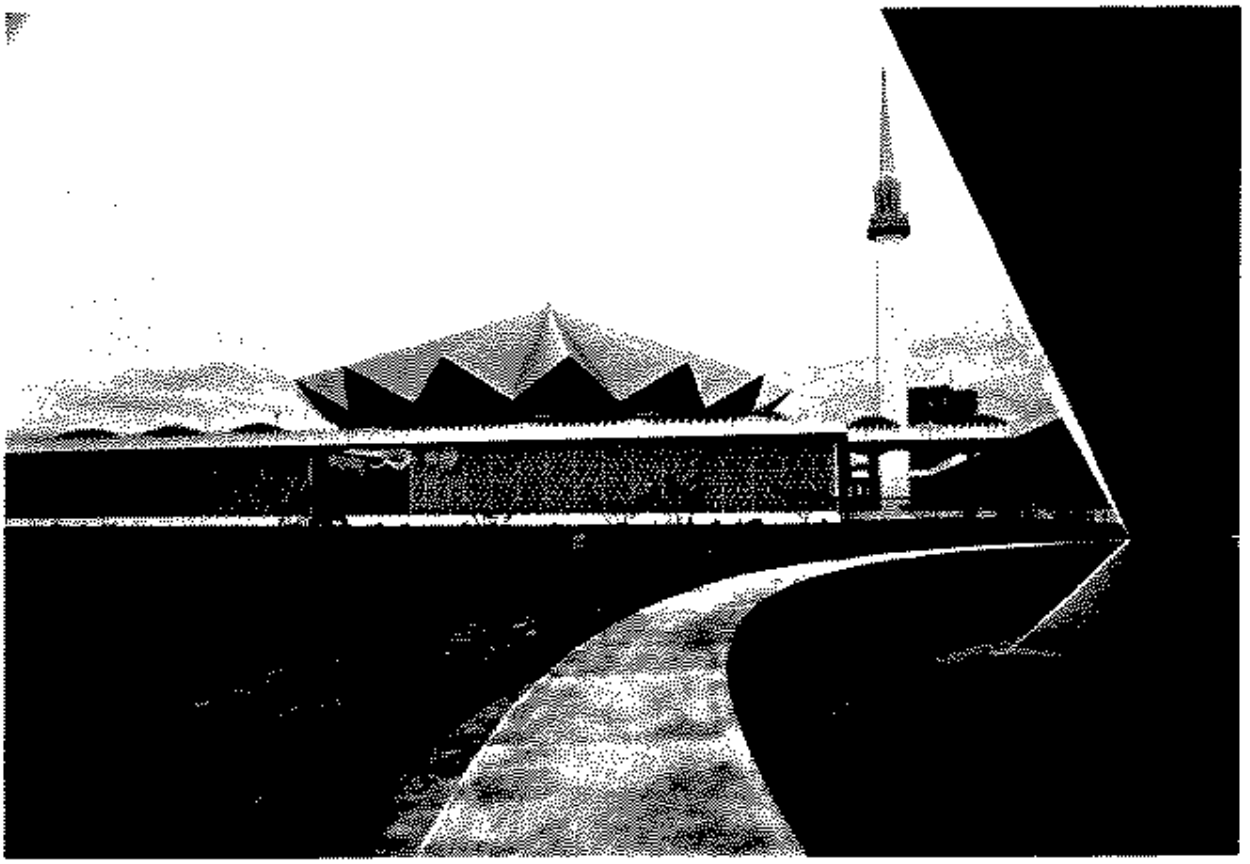
◁ 1. A Malay mother carefully tidies her little girl as the two prepare to enter a mosque, *preceding page*.

2–3. The faithful are called to prayer five times a day. Old Masjid Jame, *below*, is an oasis of silence in the busy heart of the capital. The state religion is Islam.



4. *Opposite*, Kuala Lumpur strikes the visitor as a handsome and prosperous modern city. The American International Building houses business as well as several diplomatic missions.

5-6. The saracenic foyers of the administrative offices of the national railway *left*; and *below*, the newly completed National Mosque.

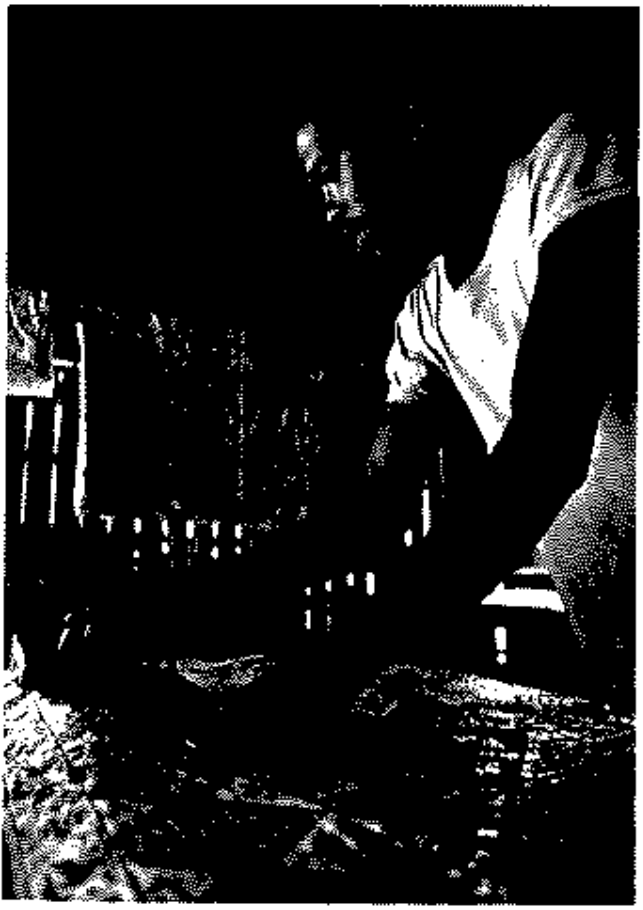


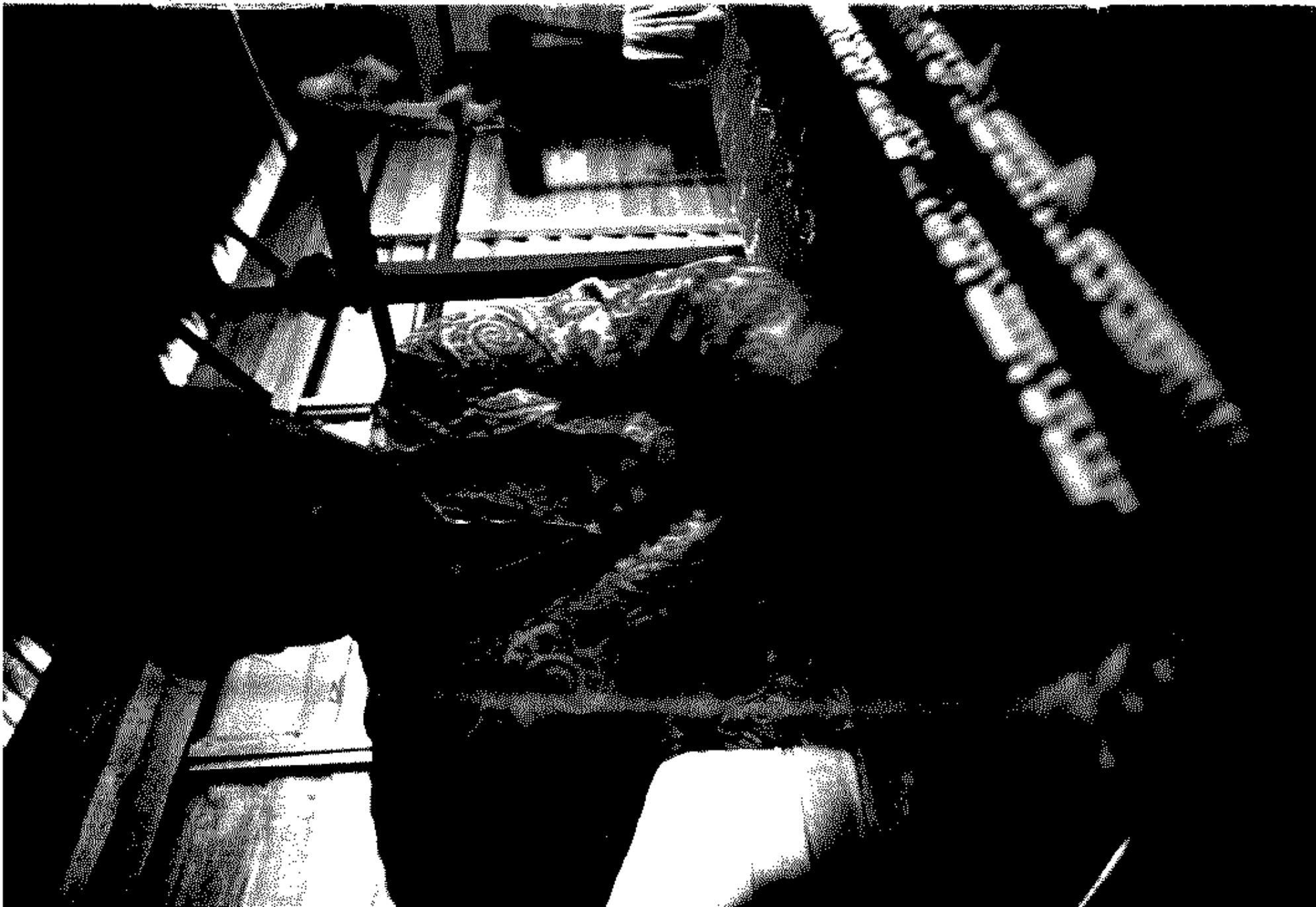
7–13. Malaysian faces. *Top row*: a worker on a rubber plantation; women shopping for fish brought from the seaside market; a snake charmer holding the highly venomous yellow-ring cat snake. *Bottom row*: an elderly man still clinging to British colonial dress; a beggar at a temple entrance (his watches do not work); a diner at a food stall. Succulent seafood is a specialty of many Malaysian restaurants.

14. The rubber tree is tapped very early in the morning, and the latex must be collected before the noonday heat. Rubber and tin are the mainstays of the national economy.

15. The smith is a familiar sight in Malaysia, where old-fashioned carts are still in use.

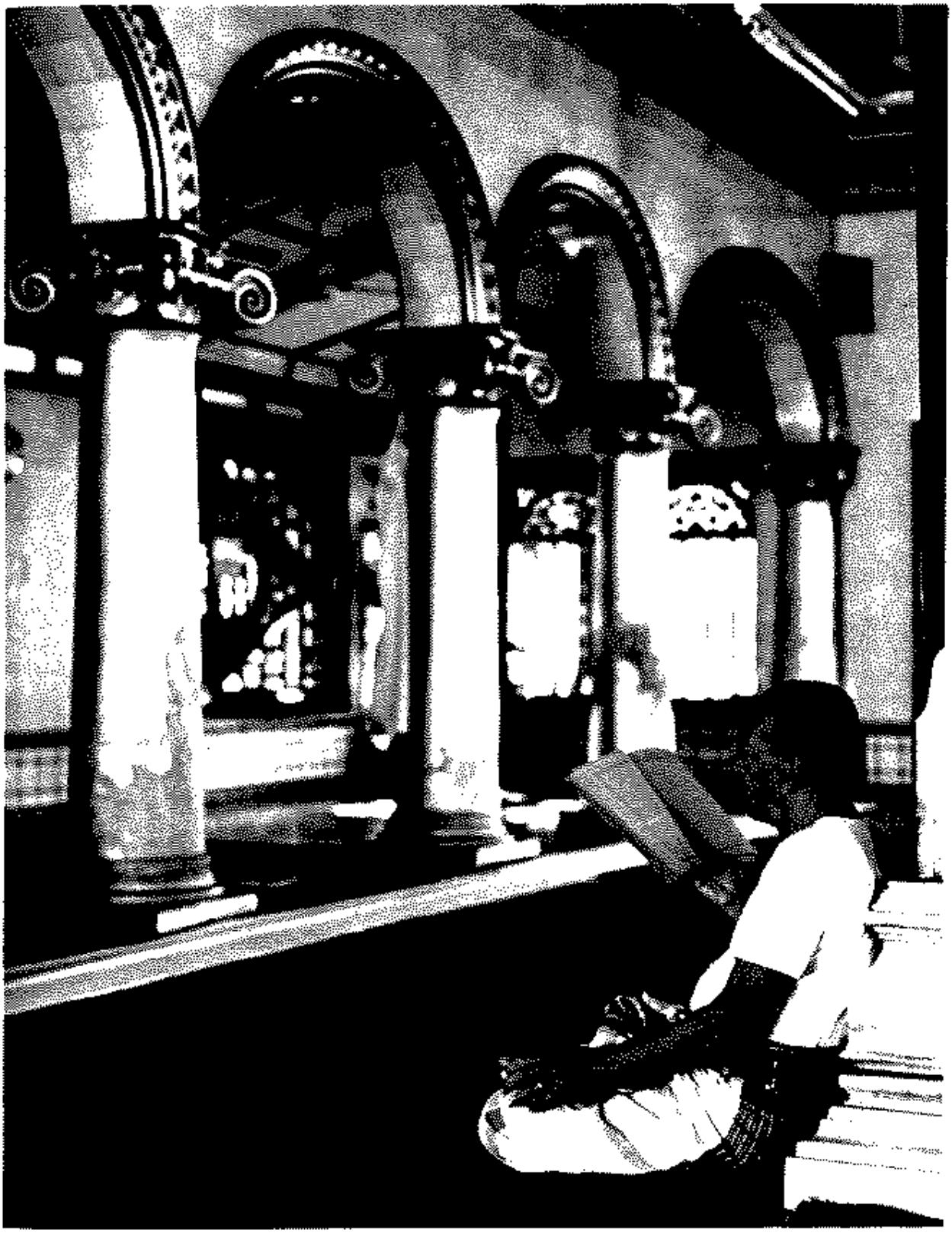
16–18. Batik is produced almost exclusively on the east coast. *Below left*, following the age-old process, a pattern is drawn using a stencil and hot wax; then the cloth is immersed in a warm dye-bath, *right*. In recent years many designers have departed from traditional decorative patterns.





19–22. The old handicrafts thrive. *Opposite*, a highly skilled woman working at a wooden handloom; *left*, a sarong woven with gold thread, every woman's dream; *below*, the shaping of vases out of *tembaga putch*, "white brass," and the plaiting of mats and baskets from the fibers of the *pandan*, a kind of pine tree.

23–24. Of all Malaysian cities, Malacca is richest in historical associations. *Opposite*, the hilltop remains of the church of St. Paul, where the body of St. Francis Xavier was for a time entombed. *Above*, the Porta de Santiago, the last reminder of the ancient Portuguese fortress.



25–26. Inside a mosque: *opposite*, a young boy, whose father is still in the prayer hall, waits beside the pools and fountains; *above*, a devout Mohammedan reads the revelations of the Prophet.

27. Few venture out into the noonday sun—and when they must, they carry waxed paper umbrellas.

Malacca

One of the first—and certainly one of the most vivid—impressions that strikes the visitor to Malaysia is the extreme ethnic diversity of its people. I have already noted that the Malays and the Chinese comprise the two largest segments of the population, but there are—in addition to the substantial Indian element—people from many corners of the globe. There are Thais from the north, Indonesians from the south, farmers from the Philippines as well as Turks and Tibetans from a greater distance who are also mostly farmers. And of course there are descendants of the conquering Arabs, the conquering Portuguese, the conquering Dutch, and the conquering British. Not all of these intruding conquerors having taken vows of chastity, Malaysia boasts a generous leavening of Eurasians too. It should also be noted that, although the country is officially Moslem, it does not lack merchants who openly profess their Jewish faith.

This unusually rich ethnic mixture is, of course, the result of several factors: the abundance of the land, for one, and the excellence of the climate, for another; but probably the chief factor has been Malaysia's uniquely strategic geographical position, lying as it does at a point where travelers and traders from many Asian lands must inevitably meet, if only to continue their onward journey. It early became an important port of call for

seafaring merchants desirous of trading silk, pottery, and sugar for scented wood, ivory, tin, and other eagerly sought wares. The inevitable result, of course, was cultural interchange and the spread of diverse religions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the western city of Malacca, which was for a time the chief metropolis of Southeast Asia. In its heyday, its sultans were virtual rulers of nearly all of what is now Malaysia—and some bits of neighboring nations as well.

To explain how Malacca, toward the close of the fifteenth century, came to occupy this lofty position would mean going back to the beginning of the present era and entering with some detail into the history of the peninsula, which (I must confess) I found both tedious and tenuous. So much of it is conjecture, and so much of it is concerned with which minor ruler of the region was able to conquer for a brief time which neighboring state before being himself conquered by some other minor ruler, all of them usually with unpronounceable names.

As briefly as possible, then, the recorded history of the peninsula would seem to begin with the foundation of the kingdom of Langkasuka in the north around the year A.D. 200. This fact, like much of early Malaysian history, is based on Chinese records, which also tell us that the state of Fou-nan was established about a century before in what is now Cambodia. Although the earliest records are Chinese, the states themselves seem to have been more Indian in character. It may be that the Malays found Chinese culture and language too esoteric and complex to be easily assimilated. Whatever the decisive influence may have been, Langkasuka seems to have enjoyed an extremely high standard of living and to have adhered, for the most part, to Buddhism imported from India, although no doubt there were devotees of Hinduism as well.

Soon Fou-nan conquered Langkasuka, and after Fou-nan

declined and fell, Langkasuka enjoyed another brief period of independence before being taken over by Srivijaya, a powerful Indonesian empire with its capital north of Palembang on Sumatra. What Srivijaya was chiefly interested in was control of the Strait of Malacca, which gave it virtual hegemony over the South China Sea. This ensured both free trade for Srivijaya as well as the collection of substantial tolls from other traders. At the same time there now came into the region the proselytizing and trading Arabs.

In the eleventh century, the area was attacked by Indian forces under King Rahendra Chola I of the Coromondel coast. Then the Thais expanded their empire southward as far as what is now known as Singapore. From the south, the Javanese Hindu empire of Majapahit sought to expand northward, and the capital of Srivijaya became a refuge for Chinese pirates. All in all, it was not a period one would be tempted to describe as serene, but it did have one fortunate result: somehow, out of the strife between Siam and Java, a Malay sultanate was established at Malacca. Thus what is now Malaysia escaped being chewed up and swallowed by its two more powerful neighbors.

Malacca was founded around the beginning of the fifteenth century, but no one seems to be quite sure how or by whom. The Malay Annals (which were not written down until the sixteenth century), the Chinese chronicles, and the later Portuguese histories provide little real help, for there is little agreement among them. However, what does seem to be certain is that around the year 1400 Malay chiefs fleeing from the destruction of old Singapore found their way to what is now Malacca. Did they have a leader before they arrived or did they elect a ruler after they reached that fortifiable hill overlooking the mouth of the Malacca river?

Some accounts say one thing, some another. One tells us that

Parameswara, a prince of Palembang ancestry, killed the Siamese governor of old Singapore before fleeing and eventually establishing himself as ruler of Malacca. Another tells us he was ruler of Singapore before being thrown out by the Siamese. Still another says he was accepted as their first ruler by the Malay chiefs who settled at Malacca. In some acounts, Parameswara (which is a Hindu name) is called Iskandar Shah (an Islamic one). Were they the same man? Was he born a Hindu and did he later convert to Islam? Or, as some chronicles insist, was Parameswara the father of Iskandar Shah?

