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A GAMBLING STYLE OF GOVERNMENT

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The Establishment of the Chartered Company's Rule in Sabah, 1878–1915

IAN BLACK

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PREFACE

THE British North Borneo Chartered Company became the dominant power in Sabah—a traditional term for the north-eastern part of Borneo as well as the name of the modern Malaysian state—in 1881, by an Order in Council of Queen Victoria. The royal charter gave imperial legitimacy to the Company's founders, who had already acquired from the region's former rulers some territorial and administrative rights.

But many years were to pass, indeed more than half the Company's lifespan in Sabah of sixty years, before the Company would control all the territory and its people effectively. This work explores that faltering process of colonial occupation, and its consequences for the people of the area.

In consolidating their position in Sabah (termed 'North Borneo' by the Company) many factors hampered the new rulers—their own inadequate resources and the resistance of the territory to quick economic exploitation, the former political fragmentation of the region, the diversity of the territory's population, and not least the hostility aroused in the population by the Company's crude administrative policies. The Company's own political and financial problems and external relations have been discussed in this work only in so far as they affected its administration. Primarily the attempt here has been to create a history of Sabah under the Company, rather than a history of the Company itself.

To write about Sabah raises technical difficulties, however. It was, and remains, a country of considerable ethnic and linguistic diversity; the customs, economies and political histories of its people also varied greatly at the time of the Company's coming. Subsequently the impact of the Company

varied from community to community. For the most part the broad ethnic category-names used by the Company, such as 'Bajau' and 'Murut' have been employed here. Where the records specify 'Dusun' the preferred modern term 'Kadazan' has been substituted. This form of categorization has been adopted for simplicity's sake, and also because the sources rarely specify traditional group-names reliably. When dealing with particular communities their geographic locations have been indicated as clearly as possible.

In writing a coherent story, and reaching general conclusions, a detailed history of every community has not been possible. It is hoped that omission has not led to misrepresentation. Recently, interest has grown amongst Sabahans in researching their own history, particularly at the local level. This work is offered in the hope that it will stimulate that process. Local researchers will perhaps one day tell the story best.

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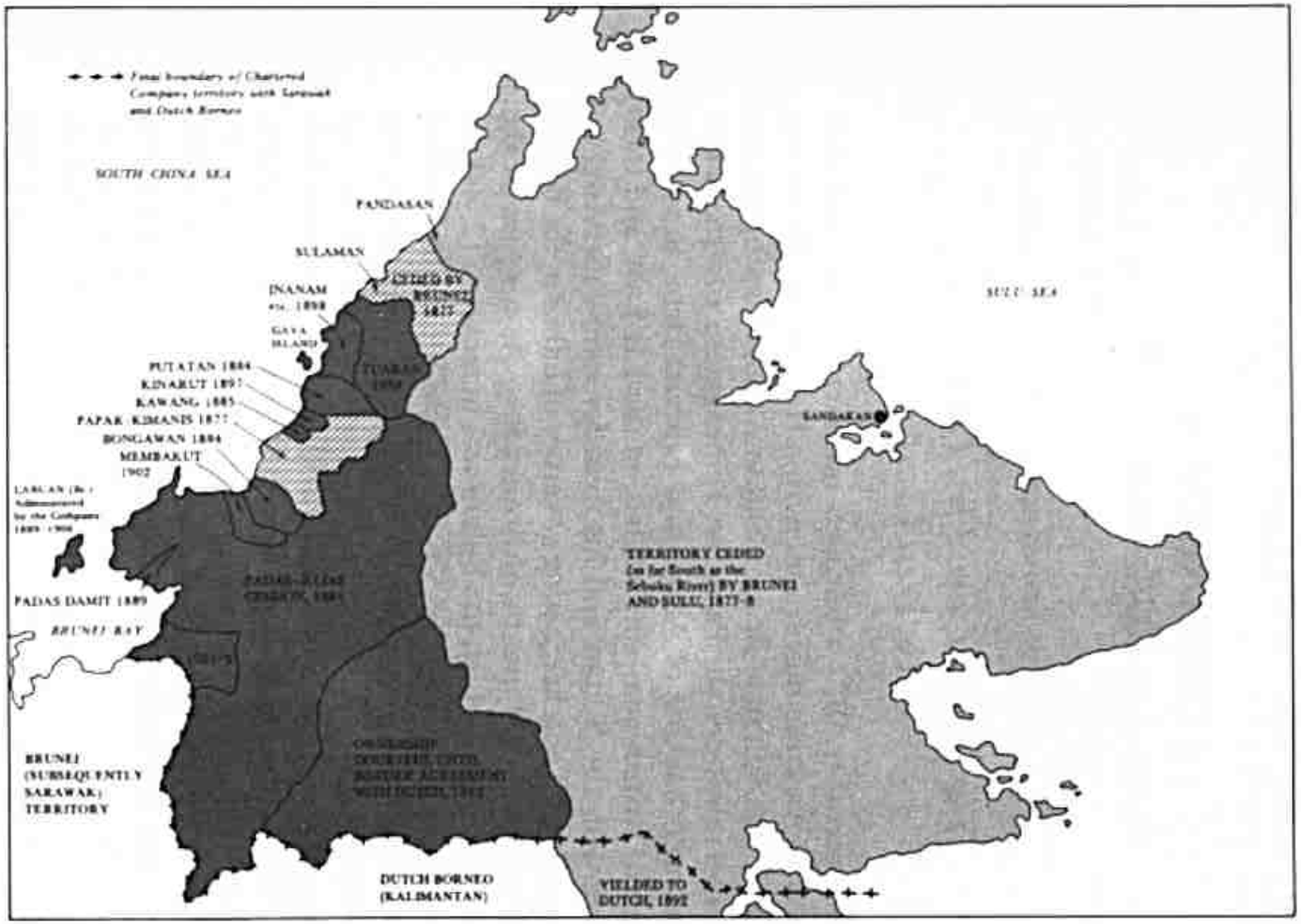
BEGINNINGS, 1878–1881

The Cessions, and First Contacts on the West Coast

On 29 December 1877 a business transaction was concluded between an Austrian businessman from Hong Kong, Baron von Overbeck, the Sultan of Brunei, Sultan Abdul Mumin, and one of his chief ministers, the Pengiran Temenggong. Overbeck had the financial backing of Alfred and Edward Dent, heads of a prominent British company trading in the Far East, and their dealings with the Sultan and his minister were supervised by William Hood Treacher, acting governor of Labuan, the British island colony at the mouth of Brunei Bay. As a result of the transaction, under which the Sultan was to receive $12,000 per year and his minister $3,000, Overbeck and the Dents became, in title, rulers of large sections of Sabah, the territory to the north-east of the Brunei capital.[1] The new rulers knew almost nothing about the lands they had acquired, or their new subjects. Nor, at this time, were they greatly interested in them. They were exploring the idea of forming a company to administer the territory, but for the time being the future of the country and its peoples remained undefined. While the Dents and Overbeck were conventionally respectable by the standards of their day, and, like most Europeans then, naively confident of the virtues of European imperialism, in Sabah they were speculative businessmen dabbling in colonial real estate, with little thought for the tenants.[2]

The peoples of Sabah who now passed under their authority



1 ACQUISITIONS OF TERRITORY IN SABAH BY THE CHARTERED COMPANY

(based on approximate watersheds of rivers named in cession documents)

Initial cessions shown shaded

were not, however, being deprived of effective traditional government. Ethnically, few of them were Brunei Malays, and in 1877 Brunei retained little effective authority over them. In earlier centuries the sultanate had been an important power in the South-East Asian archipelago, a wealthy centre of maritime trade in control of the whole of northern Borneo. By the nineteenth century Brunei was impoverished, a victim of European commercial competition, and racked by dissension within its ruling class. During the century the Brooke 'white rajas' of Sarawak had acquired much of Brunei's territory to the west of the capital, and it had only been a matter of time before the disabled Brunei court would be persuaded to relinquish its territories to the east.

In Malay style the territories now ceded to Overbeck and the Dents were perceived as water systems, and thus were denoted by river names. The River Papar, ceded by the Sultan, was dominated by a *de facto* chief in revolt against Brunei rule. The Benoni and the Kimanis, ceded by the Pengiran Temenggong with the Sultan's acquiescence, yielded a little poll-tax, but were thought to be worthless in terms of trade.[3] The Pengiran had already in 1865 ceded rights here to an American planting venture, which had proved unsuccessful and shortlived.[4] Further north, the Sultan also ceded the islands in Gaya Bay, at this time uninhabited except by passing fishermen and traders,[5] and the apparently grand prize of the whole of northern and eastern Sabah from the Sulaman to the Sebuku. Here Brunei had not exercised practical authority for many years, although the peoples from the Sulaman to Marudu Bay still expressed nominal allegiance to the sultanate. Beyond Marudu Bay, down the eastern coast of Sabah, the peoples did not even pay nominal allegiance, for here suzerainty was claimed, and occasionally exercised, by the Sultan of Sulu.

Whether the Sulu claim to territory in Sabah was valid or not, a matter disputed by Brunei, and in recent years raised by the Philippines' claim to Sabah,[6] at this time Sulu certainly had more dealings with the peoples of the east coast and its rivers than did Brunei. Here many communities acknowledged the

sovereignty of the Sulu sultan, and were sporadically, and inequitably, required to pay revenue. But Sulu too was harassed by European pressure, from the Spanish government of the Philippines, and in day-to-day terms Sulu provided no better administration on the east coast of Sabah than Brunei on the west. Following the Brunei cessions, Overbeck sailed from Brunei to Sulu to acquire the rights in Sabah claimed by the Sulu sultanate. They were duly ceded for $5,000 but possibly for different motives than those of the Brunei sultanate. It is possible that the Sultan of Sulu, fearing imminent Spanish conquest, wished to involve Overbeck, the Dents, and, through Treacher, the British government, in his predicament. If the Spanish took command of his territory, he was considering moving to Sabah to live, and he may have hoped that here a morsel of his sovereignty could be preserved. His problem was to remove his holdings in Sabah from any Spanish claim, as part of Sulu territory, while ensuring that they were recoverable later from Overbeck and the Dents. From his dilemma, perhaps, arose the ambiguities of phrasing in the cession documents (on the interpretation of which the modern Philippines' claim to Sabah was built), the contradictory opinions about the cession he offered the Spanish and the British, and the continued assertion of his authority in Sabah, once the Dents had placed an agent at Sandakan, a matter which will be noticed later in this chapter.

Despite the European scramble for colonies in the late nineteenth century, the Dents and Overbeck were to be disappointed by the low level of enthusiasm their acquisitions in Sabah produced. They touted Sabah as a promising site for estate agriculture, for development as an entrepôt which would rival Singapore or Batavia, and for mineral exploitation, but they managed only to evoke limited interest in Britain. In London, in 1881, a company, the British North Borneo Chartered Company (referred to in this work as 'the Company') was to be established to govern the territories ceded in Sabah, redubbed 'North Borneo'. The leading figure in the Company was to be Alfred Dent, Overbeck having withdrawn

entirely from the venture. Treacher, who had supervised the original cessions, would become the Company's first governor. Meanwhile, there had been some kind of European administration in Sabah since 1878, when three 'residents' had been landed at, it was hoped, appropriate points on the coast. Of the three, only William Pryer, at Sandakan, was to be successful in developing a thriving base for trade and government, and his early career there will be examined later. On the west coast, William Pretyman was installed on the Tempasuk, and H. L. Leicester on the Papar, where they encountered some popular opposition. It was opposition not merely to them as aliens, but was also, significantly, opposition to them as the inheritors of a previously disliked Brunei overlordship.

The Tempasuk region had once been the property of the Raja Muda Hassim,[7] but he had found it as difficult to control as his lands at the western extremity of the Brunei domain, in Sarawak. In contrast to Sarawak, however, where Brooke had taken command, no one took control of the north-west of Sabah, after British naval action in the mid-century against the 'pirates' of the region, in which the maritime warrior leader Serif Usman had been killed and his headquarters in Marudu Bay destroyed. Perceptively, a British naval officer of the period wrote:[8]

> At Maludu Bay . . . the destruction of Seriff Housman has deprived the people of that region of the only energetic ruler who could have afforded protection to European traders. The natural feeling of enmity toward the nation which has punished them is likely to continue for some time. . . .