It would seem to be a case where anybody's guess is as good as anybody else's, and I for one do not propose to try. What *is* noteworthy is that this founder of the Malaccan dynasty realized that the new settlement was most vulnerable to Siamese attack, and so he turned for protection to the Chinese. The consequence was prosperity and security, thriving trade and cultural exchange. The Ming emperor confirmed Parameswara as raja of Malacca, and Parameswara in turn journeyed to China to pay his respects. Within an amazingly short time Malacca became a highly important trading post between East and West. Gold was abundant; and so many houses were erected that, the saying went, it would take a cat an entire year to walk over their tiles.

In part, Malacca's growing importance throughout the fifteenth century was due to the influx of Arab traders, who brought with them commercial contacts with much of the East. They also, of course, imported Islam, which the Malays adopted with the same alacrity they had earlier applied to Buddhism and then Hinduism. Muzaffar Shah was apparently the first of the Malaccan monarchs to assume the Islamic title of "sultan."

It was during the reign of Muzaffar Shah's three successors that Malacca attained the apogee of its prosperity as a Malay sultanate. In fact, it was so very prosperous and so very attractive

and secure during this brief period that the celestial emperor of China himself offered one of his daughters in marriage to Sultan Mansur Shah. The Malay Annals relate in most extraordinary detail the complex activities of the embassies exchanged between the two monarchs that finally resulted in this lofty union; and present-day Malaccans are pleased to point out to the visitor the hill upon which the Chinese princess, Hang Liu, had her palace.

Sultan Mansur ascended to the throne of Malacca in 1456, Sultan Ala'u'ddin in 1477, and Sultan Mahmud in 1488—the very same year that Bartolomeo Díaz rounded the Cape of Good Hope, ultimately making the Portuguese monarch a present of much of the Orient, including that city which was then considered the most strategic and vital of all. In 1511 Malacca fell to forces commanded by Afonso d'Albuquerque, and the brief dynasty of its Malay sultans came to an end.

It remained in Portuguese hands for some 130 years, years during with riches from Malacca helped fill the royal coffers in Lisbon but which offered few periods of peaceful tenancy to the occupiers of the city. It was under almost constant attack—from deposed Sultan Mahmud, his heirs, other Malay sultans, and rulers of other Southeast Asian states. Anticipating this, one of the first things Albuquerque did, after taking the city, was to build a towering fortress, making use of Malay forced labor and the fifteen hundred slaves left behind by the banished sultan. (Although Malays and Javanese were forbidden to keep slaves, the Portuguese themselves felt no scruples in the matter.) Albuquerque also made use of what materials were at hand: ruthlessly he tore up ancient tombstones and destroyed both mosques and temples to construct his mighty fortress. When it was finished, it was given the name of A Famosa, "The Famous."

Ruthlessness, indeed, here as in other parts of the globe, characterized the Portuguese occupation: ruthlessness toward the

helpless Malays but not toward representatives of more powerful peoples, the Chinese and Siamese, the Indians and even the Javanese. With them Portugal desired to trade and at the same time extract duty for safe passage of their ships. For this purpose the authorities issued new currency in gold, silver, and tin. During their 130-year occupancy, they also turned Malacca into a very handsome sixteenth-century city. In addition to the fortress, they built two splendid palaces, a castle, a meeting hall for the council of state, and five churches. In one of these, now known as St. Paul's, Francis Xavier preached, and his body was temporarily entombed there before being removed to Goa.

Yet it soon became clear that Portugal had overextended itself. In its fervor to conquer the world (and fill yet more coffers back in Lisbon), it had failed to reckon with the fact that it was a tiny nation, lacking the manpower to hold on to its many scattered possessions. The Dutch, whose interest in the wealth of the Orient was as keen as that of the Portuguese, grew increasingly aware of the latter's weakness; and in June, 1640, with the assistance of Malay warriors, they undertook the attack and siege of the city. In mid-January of the following year, the Portuguese surrendered.

As soon as they had captured the port, the Dutch announced their intention to continue the "tolls, licenses and the cruising in the Strait instituted by the Portuguese for the maintenance of the rights of Malacca and now devolved on us by right of conquest." Import duties varied from year to year and from nationality to nationality, but no ship, unless specifically exempted, could sail through the Strait without calling at Malacca and securing a pass. The penalty was confiscation.

Despite their strict rules, however, and their native thoroughness, the Dutch were unsuccessful in Malacca, and under the domination of the Netherlands East India Company the city fell

into disrepair and dilapidation. The company itself was unduly greedy, and Holland discovered that, like Portugal, she too was a small nation, she too lacked the manpower she needed. She did do some building in Malacca, including the Stadthuys (thought to be the oldest Dutch building in the East) and the very fine Christ Church; but the fact remains that Malacca's population of twenty thousand under the Portuguese had dwindled to three thousand by the time the fortress was taken by the Dutch and probably never rose to more than five thousand during the whole period of Dutch occupation.

Now the fortunes of Malacca became inextricably entangled with those of a Corsican army officer, Napoleon. After Napoleon's armies overran the Netherlands, the Prince of Orange, William V, sought refuge in England, where he came to an agreement with the British permitting them to occupy Dutch colonies temporarily to prevent the French from making use of them. In Malacca, a British resident took charge, with Dutch officials acting under his orders.

The British East India Company, it would seem, was no more disinterested, no more loftily patriotic than its Dutch competitor. While it was willing to cooperate with the British government in helping to prevent the French from making use of Malacca, it anticipated that once the war was over Malacca would be returned to the Dutch. The Dutch were wartime allies, but they were also peacetime business rivals. The Company's decision, accordingly, was to raze the great fortress and move the remaining population to Penang, where the company had a headquarters and had been enjoying a profitable trade for a quarter of a century.

The British resident objected, but the Company had its way —at least to the extent of destroying the fortress. And it would, no doubt, have succeeded in destroying all that still remained of

the city had Sir Stamford Raffles not come down from Penang for a rest. This was his first sight of Malacca, and he was shocked at the thought that so fair and potentially prosperous a place should vanish from the earth and that its people should be evicted from the land that was theirs. He drew up a memorandum on the subject which was forwarded to the directors of the Company. It was so forceful that it persuaded the hard-headed businessmen to change their minds.

Having succeeded in saving Malacca from obliteration, Raffles made it his headquarters when he returned to the peninsula as the newly appointed "Agent to the Governor-General with the Malay States." In 1824, Britain and Holland signed a treaty, by which Britain agreed to surrender Bencoolen, in Sumatra, and the Dutch agreed to give up any claim to Malacca. So, until the next conqueror came along in 1942, Malacca was administered by the British. Raffles died two years after the treaty with the Dutch was signed, banished to London on an inadequate pension and dishonored by the Company, which decided his head was insufficiently hard for its purposes; he was then forty-five.

Little wonder that I walked with a kind of awe through the streets of the city that he helped save for us! No other place in Malaysia is so rich in romantic legend and equally romantic history. Perhaps the best place to begin one's sightseeing of Malacca is the Sultan's Well, which may very possibly be the city's oldest surviving monument. It dates, according to legend, back to Raja Iskandar Shah and possesses the same magic properties ascribed to its more famous Roman counterpart, the Trevi Fountain: a coin tossed into its waters assures a return visit. Or perhaps an even better place to begin is the rich Malacca Museum, housed in a Dutch building over three centuries old. Here the visitor may wander through spacious, high-ceilinged rooms that will afford him a vivid, capsule history of the city, from the Malay

sultanate, through the rule of the Portuguese invaders, to the time of Dutch control and British occupation, ending quite properly with Malacca's status in the contemporary Malaysian state of affairs.

Wherever one begins, one will probably want next to visit the Chinese relics, for Malacca still retains a strongly Chinese character. The most famous, I suppose, is what the Malays call Bukit China, or "Chinese Hill," where the Ming princess is supposed to have had her palace and where some of the city's oldest Chinese remains still stand. Along with two neighboring hills, Bukit China possesses what is probably the oldest and largest Chinese burial ground outside mainland China, with many well-preserved ancient tombs. At the foot of the hill is the Sultan's Well, and nearby is the Poh San Teng Temple.

But the oldest and most interesting of the extant Chinese temples is some distance away, on the other side of the river. So to take me there I hired the usual means of transportation in Malacca, a trishaw (after, of course, coming to terms with its driver about the price). I could not but envy his strong, muscular legs encased in leather sandals that looked as though they were almost as old as the man himself. His costume was the customary one: striped shirt and shorts and a broad straw hat.

The trishaw man seemed to be in no hurry to reach Cheng Hoon Teng Temple, for he stopped quite a long time at a blacksmith's shop on the way to have a good gossip with a confrere. Eventually, however, we did reach the temple, its entrance guarded by two fierce-looking creatures remotely resembling dogs. I supposed they were there to drive evil spirits away, but they had no effect whatsoever on an elderly, pipe-smoking beggar who lay in the shade of one of them. As he made his vocation clear to me, I noticed that he wore two wristwatches; I also noticed that neither one of them was running. Inside the walled

court were two ceremonial masts towering over the temple eaves which were decorated with porcelain and glass animals and flowers. These, I was told, perform the function of welcoming visitors; they may also, so far as I know, be helpful in warding off unwanted spirits.

The most famous relic of the Portuguese occupation is the sole surviving gate of the old fortress, A Famosa, razed by the British during the Napoleonic Wars. The gateway, Porta de Santiago, has achieved the distinction of being selected as the symbol of the State of Malacca. It should be noted that some heretical archaeologists now claim that the gateway is Dutch, not Portuguese at all; but whichever it is, it is a handsome bit of stonework and worthy of the honor conferred upon it.

Of all the churches that the Portuguese built during their occupation of the city only fragments remain, for the Dutch demolished Roman Catholic churches as ruthlessly as the Portuguese had demolished still earlier mosques. To the Catholics, shrines of the hated Moslems were an abomination; while to the Protestant Dutch, Catholic churches were equally abominable. Ah religion!—I couldn't help thinking, as I climbed St. Paul's hill—what sins have been committed in thy name!

Atop St. Paul's hill stood a small chapel erected by the Portuguese in 1521 and dedicated to Our Lady of Grace, and here, in 1545, on his first visit to Malacca, St. Francis Xavier worshiped and planned the building of a school for the teaching and conversion of Malay children. In all, the saint visited Malacca four times, on his voyages between Goa, in Portuguese India, and Japan and China; and in 1552 his remains were buried in the chapel before being transferred to Goa. After the Dutch took Malacca, they periodically renamed the chapel before finally calling it St. Paul's—strangely, for the Jesuit College of St. Paul had been attached to the chapel.

Near the mouth of the Malacca river, fronting the first bridge, the visitor to this Southeast Asian port is suddenly faced with a sight reminiscent of a small country town in Holland. Between green lawns and shrubbery stands a three-story pink clock tower, with a cannon on one side of it and a fountain on the other, to tell the visitor the time of day—a fact that the European seems to find so much more essential to his well-being than the Asian. The building behind the clock tower, a shade darker in tone, is the Stadthuys, generally conceded to be the oldest surviving Dutch structure in the Orient and still used to house government offices. The Dutch began building it almost the moment they were sure they had Malacca in their hands, and its sturdy stone walls, with its thick iron-clad doors and windows, are living proof that, whatever grievous faults those early invading Dutchmen may have had, they knew how to build.

Even more convincing testimony to this fact is offered by nearby Christ Church, built by the Dutch nearly a century later. The Malaysian Ministry of Trade and Industry waxes particularly enthusiastic on the subject, noting that Christ Church was "built in 1753 of salmon-pink bricks, brought from Middleburg in Zeeland and covered with red laterite. Typical of Dutch architecture, it features louvre windows topped with fan-shaped decorations, heavy wooden doors, and a tiled roof. Particularly outstanding are the fine ceiling beams, each cut from a single tree and measuring 48 feet by 12 inches square, 'a span of level ceiling seldom attempted in present-day architecture.' "

What with the incredibly clear blue sky and the green tree-studded lawns, this pink complex of church and government house has a fairyland atmosphere. Obviously, I thought, it could exist nowhere but in polygenetic Malaysia: the Dutch offices where now Malays and Chinese, among others, work together; the Dutch church, now Anglican; and sitting in the shade of a

tall tree on the lawn some Indian public scribes with their battered old typewriters in front of them. The occasional rattle of a typewriter and the splashing of the water in a nearby fountain formed the acoustic background to the scene. Transfixed by it, I stood and watched. A few boys dabbled their feet in the cool water of the fountain. A trishaw driver offered his services to a potential client. How I hated the thought of leaving this beguiling city!

But I had to leave, and as I headed toward the eastern border of the state I stopped at another of Malacca's major sights, Gunong Ledang, "the Shimmering Mountain," better known in the West as Mount Ophir but also frequently called Malaysia's Olympus because of the great wealth of legend that shrouds its summit. One of the best known of these concerns our old friend, the illustrious Sultan Mansur Shah. It seems that seated one day in his hall of audience, he announced to his assembled courtiers that he desired another wife, one that would excel all other wives in the world.

"But Your Majesty," objected one of his attendants, "has already married a princess of China and a princess of Java. What more," he asked, "could Your Majesty desire?"

The sultan shrugged. "All princes," he said, "marry the daughters of other princes. That's nothing. I want to marry the princess of Gunong Ledang." With that, he appointed two chiefs to undertake the mission, along with a retinue to accompany them.

After several adventures, including gales and singing bamboos, the most intrepid of the mountain-climbers stumbled upon a garden where four women sat. The eldest seemed to be in charge, so to her the spokesman for the travelers related the sultan's desire. The old woman, who said she was the princess's guardian, offered to communicate the sultan's desire to her mistress; and with that, she vanished.

Soon there appeared an even older woman, one so bent with age she could hardly walk. She related the conditions under which the princess of Gunong Ledang would agree to accept the sultan's hand: two bridges between Malacca and Gunong Ledang, one of silver and one of gold; seven trays filled with the hearts of mosquitoes and an equal number filled with the hearts of mites; a vat of young areca-nut water and one of tears; and last, a cup of the blood of the sultan and one of the blood of his son. Then she too vanished; the emissary of the sultan said later he was convinced she was the princess herself disguised as an old crone.

When the marriage conditions were repeated to the sultan, he said sadly: "Everything that the princess asks for can be given her with one single exception: the blood of my son. For that I have no heart."

So Sultan Mansur Shah was not united in matrimony, after all, with the remote and, when all is said and done, rather demanding princess of Gunong Ledang.

Hilltops and Holy Water

Not the least of Malaysia's charms are its many hill resorts where the climate is temperate and the amenities offered are on the luxurious side; so to console myself for leaving Malacca I took a tour of the central highlands, whose hills are carpeted the year round in thick fern and glowing green trees. (Trees in Malaysia, it seems, are eternally green.) All the chief resorts provide such luxuries as heated swimming pools, Western-style bars and pubs, air-conditioned limousines, golf courses, tennis courts, even gambling casinos. What more could a well-heeled vacationer ask for? In addition, he can admire the exotic colors of the scenery, the strong sweet perfumes of the flowers (including rare and gaudy orchids), ostentatious tropical birds and butterflies as well as packs of chattering monkeys—all this without even changing clothes or donning heavy climbing gear. Perhaps the best known of the hill resorts are the Cameron Highlands in the state of Pahang, but there are also the Genting Highlands, Fraser's Hill on the mainland, and Penang Hill on that famous and fabulous island toward the north.

One afternoon, not being as well-heeled as most highland visitors, I decided to try hitchhiking up the road to the Cameron townships, of which there are three. The first of them is Ringlet, and that is as far as I got, for it had started to rain and there was

very little traffic on the road. Happily, I had been invited to spend the night in the house of a Sikh farming family who lived just outside the town; somewhat less happily, the only accommodation available was a cot in a shed adjoining the house, there was only a single blanket, and the rain went on and on. It was the coldest night I have spent anywhere in Southeast Asia. Long before dawn I was wide awake, shivering beneath the thin blanket and longing for the sun. I rose as soon as it did and went outside, delighted to see that the day was going to be a fair one. Never has birdsong sounded so sweet to me.

Soon I was back on my way again, bemused by the many market gardens with huge strawberries hidden beneath their leaves, rows of giant cabbages, and lettuce fields across the valley glowing in psychedelic shades of green. Even the tomatoes seemed flashier in color and more gargantuan in size than they are elsewhere. And there was tea. Its cultivation here began only recently, in 1926, with seed brought from Assam. Since then, Cameron tea has attained a high reputation, comparing favorably with the more famous varieties from Ceylon and Darjeeling. As I continued on, I saw gaily dressed women putting the light green tea shoots into baskets they carried on their backs. Then, at a nearby plant, I watched the leaves being processed and prepared for shipment.

But the Cameron Highlands are not just market gardens and tea. There are also some lovely and exciting jungle paths, most of them leading to dashing waterfalls or magnificent hilltops. The highest of them all in the vicinity is Gunong Irau (6924 feet): a rather difficult climb but well worth it for the adventurous, since on a clear day you can see—well, not everywhere but as far as the Strait of Malacca.

It should be noted that the three townships that make up the Cameron Highlands—Ringlet, Tanah Rata, and Brinchang—

support more than half a dozen deluxe hotels, a thriving shopping center, and—of all things—a bank.

"By engineering ingenuity, careful planning and profound craftsmanship," says the tourist brochure, Fraser's Hill "scarcely shows the inroads made upon Nature's fastnesses." Then it goes on to list the facilities available: the golf course, the two hard tennis courts, the swimming pool, the pubs that "provide a snug and congenial atmosphere reminiscent of old English inns," the luxury hotel, and the bungalows. Whatever Fraser's Hill may be reminiscent of, it is not, at least to my mind, despite the inevitably lovely scenery and jungle walks, reminiscent of Malaysia.

Its history, strangely enough, is. It seems that around the end of the last century or the beginning of the present one there was a lonely and intrepid Englishman named Fraser who built himself a makeshift sort of house on the present site of the resort. He earned his living by running a mule-train between some of the smaller of the nearby towns and also by trading in tin ore, which he procured at bargain prices from Chinese prospectors who desperately needed the money to buy themselves a few peaceful pipes or pay off their gambling debts. Then suddenly one day, so the story goes, he was heard of no more, and the punctilious bishop of Singapore undertook to find out what had happened to him. He made the trek up to Fraser's Hill, as it was by then known, but there was no Fraser. Fraser had already vanished into the stews of Singapore!

I do not actually want to denigrate the resort: it is a very attractive and extremely comfortable place for those who like that sort of holiday. So also is the newly opened resort in the Genting Highlands, only some thirty miles from Kuala Lumpur and readily accessible by car or helicopter. In addition to the usual amenities, such as a brand-new two-hundred-room hotel with

two restaurants, one Oriental and one European, and an American-style snack bar, Genting also offers a thirty-acre flower garden, a large convention hall, and a glamorous gambling hell called the Casino de Genting.