The region had descended into the virtual anarchy Pretyman discovered when he arrived in 1878 to uphold the rights of the new owners.[9] He was advised, by a Bajau chief, that his safety could not be guaranteed, for the Bajau peoples of the region were unaccountable to their chiefs, and murder and theft were common. The chief had given up the attempt to control the Bajaus, and another, Datu Rumbangang, was on the point of doing so. The situation was further complicated by the presence

of an Illanun community, coexisting with the Bajaus in a state of armed truce. The non-Muslim Kadazan peoples of the area also lived independently of the Muslim Bajau and Illanun chiefs. Pretyman was told[10] that the Kadazans had 'never paid, and never will pay taxes', although some months later they did offer to pay Pretyman the taxes—10 *gantang* of rice per head—which they said they had once paid to the Bajau chiefs. Large-scale clashes between the Kadazans and the Muslim peoples seem to have been rare, the basic reason probably being the economic interdependence of the two groups. The Muslim peoples were not, primarily, agriculturists, and they rarely assured for themselves adequate food supplies, while the Kadazans were willing to exchange their rice for fish, salt, cloth, pottery and brassware, available only from the Bajaus and Illanuns who controlled the river mouths and coastal trade. But the Kadazans, less martially oriented than their Muslim neighbours, had developed an effective means of self-protection. In describing events on the river Tuaran some years earlier Spenser St. John, a European writer, illustrates (referring to the Kadazans as 'Ida'an'):[11]

> [The Illanuns] . . . who occupy the mouth of the Tampasuk, were formerly very powerful on this coast; their own oppressive conduct turned the people of the interior against them, and at Tawarren they were driven out. They were accused of stealing the children of the Ida'an. I say driven out—I should rather have said teased out. No people in this country can cope with the Lanun in battle so the Ida'an kept hovering around their villages to cut off stragglers. At last, no man could leave the houses even to fetch firewood, unless accompanied by a strong armed party, which interfered so much with their piratical pursuits that they at last abandoned the Tawarren. . . .

In the Tempasuk district a similar process had occurred, with the Kadazans doggedly repaying crimes of murder and theft committed against them. Pretyman was told, by both sides, of a mass of complaints and disputes about theft and violence, some of the cases going back many years.

During his first months Pretyman was unable to win trust or

respect, but when it occurred to some groups that his authority, backed—they imagined—by British naval power, might be useful, he began to win supporters, and in this way he won the co-operation of the Illanuns, the Kadazans, and some Bajaus. He established a court, assisted by co-operative chiefs and headmen, picked from both sides in cases of disputes between groups, and also a *tamu* (periodical market). In a district where the population was divided, indeed fragmented, he found it possible to insinuate his authority by a judicious balancing of rival interests, a gambit that was to become familiar in the subsequent history of Company rule in Sabah.

But primarily Pretyman's authority in the Tempasuk was established by force. In September 1878 he was challenged by Datu Linte, a Bajau chief, who resented alien interference in what he claimed was Bajau country. The two leading Bajau chiefs, Datus Temenggong and Rumbangang, acquiesced in Pretyman's presence, but he was advised by an Illanun chief that Linte's challenge was popularly viewed as a general test of strength. The Illanuns were ready to fight on Pretyman's side. Pretyman hastened to Labuan, where he persuaded the British colonial authorities to put out a warrant for Linte's arrest on a charge of piracy, returned to the Tempasuk with a borrowed force of Labuan police, and confronted Linte. After a brief struggle Linte was arrested, and immediately the other chiefs and headmen of the district hurried to express their loyalty to their new ruler. The Sultan of Brunei, at the instigation of Pretyman, later issued a proclamation reiterating his grant of rights to the Europeans. The unfortunate Linte was tried in Brunei, having been handed over by the Labuan authorities, and executed by strangling.

Following this trial of strength Pretyman found his position more secure, and made some progress in enforcing his authority through his court. But his success did not survive his departure, after recurrent bouts of fever, in January 1880. He left behind Peltzer, a Belgian charged with investigating Sabah's agricultural prospects, and Witti, an Austrian who, although appointed by Pretyman to supervise the Tempasuk, longed to explore

the as yet unmapped interior. Witti fell out with Peltzer, who quit Sabah, and then himself abandoned his post to begin a remarkable series of explorations which would lead to his disappearance and presumed death, probably by murder.[12] Without Pretyman's presence the simmering feuds and hostilities of the district revived, and when the Company was officially established in 1881 it was decided not to persevere with a station on the Tempasuk. The possibilities for trade there were considered meagre, although Pretyman had gathered stories of the district as once a significant trade centre, and had noted evidence of substantial Chinese settlement in earlier years. The tax yield too fell far below the costs of maintaining a European officer. Accordingly the Tempasuk, after its pioneer involvement with Company rule in Sabah, was subsequently left to its own devices, scarcely to be visited again by a Company officer for twenty years.

Southward, on the Papar, the first European residents also encountered hostility, though the Papar was both better governed and more prosperous than the Tempasuk.[13] The district produced surpluses of padi and sago, which together with coconuts, animal hides and jungle produce were traded for salt, cloth, iron, and brassware. The population was predominantly Kadazan and devoted to agriculture, but Kampong Papar itself, about twenty houses, was inhabited by Bajaus and Brunei Malays. The chief of the district was a Bajau, Datu Amir Bahar, who some years earlier had led an insurrection against the Brunei pengiran who formerly ruled there, and driven him out. The pengiran had sold his rights in the district to the Sultan, who now had ceded them to Overbeck and the Dents, leaving them to deal with the rebel.[14] The Datu, who discreetly withdrew from the Papar when the district passed into European hands, appears to have been generally well accepted, collecting moderate taxes, settling disputes, and holding a fortnightly *tamu* which communities from the interior attended. However, his authority had not been absolute. The Kadazans, as well as being numerically in the vast majority, were prosperous and had probably been subject to the Datu's authority

as much by consent, and convenience, as by force. One of their headmen, Orang Kaya Dugassa, a man of wealth and forceful character, also had a position of some influence over both Kadazan and Muslim peoples, although his own people acknowledged his leadership grudgingly. A Kadazan headman who became overbearing and disrespectful of communal custom, however rich or powerful, forfeited respect.

The first representative of the Europeans, H. L. Leicester, seems to have made little impression. He was replaced in August 1879 by A. H. Everett,[15] who had come from the Sarawak service and was eager to inject some Brooke-style vitality into the new venture in Sabah. He castigated Leicester for his desultory collection of poll-tax and customs dues, his casual attempts at administering justice (he had heard some cases but adjourned most without judgement) and his construction of a government house which was highly inflammable, impossible to defend against attack, and sinking slowly into the river. Everett went about his task with vigour. He insisted on the payment of customs dues and poll-tax, encouraging the chiefs and headmen to collect the latter by paying a 10 per cent commission. He also re-established a court and plunged into the complex disputes which had bored Leicester. Inevitably he thus antagonized the former leaders of the district. Orang Kaya Dugassa was the first to baulk, objecting to a judgement Everett made against him in his absence and the arrest of one of his followers suspected of cattle-stealing. He began building a stockade up-river, but capitulated when Everett threatened to bring down a force of Tempasuk Illanuns against him. Everett thus heralded a tactic the Company would frequently employ to control unruly subjects—playing on popular fears of the warrior communities of Borneo. Most notably in future years Sarawak Ibans were often to be used in Sabah to stifle resistance to Company authority.

Meanwhile, the former Bajau chief, Datu Amir Bahar, had returned to the river, and late in 1879 Everett set out to win the loyalty of the Orang Kaya and of the Datu by paying them stipends, and setting them to unravel the more complicated

court cases. But the Datu was not happy as an underling on the river he had once wrested from Brunei control by force, and with popular support. In April 1880 he refused to pay the customs dues introduced by Everett and methodically collected by a Eurasian bookkeeper. His Bajau followers gathered to his aid, fortifying his house which faced Everett's across the river. The Kadazans of the neighbourhood evacuated their houses and hesitated to declare for either side, until the Datu forced the issue by demanding their poll-tax, which most paid. Everett took the next initiative in the test of wills by issuing an ultimatum demanding that the Datu quit the river within five days, and by letting it be known that he had sent to Labuan and Brunei for help. The five days passed in an atmosphere of mounting tension. On the final night Everett committed his fears to his diary, castigating his superiors for failing to garrison the territory adequately—it was, he wrote, a 'gambling style of government'.[16] He would have been shocked to know how apposite a description of Company rule in Sabah this would remain for the next twenty years.

But in the morning it was the Datu's nerve which failed. He laid down his arms, and with his followers retreated to the neighbouring, but still unceded, Pangalat district. It was a prudent move, for Treacher was about to arrive in a British warship. The Sultan, however, wrote that he failed to see why he should be troubled with affairs in the ceded territories, an attitude which infuriated Everett:[17]

> The fact that the Sultan has leased (for a sum enormously above their present value) certain districts as being under his control, whereas they are by no means controlled by him, would seem to offer a fair pretext for an entire revision of the lease of the districts on the West Coast,

and subsequently Everett went to Brunei to renegotiate the cession. The Sultan's yearly payments were cut from $12,000 to $5,000 and the Pengiran Temenggong's from $3,000 to $2,500. The Sultan also disposed of Datu Amir Bahar by making a gift to the Company of the river where the Datu was sheltering.

This act irritated another possessor of rights in this river, Pengiran Abdul Rauf, but he subsequently agreed to surrender his rights for $300 annually.[18] This round of deals was completed when the Datu agreed to abstain from interference in the new rulers' affairs, in return for $20 a month. With the Datu gone the Papar population hastened to acknowledge Everett's authority, voluntarily offering poll-tax. But Everett was tiring of presiding over a fractious population in a district which, like the Tempasuk, seemed to promise nothing of major economic importance, and, in London, Alfred Dent was dismayed by the reports from Papar. Dreaming of Sabah as harnessed to world trade he did not wish his pioneer officers to get bogged down in local administration, 'arranging the petty jealousies of the rival chiefs'.[19] Accordingly, Papar as the site for a European resident was, like the Tempasuk, soon to be abandoned. The Company, before it was officially chartered, had begun to retreat from the complexities and expense of practical government in Sabah.

Pioneer Administration on the East Coast

Across Sabah on the east coast William Pryer had been landed in Sandakan Bay in February 1878,[20] together with two Eurasian assistants, ten Chinese labourers, and a West Indian servant. Pryer was to have more success than the pioneers on the west coast, effectively creating in Sandakan a minor colonial entrepôt port. He was also to prove a popular administrator, displaying a genuine regard for the welfare of the peoples he governed. It is ironic, therefore, that as Sandakan developed it would increasingly turn its back on the Sabahan hinterland, absorbing itself in trade and ignoring questions of good government in the territory at large. Pryer was to make Sandakan his home until 1899, and in later years would become critical of the Company's inadequacies. In 1878, however, he was still enthusiastic not only about Sabah's economic potential but also the implications of the orders he had been given to '. . . cultivate friendly relations'[21] with the native authorities and with the people. His enthusiasm was ingenuous, and his feelings

for the people somewhat sentimental, but the former quality helped him to establish himself as a man of authority before a demoralized people, and the latter to do this with some sensitivity.

The east coast at this time was far from peaceful. Conditions were unstable, and life precarious. Sulu had maintained some authority on the coast but it was only spasmodically effective.[22] Preoccupied with her battle with Spain, and soon to succumb, the sultanate did not have the power to control her nominal holdings in Sabah. Sulu officials, who were themselves also traders, tended merely to exploit the indigenous population on forays along the coast and up the rivers. Other traders did the same, falsely claiming the sanction of the Sultan. All the traders regularly suffered humiliation at the hands of those bold enough to challenge them, notably the pirates of the coast and islands, but also on occasion the more daring peoples of the interior. Pryer's accomplishment in taking command of this situation was remarkable.