The island of Penang, at the northern entrance to the Strait of Malacca, has a hill resort too, at the top of a funicular railway, but it is a very minor affair compared with the luxurious resorts of the mainland—and it forms but a small part of the island's many attractions. Its hotel has only twelve rooms, and there is not even a miniature golf course, but it is well worth a visit for the gorgeous view. The time to go, of course, is toward sundown, when the always lovely island is at its best.

A possession of the sultan of Kedah, the island was known as Pulau Pinang, which means the "Island of Betel Palms," but its name proved to be rather more than the British East India Company cared to bother with, so when, in 1786, they signed an agreement to lease the island from Sultan Abdullah of Kedah, they called it simply Penang. Now, with Province Wellesley on the mainland opposite, it has become the State of Penang and is one of Malaysia's chief tourist attractions.

It has a great deal going for it. Before the arrival of the British, it was a virtually deserted hideout for pirates marauding through the Indian Ocean; but with the East India Company came trade and prosperity, and with prosperity came Chinese, Indians, Arabs, and representatives of many other Southeast Asian nations who, along with the Malays, made Penang their home.

In George Town, the principal city, as well as all over the island, there are Islamic mosques, Christian churches, Buddhist temples, rich Chinese clan houses, and lavish shrines and pagodas sacred to either Chinese or Hindu deities. The Tengku Abdul Rahman Aquarium is superb; indeed, it is said to house the finest collection of marine life in Southeast Asia; while the

Botanical Gardens, only five miles from the city, are an endless delight, not only for the jungle flowers, the lily ponds, and the fern rockeries but also for the huge herds of monkeys that romp freely about and for a special enclosure devoted entirely to the *pelandok* (the local name for the mouse deer, the smallest hoofed animal in the world). Then, when it comes to indolent lolling, I think no one has ever tried to count the number of fine white sandy beaches that dot the Penang coastline; and when it comes to shopping, let it be remembered that Penang happens to be a free port.

Of course nothing in Malaysia—no botanical gardens or jungle paths—quite compares with a four- or five-day trip through the huge National Park (Taman Negara). Situated on the east side of the central mountain range, it occupies an area of some seventeen hundred square miles—an area teeming with all kinds of wild life. The adventure is customarily made by river boat, which leaves from a place called Tembeling Halt, and then on foot through dense jungle paths. You may be lucky enough to glimpse some tigers, although they are elusive beasts, but you will certainly encounter barking deer, monkeys, wild pigs, crocodiles, perhaps even elephants and *seladang* (which is Malay for a species of wild ox). Very likely too you will come face to face with one or another of the families of Negritoes who continue to prefer their Tembeling river jungle to more sophisticated sites.

For those who do not care to do their adventuring by boat, trekking is possible, but in that case a guide is essential. How else could you expect to make your way to the rest house near Kuala Tahan, at the foot of Gunong Tahan, the peninsula's highest peak (7186 feet)? Kuala Tahan is cool, and for those who (like me) feel the cold, a sweater is strongly recommended.

Leaving the park, I made my way to Kuala Lipis, and from there started south, for my ultimate destination at that time was

Kuantan on the peninsula's east coast, which is watered by the South China Sea. As usual, whenever I could, I was hitchhiking and this time was given a ride as far as the junction of Benta Sebrang, where the road to Jerantut turns off. I walked on a bit further but very soon got another lift, now in a fine, sturdy Land Rover. The driver—who, it turned out, was the manager of a rubber plantation—was an extremely friendly man, and I soon found myself in his comfortable living room drinking a cup of his very excellent tea.

After the usual pleasantries, our conversation turned to the absorbing subject of Malaysian festivals. He told me there was to be a fire-walking ceremony the following evening at a nearby village and, for special potency, there would be present a *bomoh*, or medium, a man able to communicate with the spirits of the dead. When my host sensed how eagerly I desired to attend this festival, he very kindly offered to put me up for the night and drive me there the following evening.

On the way, we stopped at Kampong Damak, a small village inhabited by an aboriginal tribe that until very recently was altogether nomadic. The big hut into which we were invited was a true treasure-house. There were intricately carved blowpipes of the kind formerly used in intertribal warfare and now still used for hunting. Although whatever religion the people professed must have been a kind of animism, the plaited mats on display were rich in Islamic symbols. Especially interesting were wooden statues of spirits that had tormented one or another of the villagers. A person so afflicted must carve a replica of the evil spirit as it has appeared to him in dreams or visions; then, with the help of this statue plus the spiritual energy and magic power of a *bomoh*, the wicked spirit can be brought under control and the villager freed from his supernatural tormentor. Once this has been accomplished, the statue is of no more use—

and so it is offered for sale, for a few Malaysian dollars, to passing tourists.

I was tempted to buy one for myself, as a curious souvenir of my visit, but later was glad that I had not. We had dallied so long in Kampong Damak that by the time we reached the site of the fire-walking ceremony, the ritual had already begun. The atmosphere was tense, and I myself felt uneasy and bewildered; the tenseness, as we entered upon the scene, seemed mysterious, perhaps even contrived. As the medium droned monotonously on and as one participant after another danced jerkily over the flames, I felt increasingly skeptical. It was all a trick, I decided.

Then, still listening to the toneless murmur and watching the fire dance, I experienced the tension growing within me until finally my body felt utterly overpowered by the strain. Then I noticed that I was trembling, and the harder I tried to stop the tremor, the less I seemed able to control it. After a time, however, I relaxed, became receptive to the sounds and sights around me, and the tension vanished. Feeling like an intruder here at this solemn ceremony, I kept wishing I was somewhere else, anywhere else. My anger turned against myself; and what had begun as a mere spectacle became a spiritual lesson. Now I was content at not having casually acquired the wooden effigy of an evil spirit that had been tormenting a villager of Kampong Damak.

Far and away the most remarkable, the most emotionally overwhelming festival that I witnessed during my stay in Malaysia was the one called Thaipusam, when Malaysia's devout Hindus celebrate the birthday of Lord Subramaniam, youngest son of Lord Siva, god of destruction. The other two members of the Hindu trinity are Lord Brahma, god of creation, and Lord Vishnu, the god who maintains the equilibrium between Brahma and Siva. The festival takes its name from the fact that it is celebrated in the month of Thai (in the Hindu lunar calendar)

on the day of Pusam, when the moon is full. It is the time when the devout repay to the god any debts they may have incurred during the preceding year or make penitence for any misdeeds they may feel themselves guilty of. If a man's child falls ill, for example, he may vow to undergo the tortures of Thaipusam should the god permit the child to recover.

Several days before, the zealot begins to prepare for the ordeal by making frequent visits to the temple, where he prays devoutly and makes offerings of such delicacies as milk, honey, and coconuts. He may also, particularly if he feels the need of the severest tortures, undergo a strict fast. Then, on the day of the festival, a priest will make use of incantations to induce a state of trance, after which various parts of the zealot's body are pierced with long rods of steel or silver.

The temple itself, to which penitents must eventually make their way, stands atop a steep hill, but all along the route of the march are smaller shrines as well as food stalls for the hordes of spectators who have come to see the event. At some of the stalls food is given free to those who cannot afford to pay for it. I took my place along with the other thousands just after sunrise. They all, it seemed to me, were wearing their finest clothes and their best jewelry, adding a touch of character to the delicate skin tones. The "third eye of wisdom," as it is called, was applied to the forehead with a dot of red *kum kum*: it is said to take life through the purity of heart of the wearer and the beneficence of the gods. Long before noon, the sun had grown so hot that many of the spectators sought refuge beneath the shade of tall trees nearby, waiting for the procession to get fully under way.

For many, the climactic moment was the arrival of the Silver Chariot, drawn by two white oxen, elaborately decorated, and supporting a shrine sacred to Subramaniam. It moved slowly up the road as the priests accompanying it offered their blessings

and sprinkled holy water over the spectators. The latter, in their turn, as the chariot passed, offered music (played mostly on pipes and drums) and dancing. The music ranged from traditional Hindu melodies to such popular airs as "The Three-Penny Opera" and even Christian hymns. As countless coconuts were constantly being broken in front of the chariot, the way was wet with coconut milk.

Some penitents, not content with piercing their bodies with skewers, carry a *kavadi* as well. This is a bow-shaped wooden frame, usually decorated with flowers and fruit and an icon of Lord Subramaniam, and it is held fast to the body of the wearer by spikes and hooks. It may weigh as little as thirty pounds but more likely double that, and often has an inner steel skeleton to make it heavier. Some of the *kavadi*-toters walk for several miles before being released of their dreadful burden, and I was frankly astonished at how little blood seemed to be shed in the process, nor can I hazard an explanation of this phenomenon. Intense piety? The trance induced by the priests? Perhaps a combination of the two . . .

This is not to say that everyone bore his burden unfalteringly. *Kavadi*-carriers were required to enter each shrine along the way, where they received a blessing, and upon coming out were expected to dance to the frantic beat of the music. Many collapsed and had to be helped to their feet; and many fell again before somehow stumbling on. Some had friends helping them, keeping the crowds from pressing against the *kavadi* and now and then pouring cold water over the penitents or offering a soft drink, most of which seemed to dribble onto the ground.

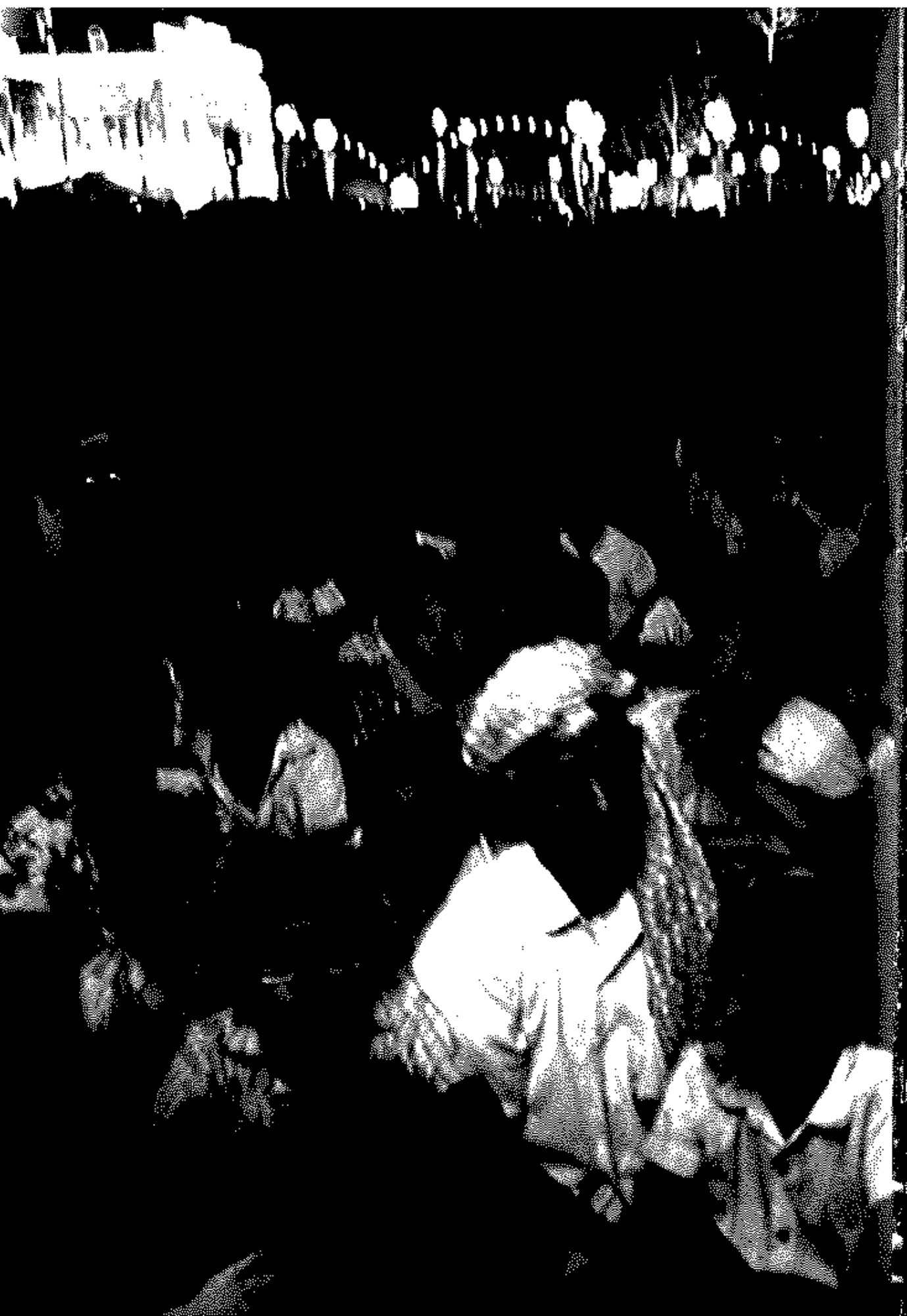
As the procession continued up the stairs to the top of the hill, where the temple stood, the shrieking of the flutes and the racing beat of the drums combined with the shouts and the singing of the spectators and the crashing of coconuts to create an

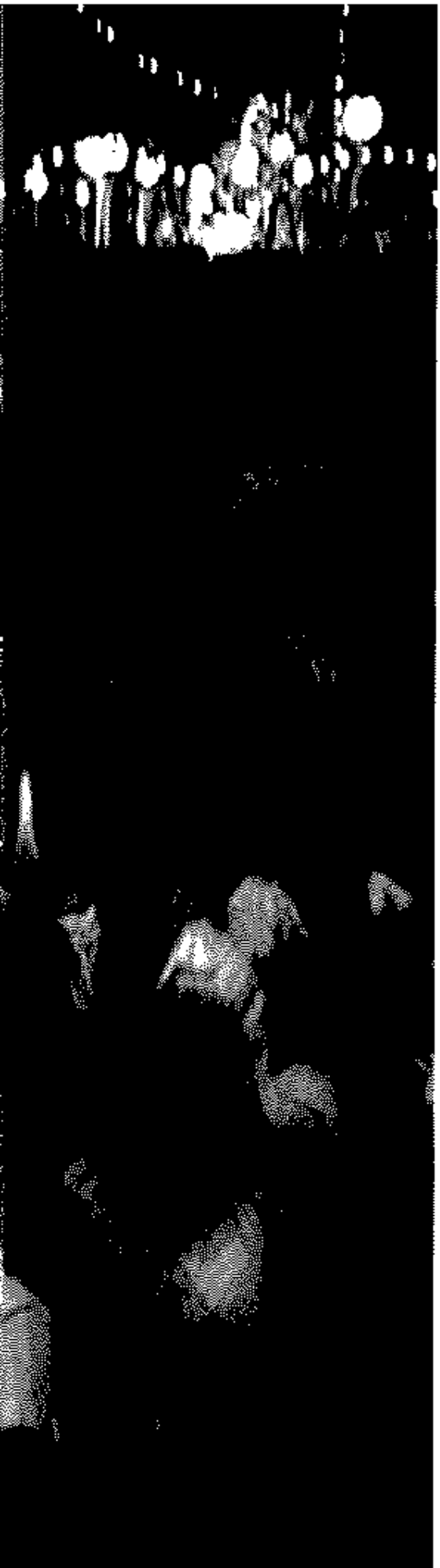
unearthly din that must, I think, have exerted some sort of analgesic effect on the penitents. Believers—and who, I wondered, could see and not believe!—looked on in adoration and awe as hour after hour the procession moved slowly past.

Just before finally entering the temple, the penitents, using whatever superhuman energy they still had left, performed a last, wildly desperate dance to the frantic rhythm of bells rung by their friends. Coconuts crashed, camphor burned. And sometimes, as a particular zealot danced on and on, I could hardly believe what I was seeing. Where, I kept wondering, did he find the strength?

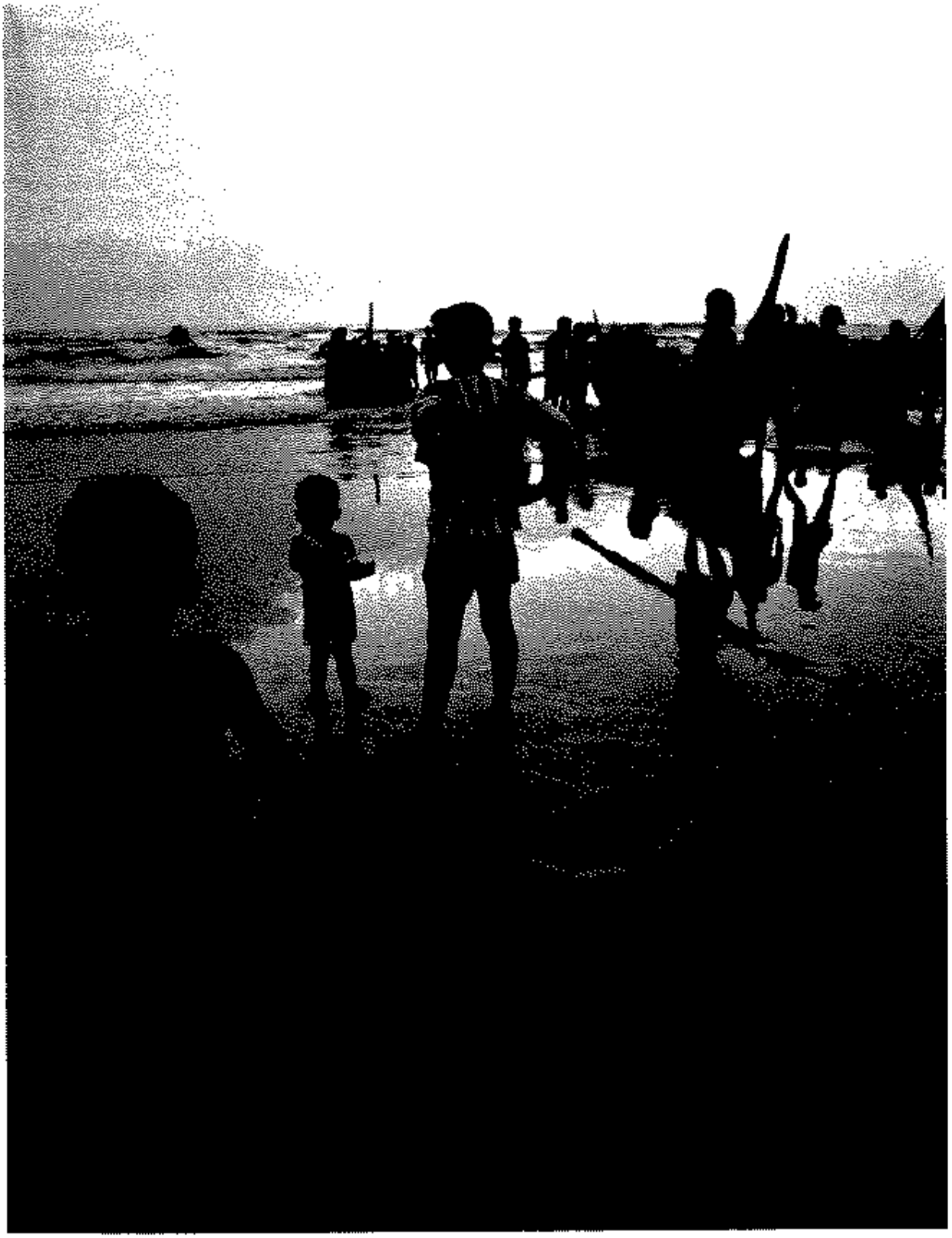
Eventually, the final dance ended, a priest removed the rods and spears and skewers and needles and relieved the man of his *kavadi*, then sprinkled holy water over the penitent and drew lines of sacred ash across his forehead. Having fulfilled his vow to the god, he now withdrew to another part of the temple for a time of quiet and meditation, seeking thereby to regain his strength. And the ever-youthful Lord Subramaniam, often considered to be the most awesome of all the gods in the Hindu pantheon—is he, too, content? Is he proud of the fact that he is capable of inspiring the incredible faith that will permit a man to undergo such devastating torture in fulfillment of vows that must not be lightly taken? Lord Subramaniam: I think I learned a great deal from him that day of the full moon in the month of Thai.