In 1878, the population of Sandakan Bay lived in three villages, two on the southern side, discreetly hidden behind the mangroves which fringed in an almost unbroken line the wide expanse of water.[23] They were Bajau communities, but the intercourse with Sulu, the position of Sandakan as the chief trading centre on the north-east coast, and the large number of slaves produced a population of some diversity. The actual number of Bajaus may have been quite small—Pryer noted, without detail: '. . . nearly all the people here are slaves'.[24] The head of the Sandakan Bajaus, referred to as Tuan Imam, himself reflected the complex nature of the communities. Of Bugis birth, he had been captured as a child by Sulus. Finding favour at the Sulu court, he was sent to Sandakan, there consolidating his position by marrying a well-born Bajau woman. Mohamed Ashgari, the chief of the district until the arrival of Pryer, was a Sulu, and he and a number of Sulu traders maintained some followers in the bay. They were not necessarily Sulu—Banjer, his servant, was as his name implied, from Banjarmasin. Captured by Illanun pirates he had been

sold to the Sulu sultan and later became musician to a Sulu noble, Datu Harun ar'Rashid. With the Datu, who at one time had been governor of the Sulu possessions in Sabah, he had come to Sandakan. No non-Muslim indigenes lived in the bay. On the Segaliud, however, a river flowing into the bay, lived a small community of Orang Sungei, known as Buludupis. As on most of the east-coast rivers the Orang Sungei—non-Malay peoples who had adopted Islam—separated the coastal Malayo-Muslims and the non-Muslim peoples of the interior. At this time the Chinese population was meagre, three Chinese traders living in the bay, the only place on the coast where Chinese shops were to be found.

The livelihood of the bay was founded on trade. The coastal Muslim people were not primarily agriculturists, depending on trade even for basic foodstuffs. The Orang Sungei were not agriculturists either, like the Muslims planting a few crops, such as sweet potatoes, tapioca, sugar-cane, and maize, and collecting coconuts and other fruit from their trees, but failing to provide for themselves an adequate supply of the staple rice. Some hill padi was grown, but on the east coast there were no large wet-padi-growing communities as on the west. The hilly terrain and poor soil largely precluded the production of wet padi, and the insecurity of life, with no group safe to devote themselves to the cycles of cultivation, and to protect their harvest, also limited the production of hill padi. On first arriving in the bay, Pryer thought one of the Bajau villages looked quite prosperous, with plantations of hill padi, sugar-cane, maize, and a variety of vegetables. Up the Segaliud, however, he found the Buludupi village 'a miserable place' where 'the people are half-starved most of the time, one or two of those we saw were mere skeletons and most of them move about in a listless, indifferent sort of way'.[25] But even the Bajaus rapidly ran short of food, and hunger afflicted the whole bay. Sulu could provide rice for export, but the chaotic conditions there, at least in this period, prevented adequate supplies. Enche Brahim:[26] 'says everything is upside down in Sulu, plenty of rice but nothing to buy it with, no exports going out of the

country, murders and thefts of frequent occurrence everywhere. . . .' As well, the pirates of the coast and islands interrupted regular trade. The son of Tuan Imam reported that he had been attacked three times in five months, and the traders were accustomed to running for the bay under cover of darkness. The result was that rice supplies were highly priced. Pryer himself, on occasion, was to go hungry until regular supplies were assured, learning how to fish, and setting a watch on his settlement's solitary hen for the one egg faithfully produced each day.[27]

In more settled conditions, Sandakan Bay could have been quite prosperous, and indeed a few traders did make a comfortable livelihood. Pryer visited Nakoda Maya 'apparently the richest man in the harbour', and was much impressed with his large house, hung with scarlet, the floors matted and strewn with silk cushions:[28]

> . . . as I noticed the light but handsome arrangements of the room, the style in which things were done, the cleanliness of everything, the grace and polished manners of the guests all betokening civilisation . . . I could not but think more favourably of Mahommedanism which had been the cause of it all. . . .

But Pryer's judgement was over-hasty. The Nakoda died shortly after, and Pryer found himself summoned in the middle of the night to stop the Nakoda's brother from slipping away from Sandakan with all his wealth, and his debts unpaid. From his creditors, Pryer learned that the Nakoda and his wife had murdered four traders who had pressed for payment.

The reason for Sandakan's potential prosperity lay in the jungle produce, such as gutta-percha, camphor, or rattan, which could be bartered for food, cloth, salt, or treasure in the form of brass and silverware, and in the especially valuable products of the district, edible birds' nests and seed pearls. Sulu had remained anxious to collect the Sultan's share of the harvest of birds' nests and seed pearls, and this had been one reason for her enduring presence in the bay while elsewhere on the coast her authority had become tenuous. In the last few

years, however, Sulu must have reaped little from either source. The owners of the birds' nests caves defied the Sultan, and the insecurity arising from attacks by pirates and 'Sakai' head-hunters (from Dutch territory) had put a stop to the collection of seed pearls. Pryer actually arrived at Sandakan in the collecting season, between January and March (not specifically cultivated, the gatherers paddled in the mud at low tide, feeling for the oysters with their toes), and had rapidly been made aware of the menace of both pirates and 'Sakais'.

As Sulu authority had become inadequate to guarantee equitable trade the non-Muslim peoples of the interior, the suppliers of jungle produce, had defensively resisted exploitation by limiting their contacts with the coast. The situations on the Labuk and Kinabatangan rivers provide good illustrations of the difficulties in the way of extensive trade in this period. Near the mouth of the Labuk a trading centre existed on Pulo Linkabo, with a representative of the Sultan under Mohamed Ashgari (Sulu chief of Sandakan) to collect customs. Such a station was not free from pirate visitations—in October 1878, eight months after Pryer's arrival at Sandakan, a force of thirty pirate *perahu* with 300 men, was reported to be there. They were the pirates who had massacred a party of commissioners from the Sultan's mother to the Sultan of Bulungan two months previously, and, in January, seven men in the service of Datu Harun ar'Rashid. No reprisals had so far been made against them. In so far as they were able, Mohamed Ashgari and Tuan Imam controlled the Labuk trade, imposing a virtual monopoly upon it by permitting traders only one visit a year and doing the rest themselves. Their restrictions were not the sole hindrances to the river trade however. At various points up the river customs stations, official and unofficial, awaited the persevering trader. The population of the river shaded through a series of mutually hostile groups, the Muslim Bajaus and Sulus living near the mouth, along the lower reaches the Orang Sungei, and, in the upper reaches, the non-Muslim peoples. All erected their customs barriers—a rattan rope stretched across the river—where duty was demanded from anyone wishing to

pass. Evasion was dangerous, as sometimes was mere arrival at the barrier:[29]

> Banjer . . . spun many yarns about this rattan business. Banjer was a Sultan's man, and had once been put on a 'bintang-marrow' station. The man in charge of it thought that the time had come to take a little duty in blood, just to let people see that the Sultan didn't keep 'bintang-marrow' stations for nothing. So they caught a trader, accused him of evading the payment of duties, and tying a rope round his wrists fastened him to a post with his feet off the ground, and left him hanging there. . . . They returned in the evening with their krises and hewed him to bits.

It was scarcely surprising that a trader who survived all the hazards from the coast inland had either the strength or the shrewdness to exploit the interior peoples. In July 1880, Pryer heard the grievances of an *orang tua* representing five communities of the upper Labuk. He complained that if they made an arrangement to pay taxes with one chief down river, other chiefs forced similar arrangements on them; that excessive interest rates on loans were charged (for example, a loan of 10 *gantang* of rice had to be repayed with 20 *gantang*); and that trade was forced upon them, at unfair prices. Goods were presented to a village, and the produce to be offered in return stipulated. He also questioned the numerous customs barriers on the river, and claimed that their goods and crops were liable to seizure by anyone with power to seize them. Haji Omar, a Sulu trader whom Pryer used as an interpreter, bore out his story.

On the Kinabatangan, the longest of the east-coast rivers, trade was dominated by one man, Pengiran Samah, head of the Buludupis of Malapi, a settlement many miles up the river but the first reached by a traveller from the coast. The Pengiran was part-owner of the Gomantong birds' nests caves close to Malapi, and, mainly through shrewdness, he had resisted exploitation of the river and of the caves by outside traders. Pryer, though not unsympathetic to the Pengiran, viewed his activities on the river as obstruction of trade, and was quickly to clash with him, beginning a six-year tussle between the Pengiran and the Company which would only end with the

killing of the Pengiran by the Company's police. The efforts of Pryer, and later the Company, to open trade on the east coast and its rivers were, however, to have consequences much wider than the occasional killing. The new rulers believed in the virtues of open trade (though not free trade—the Company depended on the payment of customs dues) and they had the power to enforce it. But, for many years, they were to lack the resources to oversee fair trade. In forcing access to the trade of eastern and interior Sabah they were opening the territory to further exploitation by unscrupulous traders, and thus to further indebtedness and impoverishment.

But before opening up the trade of Sabah, with its unintended consequences, Pryer had to deal with the fundamental problem of establishing himself in a position of authority. During the first two years at Sandakan several challengers questioned his rights in Sabah and those of his masters. The first of these challenges occurred in April 1878, when William Clarke Cowie arrived from Sulu. Cowie, in later years to become the leading figure of the Company, was at this time a minor trader operating out of Labuan who had established some influence at the Sulu court.[30] Upon his arrival in Sandakan he told the local chiefs, who knew him from previous visits, that the Sultan was dissatisfied with Pryer for pulling down the Sulu flag at Sandakan and in attempting to charge customs dues. Acting on a *chop* (sealed order) said to have come from the Sultan, the Sulu chief Mohamed Ashgari and a group of armed followers raised the Sulu flag. When Pryer, alone and unarmed, attempted to lower the flag, he was restrained, but his boldness seems to have undercut the resolution of the Sulus. During the night the Bajaus of the district rallied to Pryer's side, and in the morning Cowie slipped away. It is possible that he, rather than the Sultan, had been the main instigator of this incident. Pryer heard that Cowie had boasted that he had induced the Sultan to send the *chop*; Overbeck and the Dents had interfered in his business and now he would interfere in theirs. Cowie was to remain hostile to the new regime for some months, but he soon accepted a *fait accompli* when it became clear that the British

were sympathetic to the venture, and he became a friend of Pryer's on his sporadic trading visits to Sandakan. Later, he would acquire mastery over Sabah by peaceful means, at the shareholders' meetings of the Company in London.[31]

Mohamed Ashgari, after the flag-raising incident, also became a friend and supporter of Pryer, partly out of fear and hatred of the Spanish. In September 1878 the Spanish authorities sent a warship to the Sulu territories in Sabah. Pryer promised the captain a fight if he landed. Mohamed Ashgari sent him a message that the government had been handed over to Overbeck and that the people did not want any further change. He subsequently took shelter on the far side of the bay, but Pryer was left with enough armed support to deter the interlopers. The Spanish ship sailed with the captain announcing that he would return with a larger force. After the incident another Sulu chief, Haji Datu Ansarudin, pointed out to Pryer:[32] '. . . in the most direct way that the people of the country looked to the Government to protect them, that up to the present time it was they who had been protecting me, and that I ought to have more men . . .'. In December Pryer was sent six men to act as police, but they were scarcely more than a token force. Pryer continued to rely on the support of the local people in the event of a challenge to his authority.

During these months the settlement was frequently disturbed by news of pirates and rumours of head-hunting parties, and in these matters Pryer could count on local assistance, but the wavering attitude of the Sulu court to the Sabah cession in the last resort left local loyalties to Pryer doubtful. Still seeking room for manoeuvre, the Sultan was continuing to send his *chop* to the Sulus in Sabah over Pryer's head, implying that he still retained authority. Mohamed Ashgari was drowned in February 1879, an incident which permitted Pryer to have a tilt at the Sultan when the late chief's wives and slaves sought his protection from an order of the Sultan that they be sold:[33]

. . . told Aroup I did not think it at all a decent or respectable thing of the Sultan to buy and sell wives of his big men in an underhand way and he ought to be ashamed of himself, and in fact was so as he had

given orders . . . so that I should not hear of it, and any chops he wanted to send here in future he had better address to me—ordered that the women should not be sold.

If the Sultan remained anxious to suggest that he retained some control in Sabah he could, however, do no more than suggest. In Sulu the assertion of Spanish power was undermining what authority, in real terms, he possessed, and he was being reduced to futile bargaining. In February 1879 he sent a message to Pryer that he had refused to approve a Spanish plan to send five warships to Sandakan and that he was willing to instruct the Sulus in Sabah to follow Pryer in return for an extra $1,000 on the cession money already being paid. In July he appealed to Pryer for a straight loan. Impoverished and powerless he was unable to budge the new holders of power in Sabah from their view that he had already ceded all authority in the territory to them.