28–31. Traditional performing arts are still highly regarded. *Preceding page*, dancers wearing batik sarongs perform for the sultan, who watches the show from a specially constructed platform. *Below*, performers in this Malay play all wear the *putar*, headdress resembling a turban. *Right*, a scene from a Chinese opera; and an example of traditional Ma'yong costume.





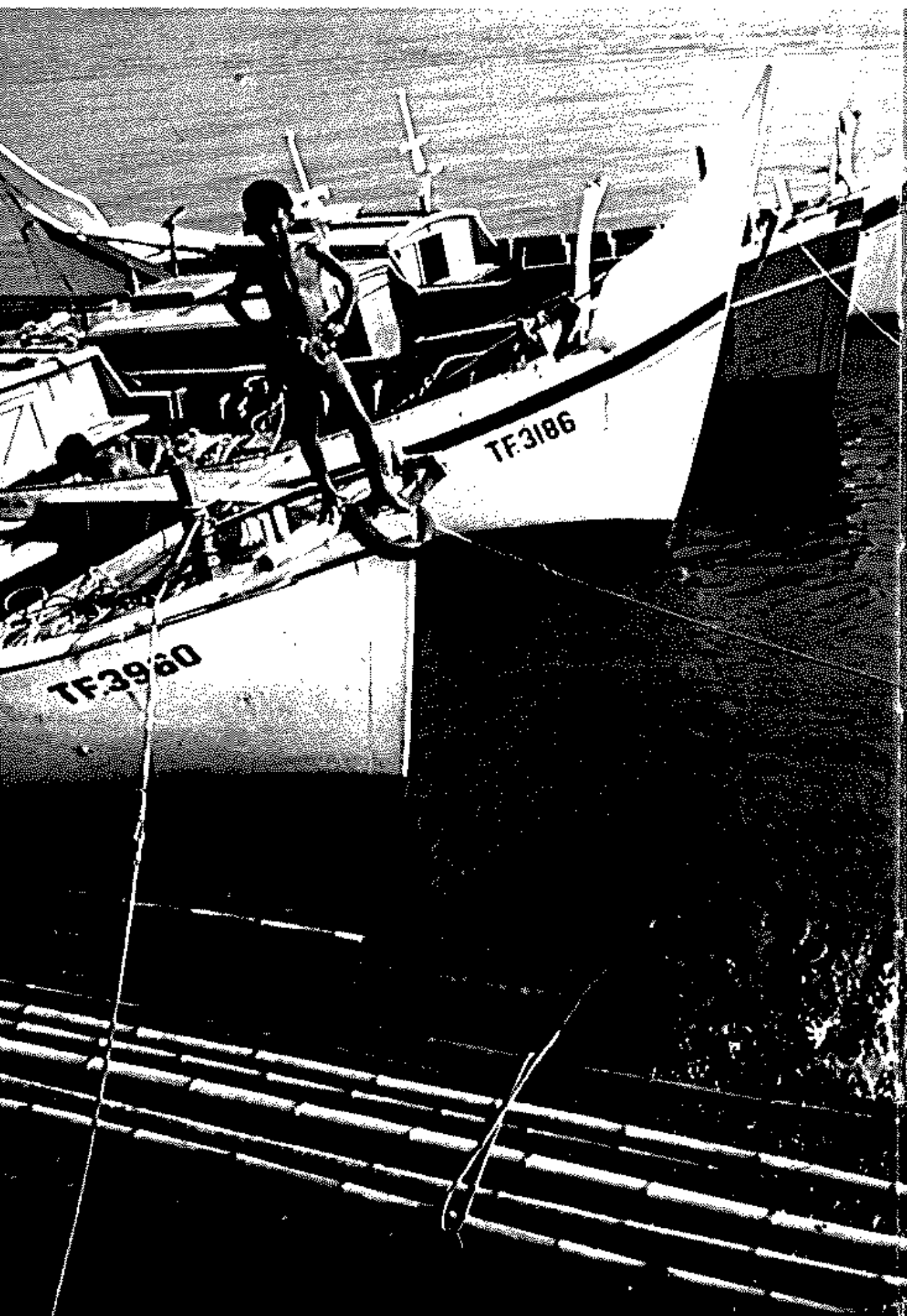
32–33. Shadow plays are also very popular. *Opposite*, an enthusiastic crowd watches a performance in front of the sultan's palace at Kuala Trengganu. *Above*, a dramatic moment in the play.



34–35. Fish is vital to the Malaysian diet. *Above*, children watch their fathers leave shore at dawn in hopes of a good catch. *Opposite*, a fisherman returns from market, carrying the unsold remains of his catch.

36–37. The favorite playground of country children is the beach. *Below*, a race home for lunch.

38–41. Village life: *opposite*, families take refuge from the heat on their shaded verandas; *left*, women must see to it that the household is supplied with water; *below*, truckdrivers pause for a game of *dam*. *Overleaf*, when fishing boats are not out at sea, they are taken over by the children.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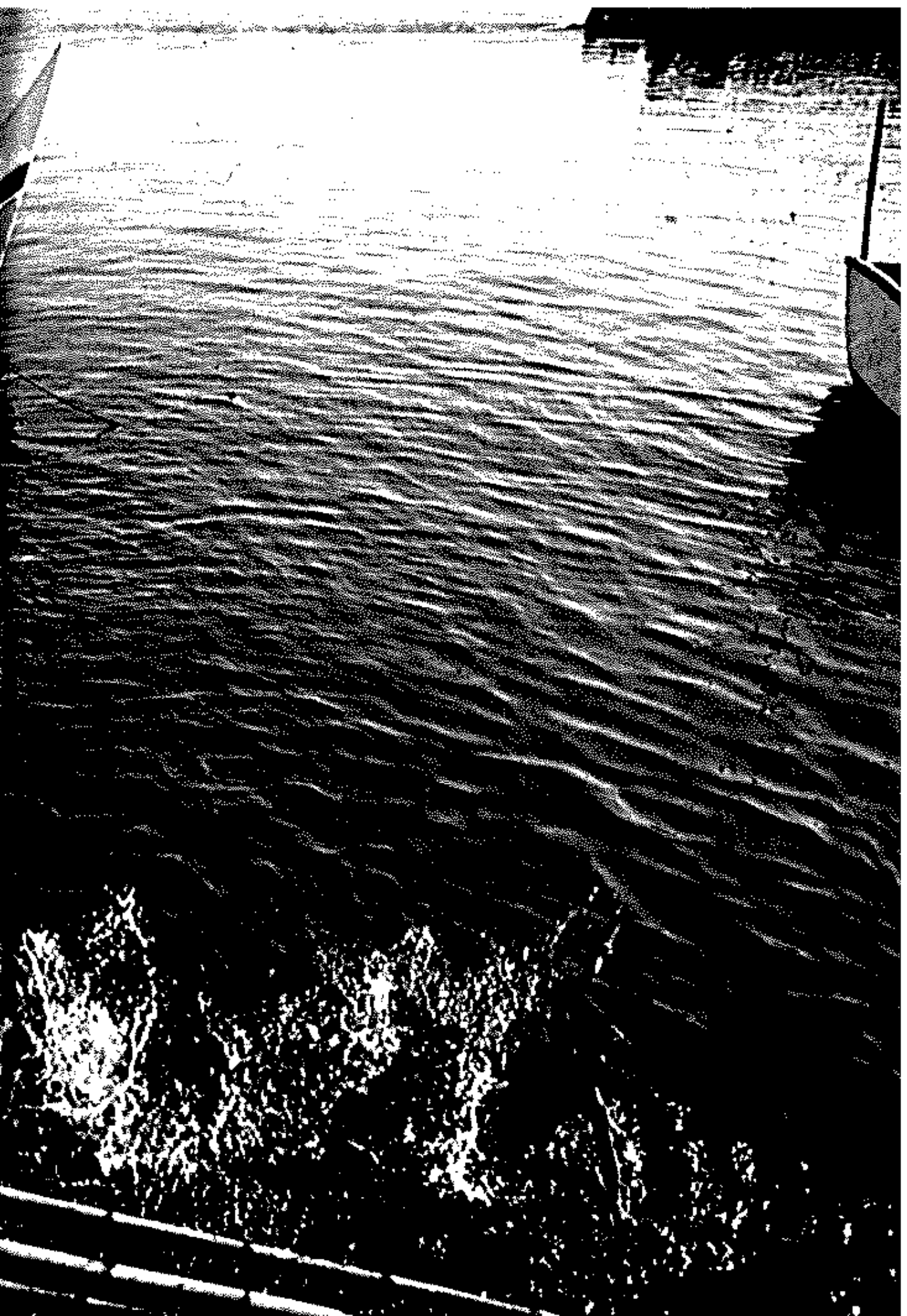
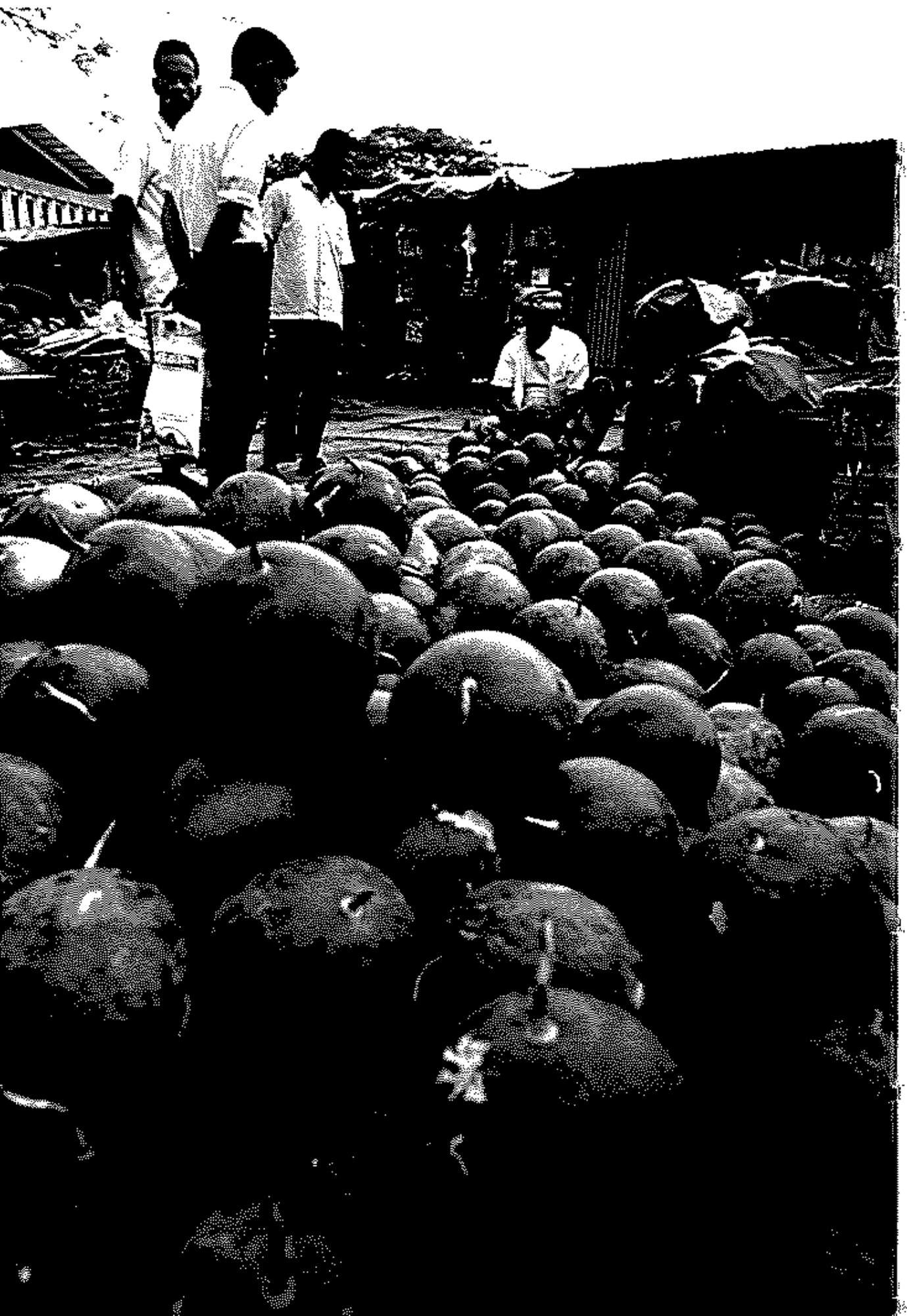
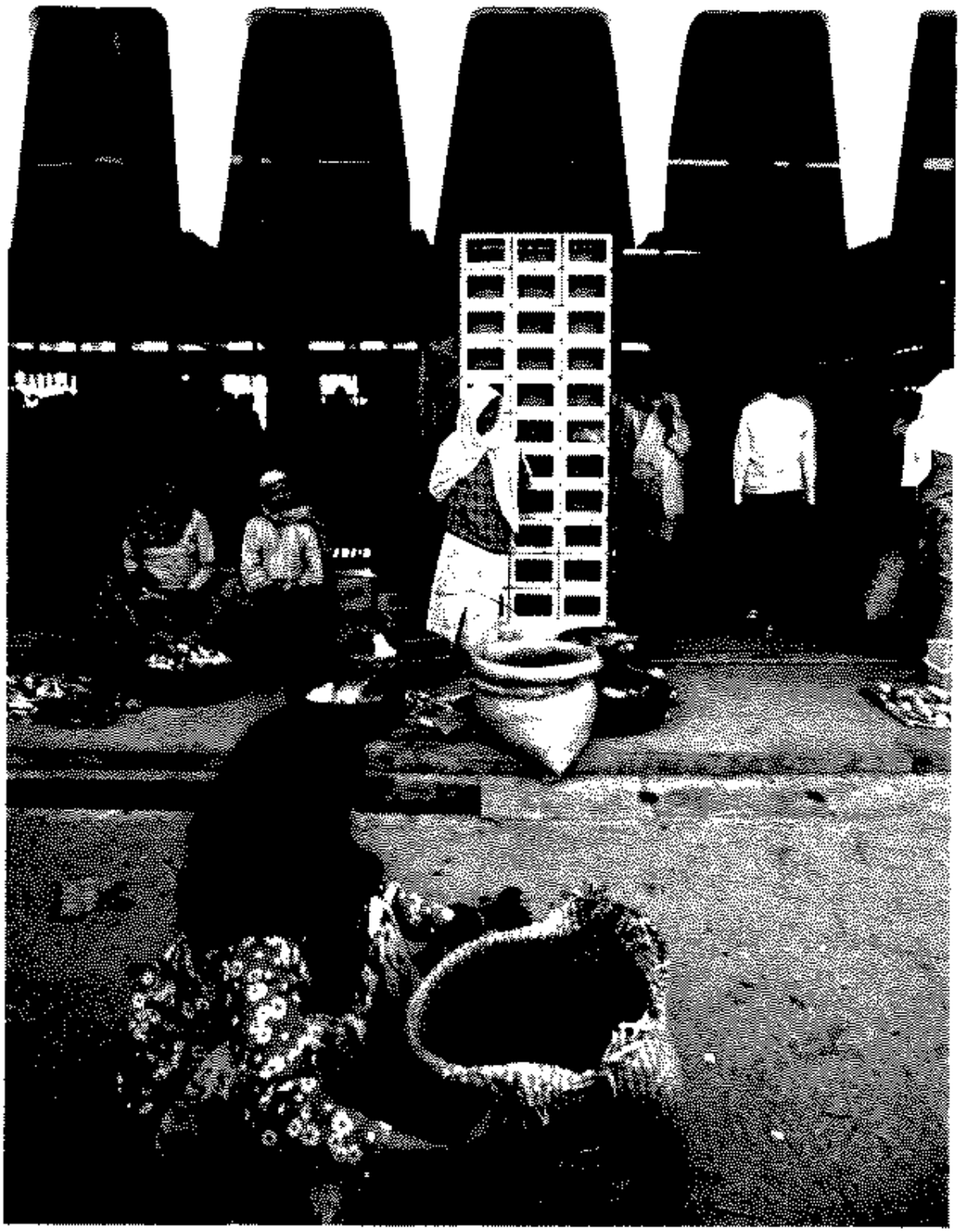




42 43. Marketplaces are essential to village life: *below*, the new but already overcrowded one at Kuala Trengganu; *opposite*, mouth-watering fruit at Kuala Dungun.

44. *Overleaf*, day changes suddenly to ▷ night near the equator, with little or no twilight.



A Living Culture

The surpassingly lovely and surprisingly little-known east coast of the peninsula consists of three states, Kelantan, Trengganu, and Pahang, the last being by far the largest. Indeed, it is the largest state in Malaysia. The name Pahang sounds mysterious, rather glamorous in fact, but its English translation is all too prosaic for so dramatic a part of the world: it means "tin" in Khmer and arose doubtless because tin was mined long before the dawn of recorded history in Sungei Lembing, not far from the beach resort and coastal town of Kuantan.

Indeed, our old friend Sultan Mansur Shah of Malacca heard such favorable reports of the mineral wealth and natural beauty of the region that—in the words of the Malay Annals—"he greatly desired to possess it." For latter-day sultans, desire was three-quarters possession, so Mansur ordered an invasion by sea, although Pahang was a powerful state ruled by a maharaja and subject to the even more powerful kingdom of Siam. Over two hundred warships sailed around the peninsula, landed at Pahang, and after some fierce but rather brief fighting subjugated it. Its maharaja was tricked into captivity and put under restraint; the state itself became a dependency of Malacca, to which it paid annual tribute.

Strangely isolated, the east coast possesses but a single railway,

that from the north to Kota Bharu, capital of Kelantan, continuing on southward to Kuala Lipis. There is also a spanking new highway from Kuala Lumpur to Kuantan; then a coastal road connects Kuantan with Kuala Trengganu and Kota Bharu. Perhaps because of this relative isolation, the east coast retains a rare old-fashioned flavor; here the indigenous arts and crafts (and sports too) of the Malays thrive as they do nowhere else in the peninsula. In the western states the visitor immediately senses a strong modernizing Chinese influence, but in the east he feels that the passing centuries have affected very little the ancient life of the people.

This is not to say that the visitor searching for quiet fishing villages and miles of virgin beach will suffer unbearable primitive discomfort. The government has put up modern hotels and motels and is proposing more. Alas, even that touristic monster, the Club Méditerranée, is planning a fifteen-million-dollar holiday village—"genuinely" Malaysian in style of course—in Trengganu. My advice to anyone who happens to read this book is to try to beat the club to the gong, unless he happens to like his pleasures computerized.