In fact, the ultimate disposal of Sabah at this time did not lie with either them or the Sultan, but rather with the British and Spanish. This was to be demonstrated when Pryer was confronted in August 1879 by Datu Harun ar'Rashid. The Datu, one of the more competent and ambitious of the Sulu nobles, and one-time chief at Sandakan, had yoked his career to Spanish power, and was sailing in Sabahan waters accompanied by two Spanish warships. On 16 August he entered Sandakan Bay, ostensibly to collect debts; tactfully the Spanish ships remained outside. Pryer was deeply concerned, for all the Sulus of Sandakan and many non-Sulus stood in awe of the Datu. Tuan Imam had risen from slavery to his present authority under the Datu and was 'paralysed' at the mention of his name.[34] But Pryer decided, as on other occasions, to present a bold front, and a struggle of wills ensued. The Datu despatched his servants about the Bay, and Pryer busied himself with routine work. On the 29th a British warship, HMS *Kestrel*, arrived and broke any spell the Datu held. He now advised that he was at Sandakan to regularize trade between Sabah and the island of Palawan. On the following day his Spanish affiliations

were put beyond doubt when representatives of the Sultan arrived, with orders for the Sultan's former subjects to assist Pryer in any confrontation. On board HMS *Kestrel* the Sulu and Bajau chiefs declared their support for Pryer and their readiness to bow their heads to the British queen. Their traditional allegiances finally had to be discarded, if they were to mean allegiance to the long-hated Spanish. Datu Harun, with Spanish backing, would soon obtain the sultanate,[35] but his collaboration lost him, and Sulu, Sandakan. After this incident Pryer ruled Sandakan without fear of internal challenge.

Pryer's personal rule was to last another two years—until the Company's first governor, Treacher, arrived in August 1881. By the end of 1879 the town of Sandakan, rising on a site selected by Pryer, contained fifty-seven roughly-built houses and a population of 698. By 1882 the town's population was put at 6,000. About half of the new arrivals were Chinese, who began to make Sandakan a predominantly Chinese town even before Pryer had secured the coastal and interior trading routes. Pryer rapidly found it impossible to govern the expanding venture unaided. The list of books he kept conveys some idea of his activities. He kept a daily journal, a register of customs and imports and exports, a ledger and cash book, a weather record, a court book, and records of public notifications, land grants, permits, slave ownership, medical treatment and vaccinations:[36] 'Did my throat no good by talking all day long, gave instructions in four bankruptcy cases over my coffee in the morning, reconciled a husband and wife during tiffin, and arranged with Heen to lend him 10 men to put up his house poles tomorrow over dinner.'

His superiors were reluctant to incur expense but they were forced during 1880 to provide Pryer with a European subresident, a secretary, and a clerk. During that year too Alexander Cook arrived at Sandakan, a Scot who was to become, as treasurer, a leading figure in the administration until 1908. Despite these additions, Pryer found it necessary to employ local men in such matters as customs collection, court

work, and negotiations with the river communities, utilizing the talents of any who had fluency in several languages or dialects and appeared to be knowledgeable about the country and its peoples. Thus a significant aspect of Company policy for the next twenty-five years appeared—the employment of *ad hoc* 'native chiefs' to govern in the absence of adequate Company administrators.

The policy also arose because of Pryer's concern to establish control over the coastal waters and rivers of the east coast, a concern stimulated by the eagerness of the arriving Chinese to explore—or perhaps restore—Sabah's trading potential. If the fear of piracy could be lifted, and the barriers to trade on the rivers removed, then local agents of the Company might suffice as symbols of the new order in Sabah. The fear of piracy was considerable during Pryer's first years at Sandakan. In the year prior to his arrival 160 traders and other seafarers had been murdered between Sandakan and Labuan, reportedly by pirates. It was never really clear, however, who the 'pirates' were. The earlier power of the sea-roving Balignini and Illanun warriors had largely been broken in the mid-nineteenth century by the activities of European naval vessels. The communities now termed pirates were, naturally, elusive, and the testimony of one who had sailed with them suggests that they were groups of miscellaneous fugitives:[37]

> Banjer told me that amongst the so-called Baligninis there were not in a hundred ten really of that race, the rest being runaway slaves, Malays, Bugis, Sulus etc. who rove from island to island and live as best they can. They are in this respect like the Bajaus but are more unscrupulous than they, capturing people and prahus and anything that presents itself.

The term 'Bajau' was used as a general name for a number of communities on Sabah's east coast and in the Sulu archipelago, many of which were nomadic, only rarely establishing permanent settlements on land. Their relationships to the land-dwelling Bajaus of Sabah's west coast are not clear, but they do appear to have shared a characteristically limited sense of com-

munity and loose political leadership. To have attributed piracy to the Bajaus wholesale would have been incorrect, though undoubtedly some groups and individuals engaged in it.[38]

The piracy of this period was mainly a symptom of the breakdown of law and order as the sultanates of Brunei and Sulu were reduced to impotence. The Spanish campaign against Sulu, and the reduction of its economy to chaos, may also have precipitated some of the sultanate's subjects into piracy as a gesture of defiance, or even out of sheer survival. Much of the piracy reported to Pryer may have been committed not by dedicated pirate groups but by traders struggling to retain their share of a declining and unstable market. The influx of Chinese into Sandakan also caused many local traders concern. One Bugis trader, alarmed that the Chinese were underselling him, urged Pryer not to move too quickly against pirates. Ironically he himself was murdered by 'pirates' in the following year. The earliest incidents in which Pryer became involved seem mostly to have concerned individuals or groups treading a fine line between trade and piracy. In October 1878 the settlement at Sandakan was upset by rumours of a general gathering of pirates on Pulo Linkabo, at the mouth of the Labuk. Most of the Sandakan population fled into the jungle. When Pryer sent a message to the pirates the reply was that they wished to trade at Sandakan, not, as had been claimed, destroy it. They did not, however, appear. In May of the following year similar forces did menace Sandakan, after attacking boats belonging to the pro-Spanish claimant to the district, Datu Harun ar'Rashid. On this occasion Pryer and his erstwhile opponent Cowie engaged them in Cowie's vessel and drove them off. Pryer's account of the incident is rather reticent, for his superiors in London were anxious that he should not devote his time to this physically dangerous, and politically delicate, problem.[39] Nevertheless he soon made another, fruitless, attempt at pirate-catching, sailing as far as Pulo Linkabo. He may have missed his quarry in the mangrove-fringed creeks and inlets of the coast, difficult to detect by those not familiar with them and exhausting to explore.