It seemed that the time for indolent lolling was back again, for the beaches of the east coast are, I believe, unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. Transparent blue water and soft, creamy-white sand: they go on for hundreds of miles, interrupted only by quiet little fishing villages whose inhabitants welcome the foreigner with cheerful and traditional Malay hospitality.

Then one day I visited the tourist bureau in Kuantan whose manager was a vital and, as I was soon to discover, a remarkably knowledgeable Malay woman. I wanted to ask her where she would recommend I go to watch the giant sea turtles waddling ashore to lay their eggs: this is one of the rare and famous sights of the east coast. Up to eight feet long and half a ton in

weight, with an eight-foot flipper span, this leathery turtle was thought to be as extinct as the dodo until it was observed egg-laying on the beach at Rantau Abang in 1952. Its laying season lasts from May to September.

Late one afternoon, then, we left the road at a cape called Tanjong Gelang and headed for the sea. There, to my considerable surprise, I saw on the beach a permanent structure shaped rather like a Malay fishing boat; it was about a hundred feet long and eight feet wide; and inside were a bar, a loudspeaker, and several handsome hostesses. When I gave voice to my surprise, I was told that (1) the turtles lay their eggs only at night, (2) if they are in any way disturbed they will rush back to the sea without laying, so (3) visitors are strongly urged not to go sightseeing for themselves but rather to wait until a guide acquainted with the patterns of behavior of the turtles announces that the egg-laying ceremony has safely begun. By this time, the sun had set, the sky over the South China Sea was dark, in the jungle to the west a few tall coconut palms shot into the night.

The process that I eventually watched is a weird, unworldly one; the turtle looks as though it really ought to be extinct, or anyway living on some other planet. It makes its ungainly way out of the water and crawls up the beach until it finds a place that seems suitable, where the eggs will presumably be able to hatch without either being disturbed or being washed back into the sea by the tides.

It digs a good-sized hole in the sand, then begins laying the eggs, usually as many as a hundred at a time. The process must be a painful one, for it elicits grunts and moans, and one actually sees what appear to be tears running down the face of the giant creature. Once the eggs are laid, they are covered with sand, and the mother-turtle makes its way back to the sea. The turtle may, I was told, be several centuries old.

The fate of the eggs themselves is not an altogether happy one. The concessionaire of that section of the beach chosen by the turtle is entitled to twenty percent of the eggs produced: these he sells to deluxe restaurants, for sea-turtle eggs are considered a great delicacy. Of the remaining eighty percent, some get eaten by snakes, birds, and other creatures who also, apparently, consider them a great delicacy. But some *do* survive, for that ancient and would-be extinct beast, *Dermochely coriacea*, continues to live on in a world where it probably no longer feels very much at home. The government, it should be noted, maintains several hatcheries to ensure that the sea turtle does not indeed become extinct.

It was thanks to the very kind Tourist Promotion Officer of Kuantan (to give the gracious lady her full title) that I came to learn about the traditional arts and crafts of Malaysia which also—thanks in part at least to the government—continue to survive on the east coast of the peninsula. Arts? Crafts? Sports? It is difficult to decide how to classify some of them.

Take kite-flying, for instance. To begin with, the kites have to be created, and they are huge, highly decorative objects the making of which requires great skill and the knowledge of centuries handed down from one generation to the next. Then, once made, the kites engage in contests of various kinds—most actively during the spring months, April, May, and June, when coastal breezes are strong and capricious. So kite-making is certainly an art, or a craft if you will; but kite-flying would seem to impinge on the realm of sport.

A century ago, kites were being created and flown all over the country; now the activity is confined mainly to the two northeastern states of Kelantan and Trengganu, where the huge, fantastically shaped kites add color to the sky and melody to the winds. Makers produce a number of different kinds of kites,

of which the most popular just now is the one called the "moon kite," while some of the older types are seldom seen. Of course, the type of kite produced depends to a large extent on the kind of contest in which it is to take part, but all the kites are richly and plentifully decorated with flowers and foliage, real or imaginary beasts, and bushy paper streamers.

During the season, contests are arranged between neighboring villages, and villagers bet enthusiastically on their entrants. The contest may be held to determine which kite can fly the highest, or which kite is most skilfully handled, or which can maintain the strongest musical hum. In the high-flying match, the contesting kites must all be of the same size and shape. Then, once they are in the air, the half-shell of a coconut with a small hole drilled in its base is floated in a bucket of water. The kite that is highest at the moment the shell sinks is the victor. In the humming match, the kites must make an uninterrupted and agreeable murmur for a quarter of an hour.

I think the most popular contest of all, the one most keenly enjoyed by everybody, is that for the most beautiful kite. Then villagers have ample opportunity to discuss at considerable length such questions as the size, shape, and decoration of a truly beautiful kite. Another contest that was extremely popular in the past involved cutting the string of an opponent's kite. This was done by applying powdered glass to one's own string, and when the two strings rubbed together in the wind, one of them eventually got cut. Unfortunately, the cutting of strings inevitably led to other acts of violence, sometimes with fatal results, so the government has prohibited string-cutting contests.

Kites have, at least on one occasion, so legend tells us, been used in warfare. If legend is to be believed, there were, long ago, two opposing armies, one of which found itself encircled by the enemy and in peril of imminent destruction. The night before

the climactic battle was to be fought, the encircled army attached bamboo flutes to a number of large kites and sent them aloft. The enemy, hearing the sound but not seeing the kites, decided it was being besieged by an army from the spirit world. As sensible human beings do not battle spirits, the soldiers fled, and the war ended more happily than most wars end.

Another borderline case—craft and/or sport?—is the making and spinning of giant tops, some of which may weigh as much as twelve pounds. A length of rope (about half an inch thick and perhaps twelve feet long) is wound tightly around the top until the entire surface is covered. The spinner then hurls the top at an oblique angle onto a designated place on the ground, after which his helper will very carefully manipulate the spinning top onto a scoop and place it on a truncheon or bottle, seeking to lose as little momentum as possible in the process. Now the top spins undisturbed until it wavers and stops; an hour of spinning is quite common. To extend spinning time, players are permitted to add oil to the point of the top. The one that spins the longest is, of course, the winner.

In a different type of contest, players try to stop their opponent's top by striking it. Here teams consist usually of three or four players, and there are various ways of reckoning the points. The team that has gained the most points by the end of the day has won that round, but it agrees to meet the opposing team a couple of weeks later at some other village in order to continue the contest.

The top-spinning season occurs after the rice harvest, and the village whose team wins the contest feels itself fortunate indeed, for a top-spinning victory means a bountiful rice harvest the following year. The first game of the season between two villages is played on neutral ground; then the winning team decides where the next contest will be held, usually at its own village.

Indeed, visitors to the states of the east coast are perhaps best advised to make the trip in the autumn, after the end of the rice harvest, for it is then that villagers can take time out for dancing, theatrical performances, and intervillage contests. Of the latter, some are quite peaceful, like kite-flying and top-spinning, while others approach the point of excitability that leads to violence. One such is the art of self-defense. In the West, we tend to think of it as a sport, but for an Oriental—although it may indeed be a means of saving his own life or taking an enemy's—it is also most certainly an art, sometimes very nearly a stylized dance.

The legendary origin of Malaysian silat, said to have occurred back in the thirteenth century, is significant. The story goes that a young man named Aminuddin, who dwelt in northern Sumatra, went one day to a nearby waterfall to take a bath and to fetch water for the household. There he became fascinated by the motion of a flower that had dropped into the waterfall: first drawn as though by a magnet to the point of impact of the falling water, it was then thrust back by the force of the water to the outer edge of the pool. As Aminuddin watched, the cycle was repeated time and time again until at last a sudden breeze carried the flower out of the whirlpool's orbit.

That evening Aminuddin told his friends about the incident, and they came to the conclusion that the floating motion of the flower could be applied equally well to the human body in its need to possess an art of self-defense. That evening Malaysian silat was born. Over the centuries it has undergone considerable development and is now considered—at least by Malays—to be the most elegant of all the Oriental styles. Other Orientals, no doubt, would fail to agree.

In the past, championship matches were frequently held for the entertainment of the country's rulers. One such bout, still fresh in the minds of people of Kelantan and Trengganu, took

place in Kota Bharu just before the turn of the century. Sutan Dollah, a master of the art and a man of Sumatran ancestry, was to defend the championship, then held by Kelantan, against an expert chosen by Dato Lela of Kemaman, in Trengganu.

Dato Lela was himself considered to be a formidable exponent of silat. Twenty years earlier he had made use of it when, at the instructions of the sultan, he had executed the sultan's cousin, a man who persisted in paying nightly visits to the sultan's sister although he had been warned that such visits were not well regarded. Now Dato Lela decided to match a very strong silat adept named Pa 'Kar against Sutan Dollah. After stopping at Kuala Trengganu to receive the blessing of the sultan, Dato Lela's party arrived at Kota Bharu in a pelting rain; but the match was held as scheduled amid a huge throng of spectators.

Sutan Dollah had his reputation as champion to preserve, Pa 'Kar had his future to think of, and both men fought aggressively. But from the beginning it looked as though Sutan Dollah was destined to be the winner: he landed some very powerful blows which Pa 'Kar failed to counter successfully. Then suddenly Pa 'Kar managed to grab one of Dollah's feet, causing him to lose his balance on the rain-soaked ground—and now there are two versions to the end of the story.

According to people who live in Trengganu, Pa 'Kar, having unbalanced Dollah and still retaining his grasp on one of the champion's feet, nearly tore him apart—and was of course declared the winner. But in Kelantan today quite a different story circulates. There it is said that excited supporters of the two silat men now interfered in the struggle, one of Pa 'Kar's admirers trying to stab Sutan Dollah with a kris and one of Dollah's admirers threatening Pa 'Kar with a gun. At this point the rival groups were separated by less impassioned spectators; and the fight was held to have ended in a draw.

If it seems inappropriate that a handgun should have been drawn at a silat contest, the appearance of a kris is perhaps even more astonishing, for to a Malay the kris has mystic significance: it is a royal weapon possessing psychic powers. A Westerner will see it as simply a double-edged dagger with a short, frequently sinuous blade and a hilt shaped rather like the butt of a pistol; but Malays believe, or believed then, that most blades were inhabited by an otherworldly spirit. This was especially true of those in which a Koranic text had been inlaid in gold or silver or those on which the Hindu *garuda*, a creature with the head of a bird and the body of a man, had been etched. So powerful a kris could, presumably, transmit its intangible potency to its owner.

Today the magic of the kris has been much reduced, although Malays still tell tales of the extraordinary feats performed by one particular kris or another, and the kris as a vital element in the royal regalia is reverently kissed by every sultan at his investiture.

Considering the importance of the kris in traditional Malay life, it is not surprising that the art of working metal flourished throughout the peninsula for many centuries. And of course it was not the kris alone that Malay craftsmen produced: they were responsible for a virtually endless variety of fine metal objects. Until the beginning of the present century, the states of Kedah and Trengganu observed the custom of paying an annual tribute of superbly worked metalware to the king of Siam. Then, when Britain officially took the northern states under its protection, they asked whether Edward VII would accept a gift from them. It was referred to as Bunga Emas, or "Golden Flowers."

Not surprisingly, the royal reply was in the affirmative, and in the course of time six gold and silver flowering trees were duly dispatched to London by way of Singapore. Enjoying the patronage of the sultans, the metalworkers could devote as much

time as they felt was necessary to the elaboration of the "Golden Flowers" or to other works of art intended for exalted use. But as the century wore on, the royal metalworkers fell on increasingly hard times; and by 1925, in part because of the importation of European metalware, Malay goldsmiths and silversmiths had all but disappeared.

Then, happily, the Kelantan Malay Arts and Crafts Society was formed to encourage the making and marketing of traditional objects, thus saving the east-coast art of metalwork from total extinction. Indeed, it is now enjoying a revival, more and more men are being attracted to its traditional lore, and while I was there I paid a visit to one such metalworker—a smith who operated a small, one-man workshop on the ground floor beneath his raised house.

He welcomed me cordially and explained that what he was working on that day was something he called *tembaga puteh*, "white brass." Actually it is an alloy of tin and copper, a kind of pewter, and is said to retain its bright, silvery shine even after long exposure to corrosive sea air.

I had arrived at a lucky time, for he was just about to prepare the molds, so I was able to watch much of the long, laborious process, every portion of which is still carried out by hand. Basically, it is the ancient method known as *cire perdue*, and familiar, I suppose, throughout the world. After a wax model has been fashioned, it is covered by layer after layer of clay, each layer being permitted to dry thoroughly in the sun before the next is applied. Then the mold is heated to melt the wax, which is poured away, and in its place molten metal is poured into the clay mold through a small hole. Once it has cooled, the clay is chipped off and the metal object is given its final polish. For this the smith used an old-fashioned, very simple, hand-operated lathe.

Objects that are made in this painstaking manner include everyday household utensils as well as more important pieces such as incense burners and flower vases. In the living room of his house, the smith held a kind of permanent exhibition of his work—a demonstration of his infinite patience and his unquestioned skill.

Like the smith, the batik designer I called on also had his workshop underneath his house (which stood on six-foot-high piles), and he used his living room as an exhibition hall. It was he whose address had been given to me on that train ride south from Kuala Lumpur by my kindly traveling companion. As soon as I mentioned her name, I became an honored guest and was shown over the entire place.

In the garden I admired a few newly prepared sarongs hanging up to dry in the sun, while in the workroom itself I was able to observe the highly complex processes involved in batik-making: first, the making of tin blocks, and then the dipping of them into a mixture of hot wax and resin before applying them to a piece of cloth spread over a bed made of the skins of banana-palm stems. This substance, it has been found, allows the wax to cool fast enough to keep the design sharp. When the fabric is dyed, of course, that part of it which is coated with wax does not take the dye. The same process must be repeated for every additional color. Usually not more than four are used in one batik, but even so one roll of cloth may take as long as two weeks to prepare, for after all the time-consuming waxing and dyeing processes are completed, the wax must be removed, the colors fixed, and the cloth hung up in the sun to dry.

Batik-making originated apparently in Java, which, until the second world war, was the sole supplier of batiks to the world market. Now Malaysia has taken over a healthy share of that market and has developed variations of its own, including the

use of the batik process by painters. In the combined living room and showroom of my host I was able to admire the delicacy and variety of Malaysian batik work.

Batiks are used also now in Ma'yong, the Malay dance-drama. With long-sleeved silk blouses, held in place by jeweled gold brooches, matching woven silk sarongs reaching to the ankles and fastened with a silver belt and perhaps a golden buckle have since the beginning of the present century been worn by the stars of the show. Even so, and despite all this splendor, some of the younger actresses are overwhelmed by the sadness of the events they are portraying and fall into fits of hysterical weeping. To prevent this double tragedy, a *bomoh* (or medium) is always present throughout the performance.

Ma'yong was performed first in the region of Pattani (over the Thai border) for the raja and other dignitaries; it was only in the present century that it became a publicly performed entertainment at festivals and on certain other occasions. Its purpose was then, and is now, to ensure the favor of Ma'Hiang, the goddess who watches over the rice crop. To describe what it actually *is* is rather more difficult, for we have nothing resembling it in the West. It is a romantic drama which is both danced and sung to the accompaniment of an orchestra consisting of a spike-fiddle, two double-headed barrel drums, and a pair of hanging gongs. The fiddle is the most important of the instruments, giving the tempo not only to the other members of the orchestra but also to the performers on stage.

Ma'yong, it should be noted, never has a written script, the dialogue and songs, even the tunes, being improvised to suit the occasion. The play always begins with a prologue, which is actually a solo sung by the leading actress and which may last as long as twenty minutes. After she has completed her aria, the chorus joins in—and the play begins.

Of all the Ma'yong dramas, perhaps the most popular is the one called "Dewa Muda," and I shall try to relate here a very brief synopsis of its plot without (I hope) making it sound ridiculous, for it very definitely is not; it is merely altogether different from our own theatrical traditions.

It is the story of the love of a young prince, born of immortal parents but reared by mortal—though royal—ones. One day he happened to find, floating on a lotus petal in a pond, a note from the Princess-above-the-Clouds suggesting that he visit her. This of course, he desired very much to do, so he took counsel with his faithful servant, and together they decided to disguise themselves as a cat and a mouse and for transportation to make use of the prince's foster-mother's magic kite of gold.

Safely they reached the garden of the palace of the Princess-above-the-Clouds, and the young prince eventually made his way to her private chambers. Unhappily, his presence was discovered by a member of the palace guard, and when he tried to escape through a window he was wounded by an arrow—mortally, so it seemed. Making use of the magic kite, his despondent servant brought him back to earth, where preparations were made for his funeral, since it seemed clear he could not long survive. Just before he breathed his last, however, there came a strange herbalist who succeeded in restoring him to life. Then, as the herbalist was about to slip away, the prince realized that it was none other than the disguised Princess-above-the-Clouds and, leaping on his magic flying horse, he pursued her, caught her, and in great happiness resumed his interrupted love affair with her.

Probably of all dramatic presentations in Southeast Asia the oldest is the shadow play, called in Malaysia *wayang kulit*. The plot is generally taken from the Hindu epic, *Ramayana*, which certainly seems to suggest that shadow plays were performed in

the peninsula well before the arrival of Mohammedanism. The action is shown against a cotton screen, eleven feet by eight and raised some four feet above the ground. The figures, which are usually about two feet high, are manipulated by a puppeteer, sometimes by more than one, and are made of beautifully colored cowhide. (I have, incidentally, seen some batiks portraying in abstract fashion these *wayang kulit* figures.)

The performance usually begins about one hour after the day's last prayer, at sundown, with a vigorous overture of drums and gongs that can be heard for miles. The overture is followed by an introduction, made by one of the musicians, and then the puppeteer takes over and the play itself begins.

In the *Ramayana* shadow plays there are four main characters: Sri Rama, the first hero of the *Ramayana*; Siti Dewi, Sri Rama's wife; Hanuman, the white-monkey warrior who is an ally of Sri Rama; and Maharaja Rawana, the demon king who is Sri Rama's antagonist. Most probably the play will begin with the abduction of the exceptionally beautiful Siti Dewi by the wicked Maharaja Rawana. Then Sri Rama, with the help of the invaluable Hanuman, sets out to rescue her—and eventually of course he does. Maharaja Rawana is conquered and slain.

The play may last as long as the puppeteer chooses, with as many episodes to delay the finale as he likes. Indeed, the play may go on night after night for thirty nights before the final episode is depicted. There has never been a written script for the Malay shadow plays, and although the basic narrative remains unchanged, details are altered to suit the taste of individual puppeteers. This has been true for centuries, from generation to generation: it is one more expression of the abiding continuity of Malayan life.

An Anthropologist's Dream

So far I had devoted all my time to what is officially known as West Malaysia, the peninsula itself. But there is also East Malaysia, which consists of the two states of Sarawak and Sabah in northern Borneo—and regretfully I realized how little time I now had left in which to explore them, those two remote and distinct worlds, utterly different from the peninsular states and in some respects from each other as well.

Their recent histories have been quite dissimilar. Sarawak was the fabled land of the headhunter, "the wild man of Borneo," and of three generations of "white rajas" before for a short time it became a British crown colony and ultimately part of the federation of Malaysia. Sabah, which used to be known as North Borneo, fell under British protection much earlier—until it too joined Malaysia. Sandwiched between the two states is the tiny, oil-rich principality of Brunei, which still remains a British protectorate (at the time of writing, anyway).

These three all hug the northern coast of an island—one of the world's largest—that straddles the equator; their inhabitants live either on the coast itself or inland beside the equatorial rivers that form the chief means of communication and transportation. The vast territory south of the chain of mountains that bisects the island from east to west is part of Indonesia.

The original inhabitants of Borneo are an unknown quantity: practically nothing remains, or has yet been discovered, to tell us who they were or where they came from, or how or why, although the museum of Sarawak displays evidence that suggests there were human beings living in the area over fifty thousand years ago. The present-day primitives of Borneo are descendants of various groups of peoples who drifted over to the island in successive waves of migration occupying many centuries, probably millenia. Of these distinct ethnic groups, those best known to the outer world are the Dayaks of Sarawak, and of these certainly the most famous are the Ibans, who have been extensively studied and written about and lavishly admired for their prowess and their pride and for their easygoing but formalized way of life that is seldom incompatible with an innate love of beauty and ceremony.

But the northern coast of Borneo is lush and green and strategically located, so to its ports there came, in later centuries, a succession of varied immigrants. Out of this strange and persistent amalgam of animist tribesmen, Moslem Malays, Buddhist Chinese, and Hindu Indians there emerged the sultanate of Brunei, which, for nearly a thousand years, was the island's dominant state. Its rulers and other nobles were Malays, its traders Chinese, its people largely primitive tribesmen. Although the official religion was Islam, Brunei's culture actually seemed more closely related to the Hinduism of Java. Brunei must for a time, perhaps at the height of its power in the sixteenth century, have been quite an attractive and agreeable place; but by the beginning of the nineteenth century, everything in the state of Brunei was rotten. Its rulers were unbelievably corrupt and self-seeking, its peoples mercilessly misused, and its coastline infested with pirates trying to escape the doom imposed upon them by the degenerate aristocracy.

The story of James Brooke has been too often told; I shall make no attempt to relate it here in any detail. Briefly, then, in 1839, at the age of twenty-seven, this young Englishman arrived in his own yacht, the *Royalist*, at the port of Kuching, where he became a friend of Raja Muda, viceroy and relative of the sultan, who had been sent to put down a tribal rebellion in the area now known as Sarawak. Brooke offered his services, which were gratefully accepted.

This aid and comfort had its well-known but still astonishing climax: in September, 1841, Brooke was officially proclaimed raja of Sarawak, still considered a fief of the sultanate of Brunei. But five years later, Brooke signed a new treaty with the sultan whereby he and his successors enjoyed absolute sovereignty in Sarawak, which thus became an independent kingdom, and in succeeding years, as Brunei continued its downward slide, he and the second white raja added through purchase huge territories to the Brooke domain.

For a century Sarawak was ruled and (it is generally conceded) well ruled by three generations of Brookes. They were particularly solicitous of the traditional ways of the tribesmen, who as a consequence were devoted to them; and by contrast with neighboring Brunei, their three administrations were models of intelligence and probity.

However, after a hundred years of Brooke rule, the third and last white raja became acutely aware that the world had drastically changed. The autumn of 1941 was no longer the time, it seemed to him, for absolutism, however well-meaning, so during the centennial celebrations he announced, among other things, "It is Our will and intention to commemorate this Centenary year . . . by terminating forever the era of autocratic rule which has so far characterized Our government."

A constitution of more or less democratic character was

promulgated; but within a few months Borneo, like so much of the Pacific, had become captured Japanese territory. The Rising Sun turned out to be a far harsher taskmaster than the white rajas, so when, in 1945, Allied forces began making landings in Borneo, the tribesmen, in particular the Dayaks, lent their enthusiastic and very valuable support. The rules against headhunting were temporarily suspended. Borneans took down their blowpipes, their poisoned darts, and their parangs; and soon Japanese heads, some still wearing their glasses, were added to ancient, moldering collections.

During the course of the war, the third raja had had conversations with the British government about the future of his realm. Raja Charles Vyner Brooke had come to the conclusion that Sarawak would be more secure in the hands of King George than in his own or his successor's. So, on July 1, 1945, the state became a British colony and remained so until September 16, 1963, when along with Sabah it officially joined Malaysia.

The history of neighboring Sabah (first known to the West as North Borneo) is far less exciting. In 1865, representatives of an American company based in Hong Kong came exploring, with of course the ultimate aim of exploiting; but they found the going too rough. Later, a couple of Englishmen secured concessions in the area from the sultan of Sulu, who considered Sabah to be his protectorate. But he had also made similar agreements with others, some Dutch, some Spanish, and for a few years there was a lot of rather half-hearted haggling. The fact is that no one seems very desperately to have wanted to possess North Borneo until the British took the bit in their teeth and established the North Borneo Company. The Philippines then tried to see the territory returned to the sultan of Sulu but failed; and much, much later Indonesia tried to prevent the territory from becoming a Malaysian state, but that attempt also failed.

Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, is built beside the Sarawak river, some twenty miles inland; it is a small, pleasant city of great charm and atmosphere, particularly when tribespeople from various parts of the state pay a visit to the capital and happen to be wearing their native costumes, with elaborate beads and bangles, headdresses, and earrings so heavy they have altogether deformed the lobes of the ears.

On one side of the river stands the Astana, formerly the residence of the white rajas and now that of the governor of the state. It was built by the second raja in 1870, and with the jungle overgrowth cleared away it looks rather more like a well-to-do country club than a once royal residence.

Opposite it, on the other side of the river, stand most of the sights that the visitor to the city will want to see, including the remarkably well-stocked museum, whose former curator and guiding spirit was Major Tom Harisson. (Major Harisson was also one of the first to parachute into Borneo in 1945 to conduct the operations that resulted in the liberation of the island from Japanese occupation.) Here he has assembled an invaluable collection, ranging from artifacts discovered in excavations of Stone Age sites to contemporary pieces from the villages and longhouses of the state. Beside the museum are a handsomely landscaped tropical park and an aquarium, and a very short distance away, along Rock Road, the unlandscaped jungle towers in all its lush and indomitable grandeur.

Not far from the museum, on the riverfront, is the Supreme Court Building, erected in 1874 and unusual for two reasons: it stands high on stilts and is a rare mélange of local architectural styles, for during its construction native artists were invited to contribute their most inventive ideas. More traditional, of course, are Kuching's many ornate Chinese temples. These are all fairly recent, although the Chinese have in fact been associated with

Borneo for a good long time and it was a Chinese voyager who was responsible for the first written history of the island. That occurred in the sixth century, when the rulers of Brunei, although they considered themselves absolute monarchs, nonetheless were willing to admit that the mighty emperors of China might perhaps take precedence.

A short distance down the Sarawak river lies Fort Margherita, named for Ranee Margaret, who was the wife of the second Brooke raja. Straddling a slight hill, this imposing, light-colored structure, which bears a faint resemblance to an ancient English castle, can be easily reached by small ferry boats at the not exorbitant rate of ten Malaysian cents.

Sarawak's second largest municipality is Sibu, some eighty miles from the coast at the head of the Rajang delta. Surrounded by jungle, it is the center of the state's highly profitable timber industry, including ironwood, bilian, and ebony. Some of these trees are so hard and close-grained that they adamantly refuse to float downstream for export. Another much exploited tree is the camphor laurel, a species of cinnamon tree, which produces a crystalline organic compound that is the essential ingredient of true Tiger Balm ointment, the panacea of Southeast Asia. It is one of the things that induced Chinese traders to come to Borneo; others are spices, including pepper, and edible birds' nests.

All in all, there are around Sibu about five hundred distinct varieties of trees, trees that are home for a vast army of primates —monkeys, gibbons, and orangutangs. A wanderer through the jungly forest may even be fortunate enough to glimpse both elephant and rhinoceros.

Sibu is also, I consider, a better place than Kuching to start out on a brief expedition to visit that phenomenon of Sarawak, the longhouse of the Dayaks. No doubt, if one had time enough, one would arrange a three- or four-day excursion upriver to some

place remote and relatively unvisited, but I did not have the time, so I contented myself with a longhouse in the environs of Sibu.

The longhouse is in fact a village in itself under one roof, always built, for the sake of convenience, on or very near a riverbank. Raised on stilts, it is entered by means of a "ladder," in fact the trunk of a tree notched and slanted from ground to door that, in the bad old days when men hunted heads, was drawn into the house at night for protection.

A longhouse may contain as many as a hundred private "rooms," one or more allotted to each family, and here the family eats, sleeps, and does its own cooking; but when not engaged in this, or working and playing outdoors, the family members spend their time on the wide public veranda of the longhouse onto which each room opens. Here, in this giant living room, villagers gossip as they smoke hand-rolled tobacco and drink tea, pound rice and do straw or wood handwork for their own use as well as for sale in the larger centers, and—perhaps most important of all—luxuriously enjoy their numerous annual village festivals or impromptu parties, eating and drinking, singing and dancing, and of course courting. At these festivals the Ibans who have not converted to drab Western-style clothing may be seen in their full ancient and barbaric splendor. The longhouse is a truly classless, egalitarian society, and a fascinating one at that. How I regretted that I had not allotted more time to this "anthropologist's dream," as a Dayak longhouse has been often described.

From Kuching to Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, is no great distance, and the Malaysian Airline System (MAS) offers daily flights between the two capitals. By comparison with Kuching, Kota Kinabalu is rather dull—a characterless conglomeration of brand-new many-storied concrete blocks along a narrow stretch of land. The reason, of course, is that it *is* brand-

new: a postwar city. The first settlement of any importance in Sabah was on Gaya Island, and after this was burnt in 1897 by Mat Salleh, a notorious pirate, Sandakan in the east became the capital of the state. During the Japanese occupation and the Allied liberation, virtually all the settlements of Sabah were either wholly or partially destroyed, including both Sandakan and the little trading post of Kota Kinabalu. The latter, in 1946, was designated the new capital largely because of the deep-water anchorage afforded by Gaya Bay. It was a wise choice, and Kota Kinabalu is a pleasant, prosperous place—if not quite what one expects of an island with so many historic and romantic associations as Borneo.

But it offers an endless variety of excursions in virtually all directions to the older, more traditional sights of Sabah. There is a road due east as far as Sandakan, there is one that heads south almost to the Indonesian frontier, another goes in a northeasterly direction to the tip of the island, while yet a fourth leads toward Brunei. There is also rail service between Kota Kinabalu and Tenom, so the visitor to Sabah really has very little excuse not to explore in depth what may well be called another "anthropologist's dream." And he will probably, like me, regret that he does not have more time to spend there.

The train will take him to Papar, the chief village of the Kadazan people, to whom Mount Kinabalu (the highest in Southeast Asia) is holy, for it is the final resting-place of the departed ancestors. In fact, the tribal name for it, Akinabalu, means "Sacred Place of the Dead." While still alive, the Kadazan are as elegant a people as you could hope to find anywhere, especially the young women (who are famous, incidentally, all over the country for their beauty). They usually wear a sort of black shift, elaborately decorated, with belts made of gold coins and delicately woven hats.

The train continues along the coast to Kimanis and there turns inland toward Beaufort and Tenom. Here the narrow-gauge tracks run along the steep gorge of the Padas river—an area chiefly inhabited by the Muruts, a primitive people who still do their hunting with blowguns. Their quarry now is game, not other men.

No doubt the most fascinating excursion to be made from Kota Kinabalu is to the northeast, to Tuaran and Kota Belud, both of which provide a weekly *tamu besar*, a market to which villagers in the vicinity bring whatever they have to sell in order to buy whatever they can afford. Early in the morning you see them headed toward the market along country paths, some astride ponies or buffaloes, most making use of the more economical shank's mare. Whether they wear simple Western clothes or the traditional dress of their people, they all walk or sit their mounts with an innate pride and grace that modern, citified, "civilized" man seems to have lost. The overloaded baskets dangling on their backs have no effect on their admirably upright carriage.

As for what is in these baskets, it turns out to be a very motley assortment indeed when spread out on the ground, hopefully to catch some buyer's eye: squawking chickens, caged birds, vegetables and fruits in unbelievable profusion, cigarettes obviously homemade, textiles and earthenware equally obviously homemade, even jewelry (most of it, of course, of the so-called costume variety). The visitor probably will not want to acquire a noisy, irate chicken, but he might well fall victim to some of the imaginatively designed textiles that may have taken days or even weeks to weave and dye.

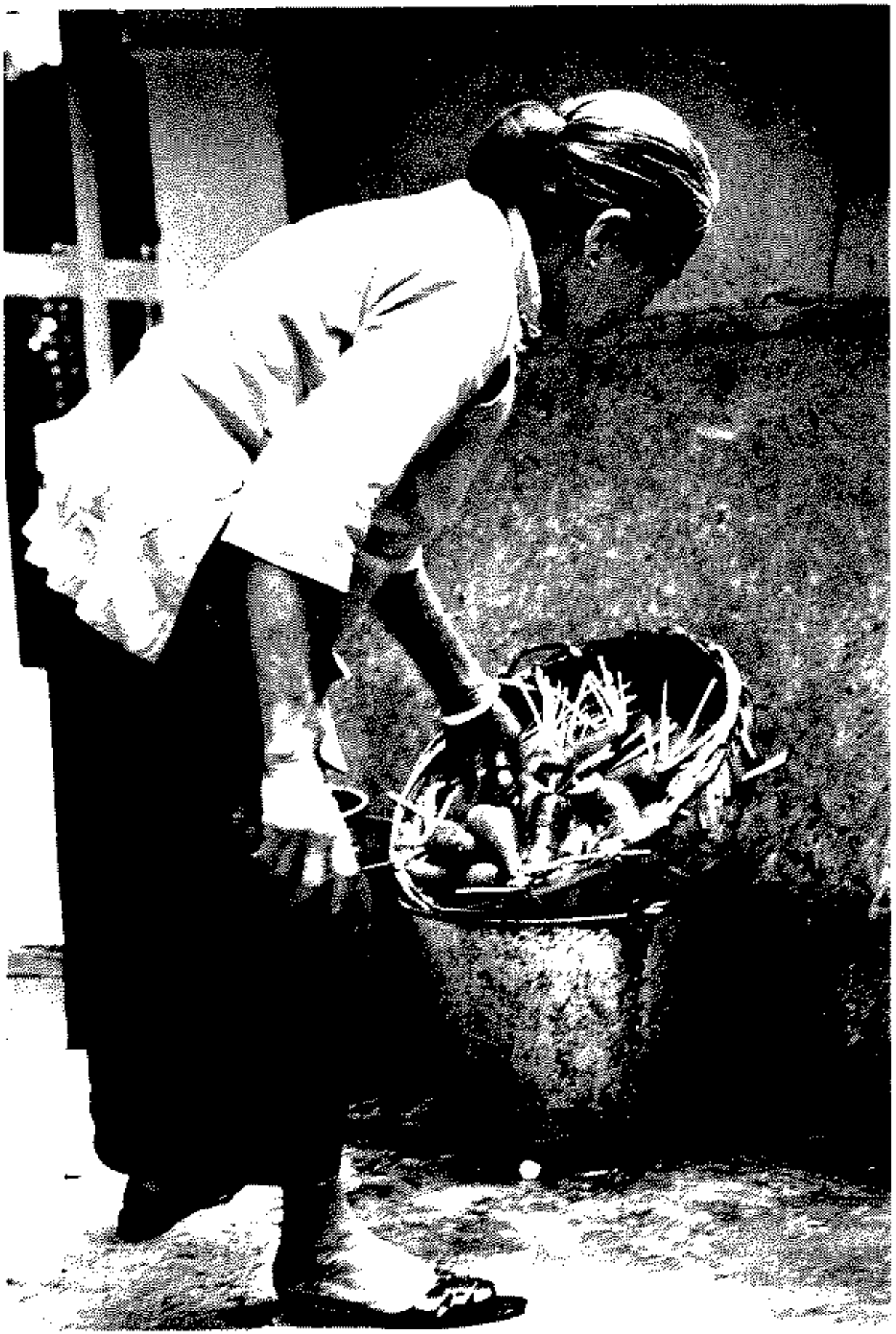
And the visitor will certainly want to catch the horserace provided by the lavishly dressed Bajaus on their small, wiry ponies. The Bajaus are as famous for their horsemanship as the

cowboys and gauchos of America. There is also usually a cockfight to be seen, and the squeamish need not hesitate, for Borneans do not use those razor-sharp metal spurs so familiar in other parts of the world where cockfighting is a popular entertainment.

Kota Belud provides one of the finest views of Mount Kinabalu—but only during the early morning hours, for long before noon its 13,000-foot summit is wrapped in heavy cloud cover. More ambitious folk may, at Kinabalu Park headquarters, make arrangements to climb the peak; the best time of year for that rather arduous expedition is between January and April, before the monsoon season.

Sandakan, on the far east coast, remains a major commercial center of the state, the two chief exports being timber and that Chinese delicacy, edible birds' nests. The latter are collected mostly at the Gomantong caves, some twenty miles out of town. Here at Sandakan, as at the other provincial towns, neighboring villagers make weekly incursions, buying and selling at the familiar market, exchanging news and gossip in their age-old dialects, living very much the same sort of life their ancestors have always led.

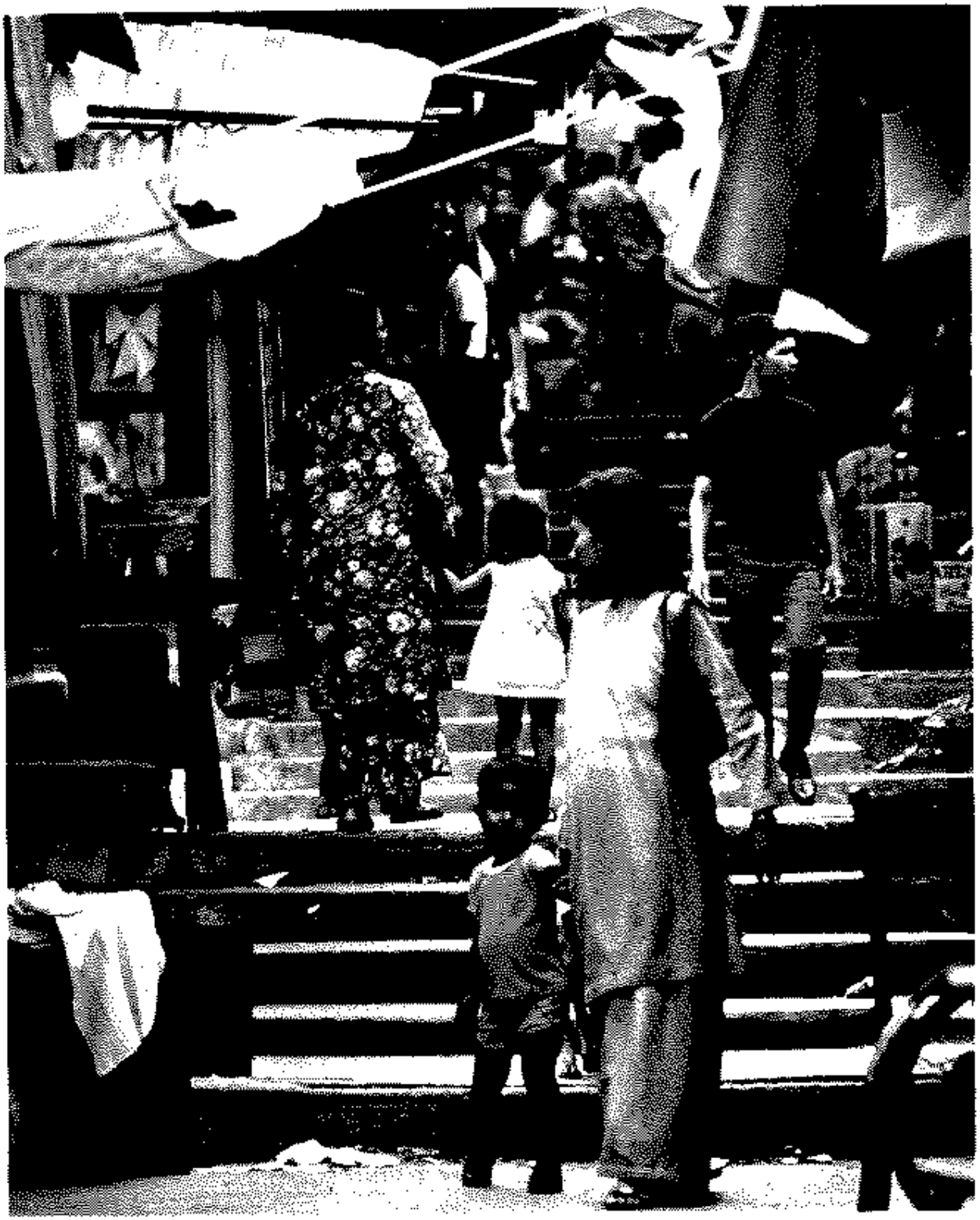
But how long, one wonders with a pang, can they continue to do so? The world will not stop for them, and their own country may not, for it too must keep pace with a frenzied, spinning century that, unlike the giant tops of the northeast, shows no sign of winding down. The time to visit Malaysia is today. Or perhaps yesterday.



45. Vegetables and fruit of all sorts thrive in the moist, temperate climate of the central highlands.

46 47. Rivers in the highlands are usually muddy. When they run clear, so people say, a disaster may be expected. *Opposite*, victims of such a disaster, a mother and son whose house has been washed away.

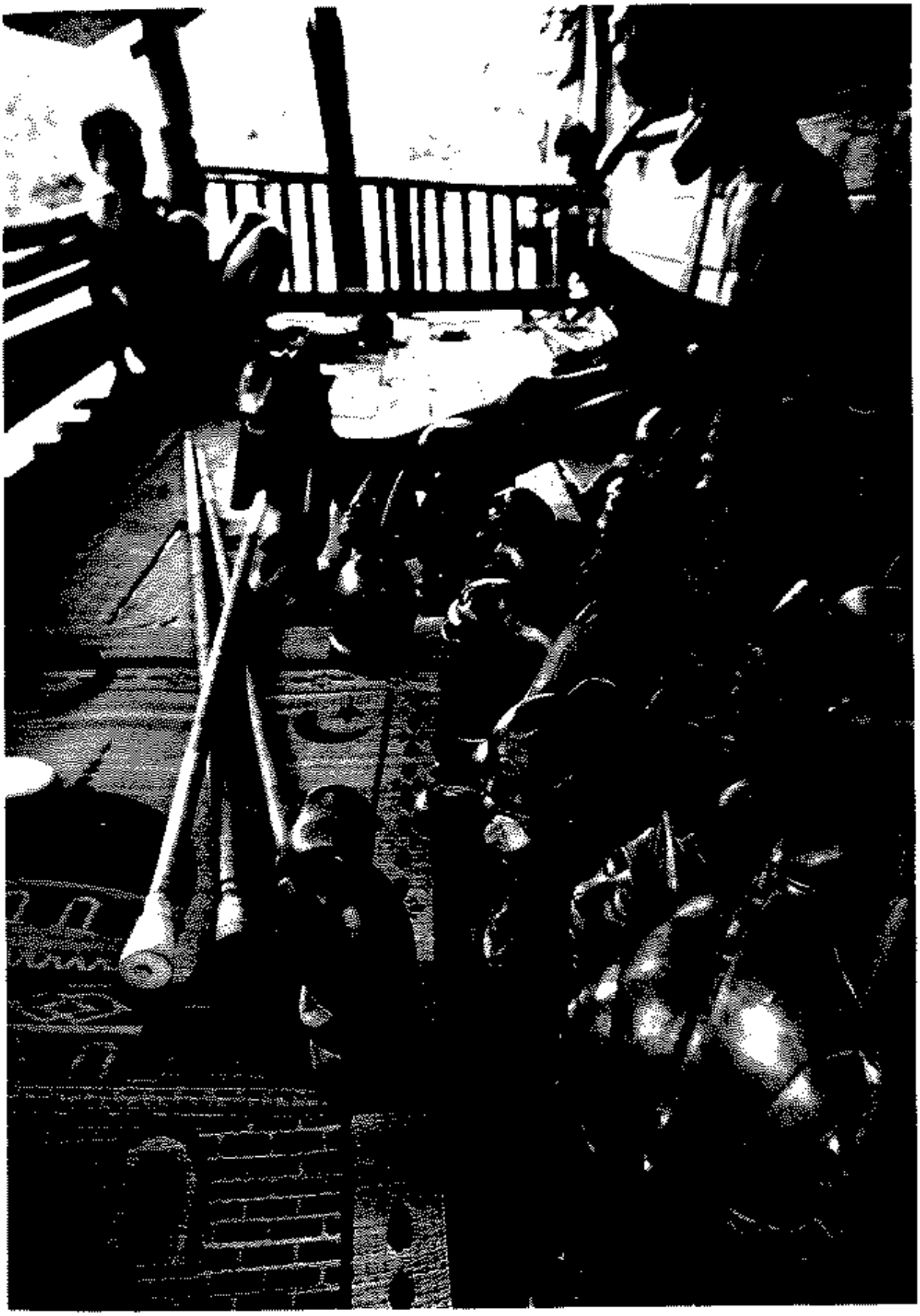
48. *Overleaf*, shoppers of diverse ▷ ethnic origins: the Malay woman in *kebaya*, the Chinese in *cheong-sam*, and the Indian in a sari.

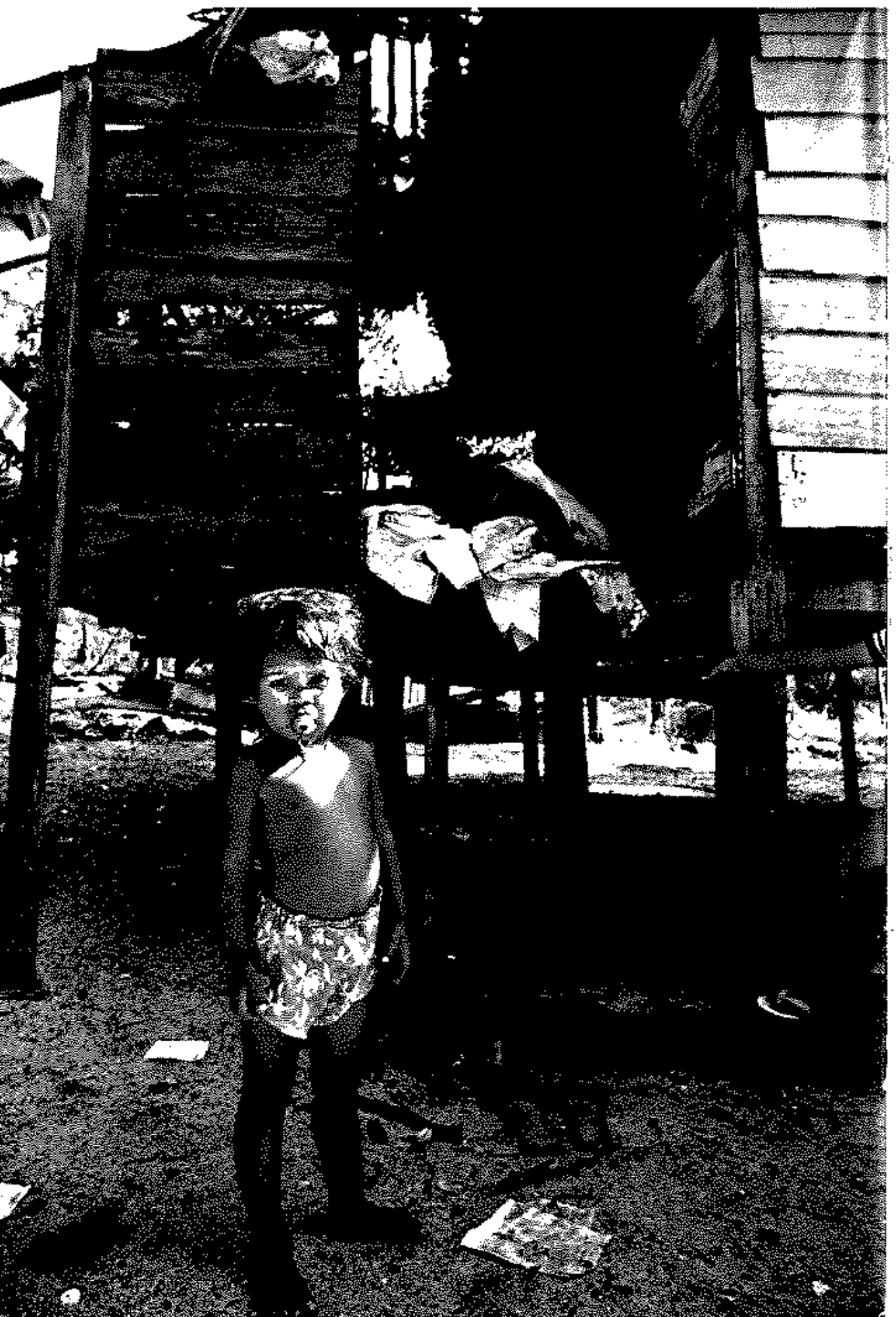


49–50. This struggling lizard, *opposite*, will be on someone's dinner table before long; its meat is considered a delicacy. *Above*, hundreds of small stalls line the steep streets of Kuala Lipis, a town in the central highlands.

51. *Overleaf*, two enduring features of ▷ Malaysian mosques are gilded roofs and arched doorways.

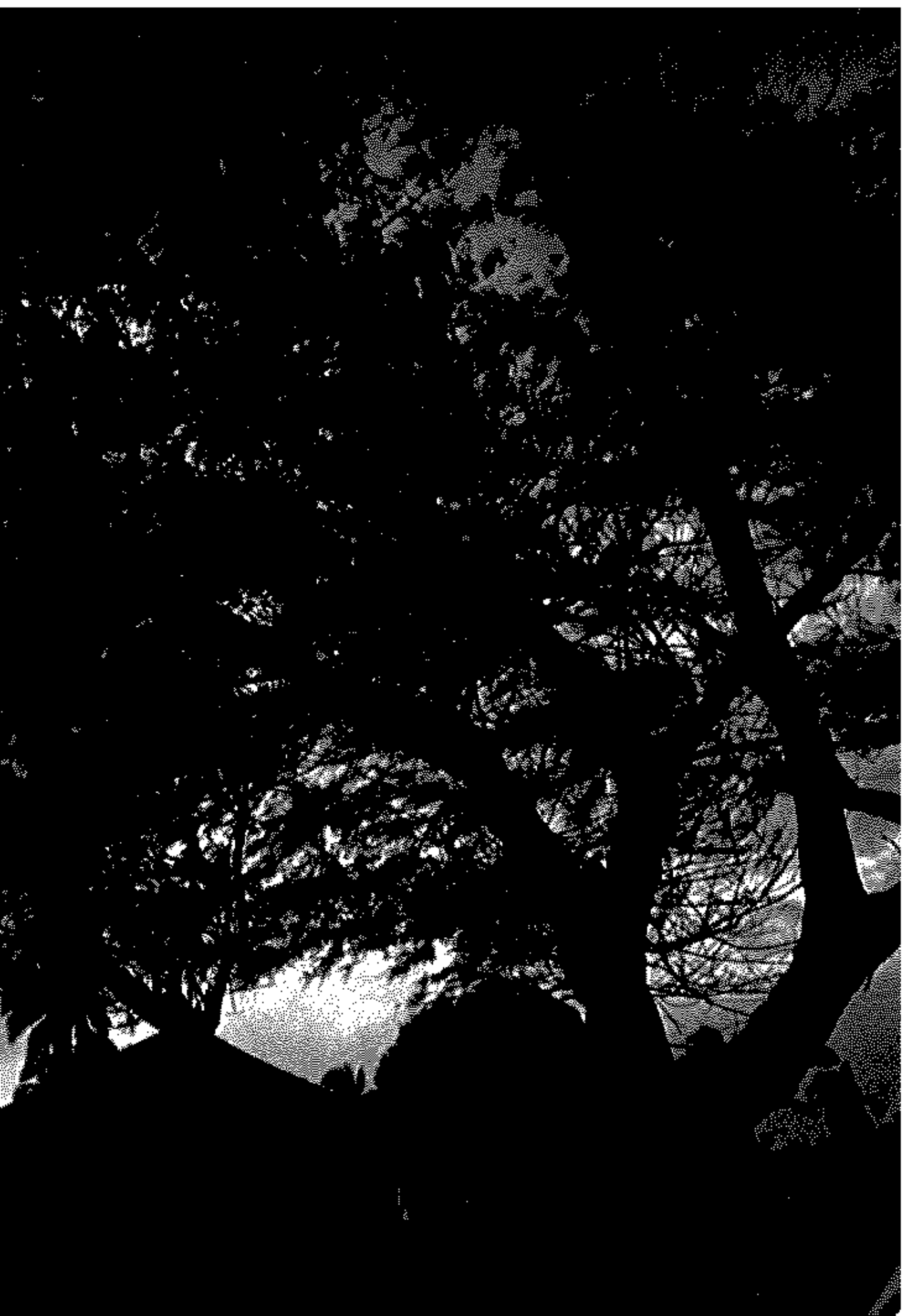
52–55. Although Malaysia's aborigines are by now acquainted with modern sophistication, they prefer their time-honored jungle way of life. The Orang Asli, *below right*, carve images of ghosts and spirits to frighten away demons; having accomplished their purpose, the artifacts are then offered for sale to visitors, *opposite*.





56. *Opposite*, even children born in the hot, humid climate of Malaysia are sometimes troubled by it. Then their faces and necks are dusted with powder.

57–58. Fruit and flowers are offered to the two deities enshrined in this cave temple near Ipoh, capital of the tin-producing state of Perak. *Overleaf*, sunset in an east-coast jungle.

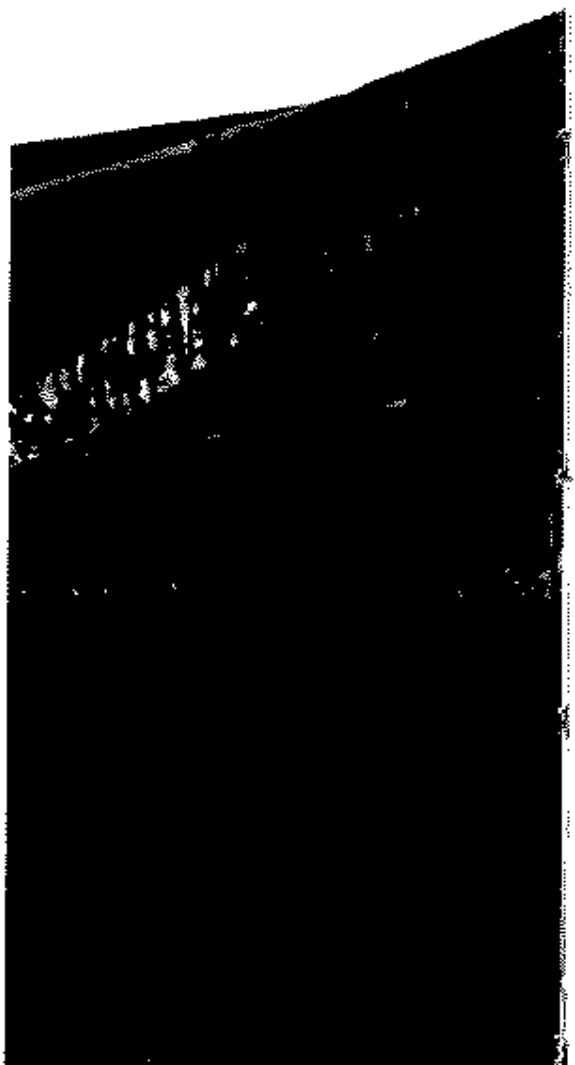


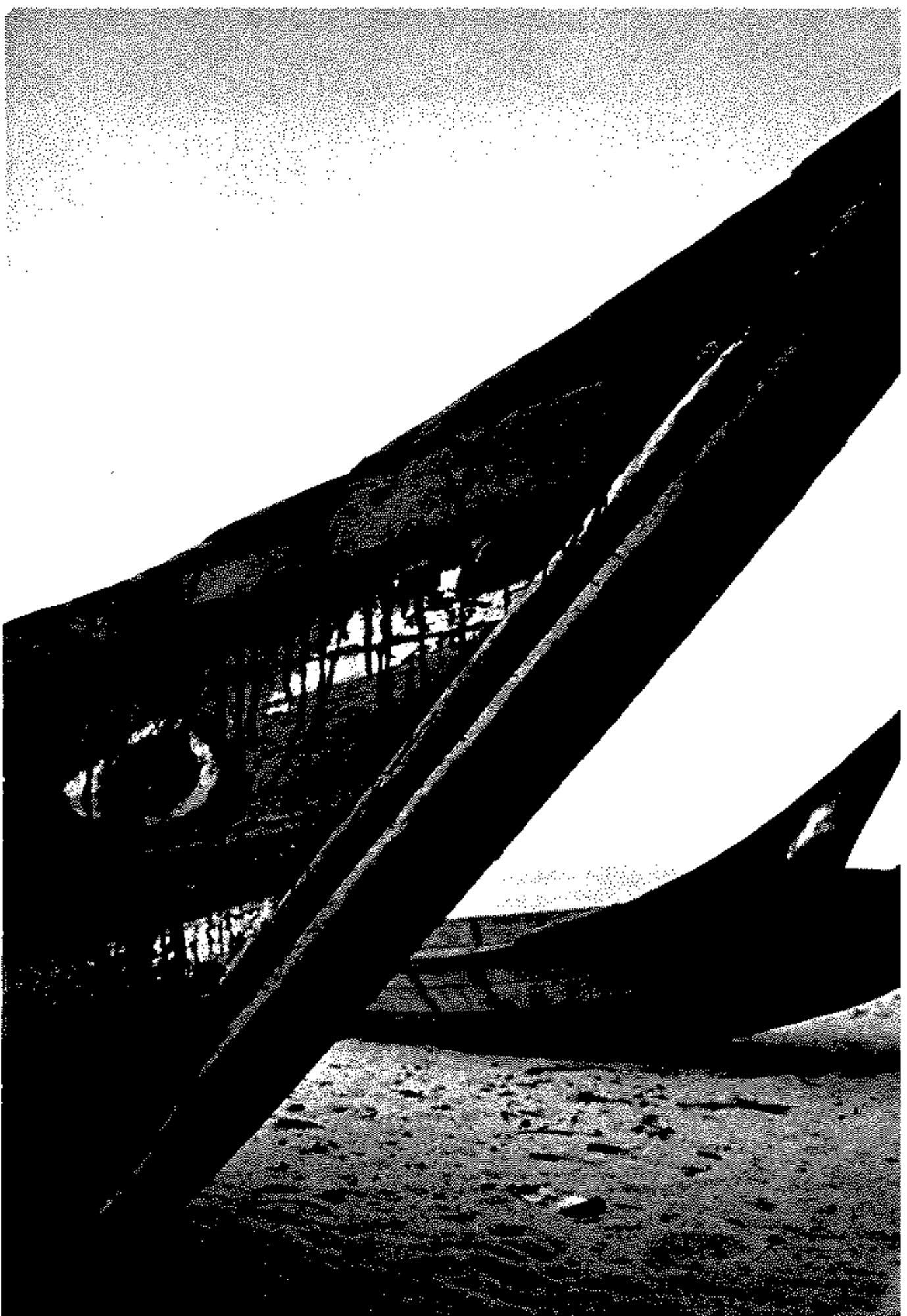
59. At the close of day, too late to go out in their boat, the fishermen *opposite* try their luck with a rod.

60. Traditionally, huts were roofed with banana or coconut leaves, but recently sheet metal has begun to be used.

62. Worn-out fishing boats lie abandoned on the beach.

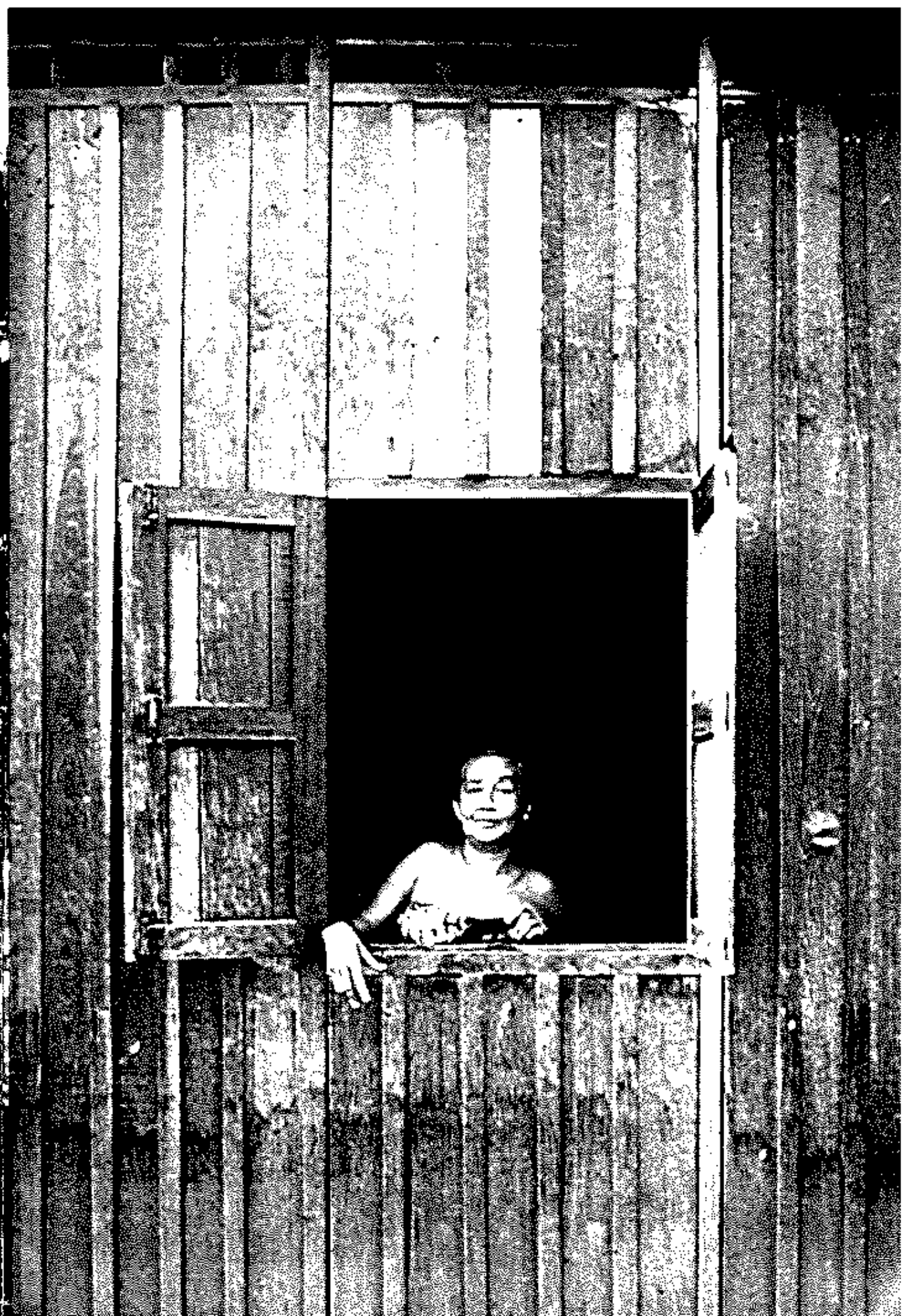
61. A village mother and son: her batik sarong is characteristic of country dress.

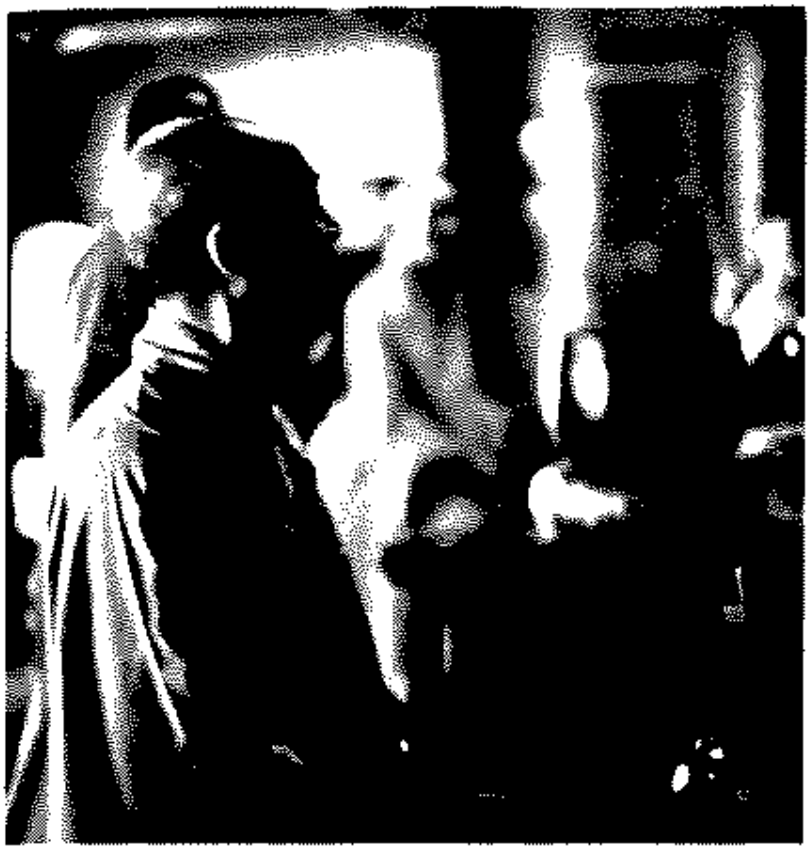




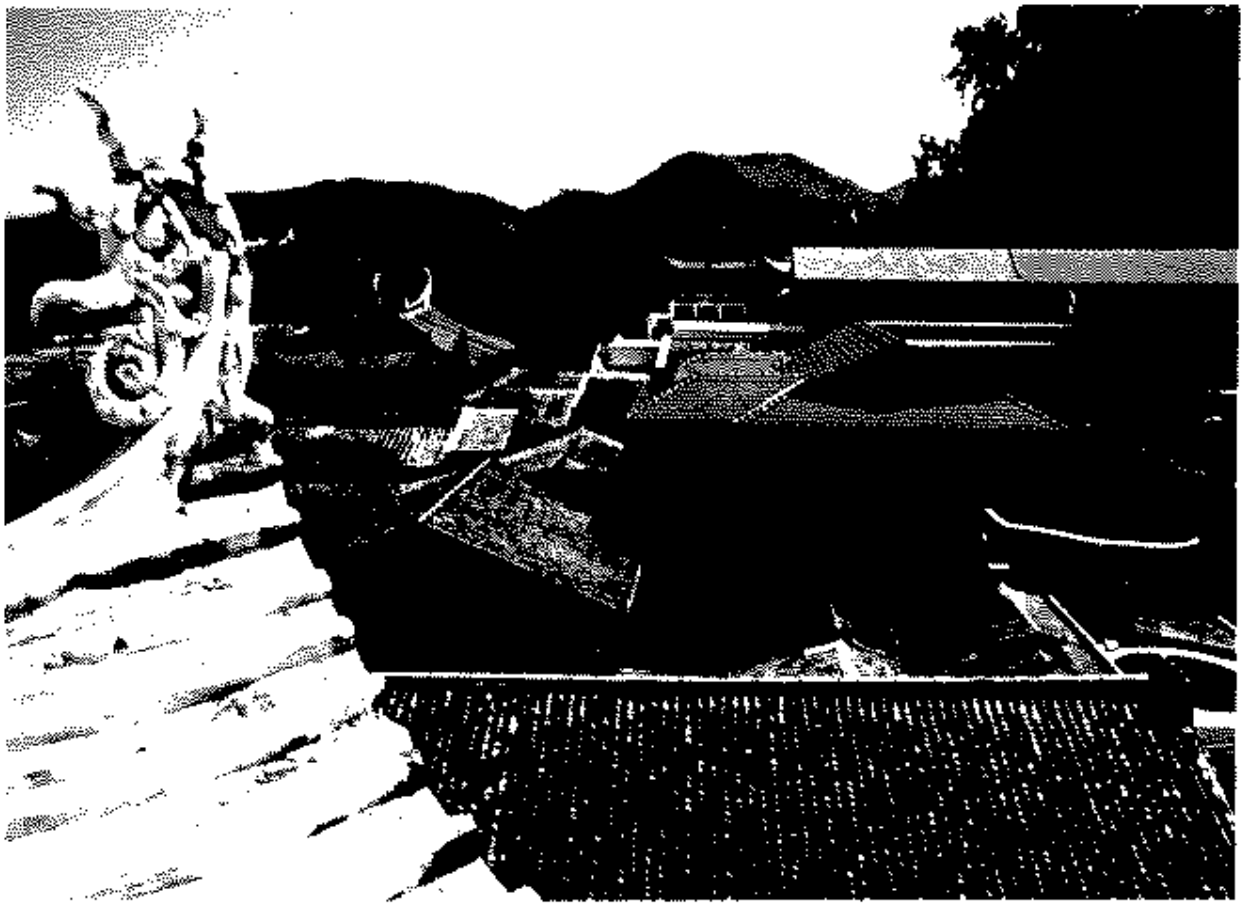
63. This young lady has just been presented with an unexpected gift of sweets, and makes no attempt to disguise her pleasure.

64. Floods are all too frequent in the central highlands. The discoloration on the wall of this house indicates the height to which the last flood rose.

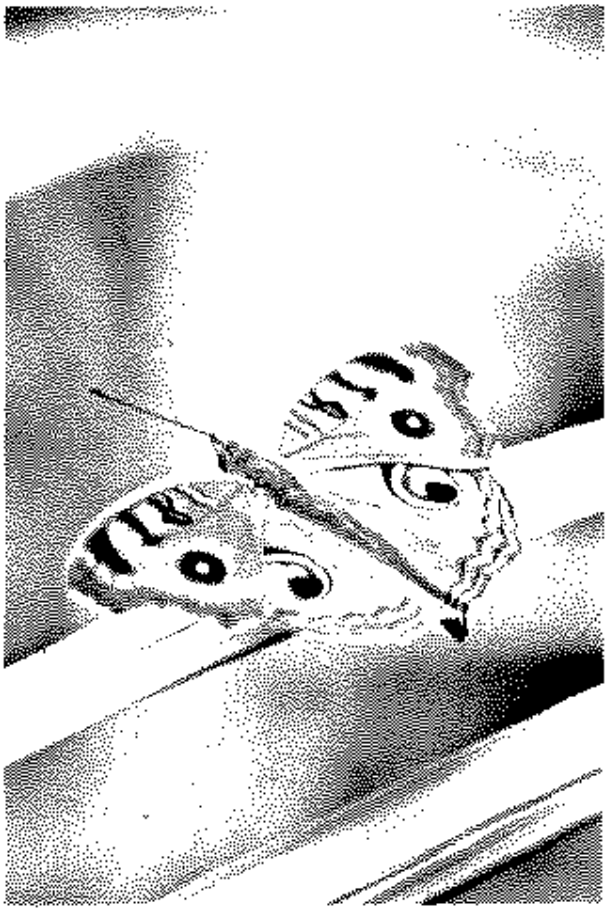


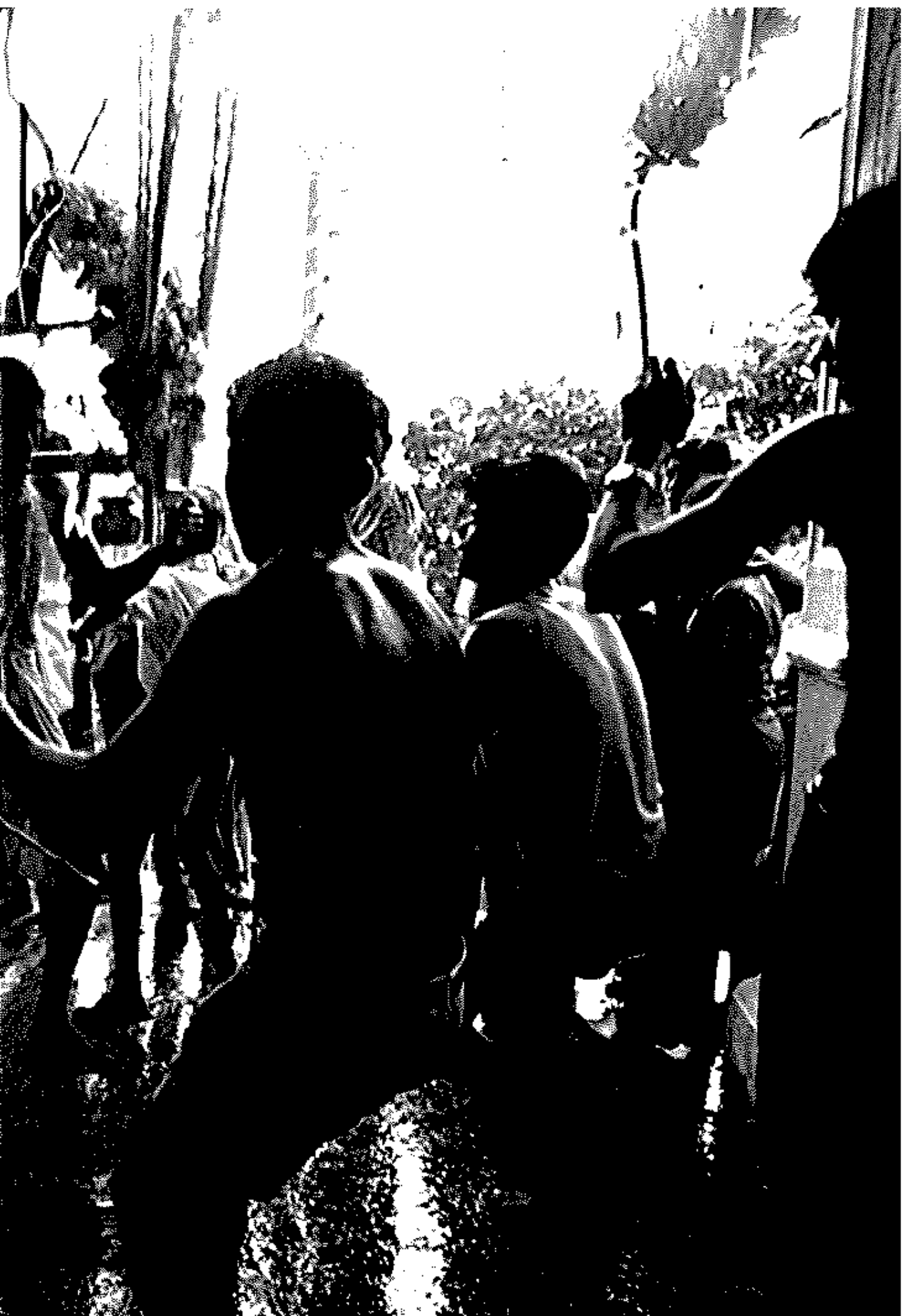


65–67. Although Islam is the state religion, the populous Chinese community observes the older Buddhist rites. *Opposite*, the handsome Lek Csi Kok pagoda of Penang; *below*, view from an upper story. 68. *Overleaf*, wherever possible, Malaysians surround their houses with trees and flowers. ▷

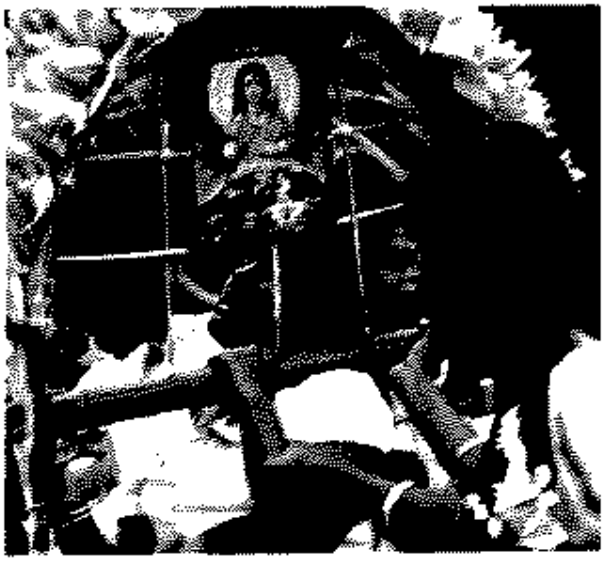


69–75. Life of all sorts abounds in a Malaysian garden: dragonflies, monkeys, snakes, coconuts for the taking, and an unbelievable profusion of bright, sweet-smelling blossoms.





76–81. Thaipusam, which usually occurs around the beginning of February, celebrates the birthday of Lord Subramaniam, one of the most powerful of Hindu deities. To do him honor, Malaysia's Hindu community turns out in full force to watch penitents undergo self-imposed torture in fulfillment of vows made to the god. Among the most astonishing of the world's religious festivals, it is not for the squeamish (see also *preceding page*).



82–87. Malaysia's chief shrine to Subramaniam is in the Batu caves, high on a hill outside Kuala Lumpur. Here, on the day of the festival, penitents come with skewers and hooks and *kavadi*—heavy and elaborately decorated wooden halters studded with nails that dig deep into the flesh. Once his ordeal is ended, the penitent repairs to another shrine for rest and medication.