But the season for personal initiatives against piracy by Pryer was soon to be over. Two British naval vessels had appeared in the Sulu Sea in April 1879, Dutch ships also cruised the area, and later in the year Spanish warships arrived to guard Datu Harun ar'Rashid and his boats. An Illanun-led community at Tungku, to the south of Sandakan in Darvel Bay, now became the chief object of suspicion, under a leader, Datu Kudunding, who challenged the claims of all comers, British, Spanish, or Sulu. A British vessel was despatched to Tungku by Treacher in Labuan,[40] primarily to forestall a Spanish engagement on what was, or might become, British soil, and the Tungku settlement was destroyed. Subsequently Pryer's policy was one of conciliation, a policy furthered by his astonishment when he at last came face to face with two of the 'pirate' community. One day word spread at Sandakan that the most dreaded of the pirate leaders—the Raja Laut—was coming. Pryer armed himself, gathered a force of fifty men and awaited his arrival, '. . . whereupon Banjer M[aster of] C[eremonies], ushered in two feeble, pale and trembling little men, out of whom it was impossible to get a word for some time . . .'.[41] Neither was the 'Raja Laut', though they had belonged to the Tungku community and gave Pryer information about its whereabouts following the naval action. They provided, as well, mute testimony to contemporary pirate life, which was scarcely that of bold adventuring after riches and power. If the tradition of the great sea-roving warriors still animated some in this period, it meant little more now than a bleak struggle for survival, a struggle becoming less and less supportable with every European ship that appeared. By the time that the Company set up its official administration in Sabah piracy was not a problem. In December 1879 Pryer suggested to the headmen of the Darvel Bay area that their people become gutta-percha collectors for the officially sanctioned traders of Sandakan.

Up the rivers of the east coast, Pryer and the Company were to discover, law and order was not to be as easily won as on the high seas. Here the Company would have to govern unassisted

by British ships, forces, or arms, and the Company's resources would prove woefully inadequate to the task. Indeed its dabblings would worsen the situation. The trading world of the east-coast rivers was a harsh one, both for the traders and for the river peoples. To the traders, Muslim or Chinese, who sailed the long miles through the enveloping jungle, its peoples were barbarians, alien, contemptible, and a little frightening. The journey into the interior, furthermore, was only one of the hazards (amongst them competitors, pirates, ill-health, and natural disasters) to be encountered on a voyage which might take them from Bandjarmasin to Kuching, from Sulu to Singapore. The temptations to ensure profit by unfair means, whether by misrepresentation of values, cheating with weights, reneging on payments, usury, or outright violence, were hard to resist. Sulu traders, and others enjoying Sulu patronage, had had the added opportunity to demand taxes, legally or illegally, and stipulate trading regulations, real or fictitious. To the peoples of the rivers, the traders were, frequently, a necessary evil. Some groups, secure in the hilly regions where the rivers were no longer easily navigable, were able to ignore them. (The Sulus, like the Muslim peoples of the west coast, told fabulous stories of the unvisited regions, of men with tails, and of a lake so wide it could not be seen across, or of two lakes linked by a waterfall 600 feet high.)[42] These uplanders were sometimes willing to bring produce to river trading posts if they could be guaranteed a fair price. But, for the peoples on the navigable rivers the traders could not be avoided. Few in number, and sometimes divided into actively hostile communities, living in a harsh terrain of thick forest and poor soil which could not sustain the lush, wet-padi harvests of the west coast, regularly defeated even by the rivers, which could rise in prolonged surging flood and made any settlement temporary, they were unable to come to terms with visitors and intruders, as had the more numerous, prosperous, and settled indigenous peoples of the west coast. Instead they were often dependent on the traders, exchanging jungle produce not for surplus wealth but for the necessities of life. They were not, however, completely

hapless victims. They could provide the produce the traders wanted and were unable to collect for themselves, and the precarious nature of life on the rivers had developed in them a canniness which sometimes further provoked, but was some defence against, the traders.

The long tradition of struggle to be the cheater and not the cheated was not likely to die with the new government. The White man was viewed as another potential exploiter, and on his heels, and mostly in his absence, came increasing numbers of traders, particularly Chinese, and the White man's 'native chiefs' and police. These were mainly to make worse the already intractable problems of unfair trade, indebtedness, and violence. Pryer, certainly, was able to do little. To the further extreme of his domain, on the rivers Sugut and Paitan, he sent British flags, which he learned were welcomed by the *orang tua*. The flags, for their houses and boats, represented a welcome extension of their powers when bargaining with Sulu traders. On the Labuk Pryer established Datu Israel, a leading Sulu, as chief. His appointment produced in late 1880 a stream of visitors from the *ulu*, anxious to discover the attitudes and powers of the new government at Sandakan. In his reassurances Pryer was extravagant.[43]

> . . . I would give them a letter with the *chop* of the Company affixed, and if anyone offended against its regulations and they brought their complaint to Elopura [Sandakan] I would send up ten men, and if ten men were not enough twenty men, and if twenty men were not enough forty men to see that the law was not broken and order maintained.

It remained to be seen whether hyperbole would be enough to reform life on the rivers.

Pryer's main efforts were devoted to the state of affairs on the Kinabatangan, the major river of the east coast and draining a huge area of the interior. At Malapi, two days upstream the Buludupi chief, Pengiran Samah, dominated its trade. Pryer was to be confronted with the complaints of both the up-river peoples, whom the Pengiran exploited and whose trading efforts he disrupted, and the traders, whom the Pengiran

cheated and outwitted with a skill equal to theirs. The Pengiran's main concern, and what chiefly drew Pryer's interest, were the Gomantong caves, the richest source of edible birds' nests in Sabah. The caves were under the Pengiran's control, and to the preservation of his authority there he devoted immense skill.[44]

When I got to know the Pangeran better I found that he was an immensely shrewd old schemer, and perfectly unscrupulous, two qualities that had stood him in good stead in maintaining the rights of himself and his tribe to the rich birds' nests caves which of course were a rich prize always being covetted by the stronger and fiercer Sooloos. Cruel and crafty though he was, one could not but admire the way in which by some means or another he managed to discomfit grasping Sooloo chiefs who were continually coming there with large followings with an intention of having a share in the caves, by fair means or foul.

The ownership of the caves was in fact a matter of dispute.[45] Discovered only two generations before the present by the Buludupis, they had immediately become a source of dissension between headmen. After hostilities, rights to shares in the caves had been settled, and Sandukong, grandfather of Pengiran Samah, had obtained from the Sultan of Sulu, in exchange for a share, a *chop* prohibiting collection by other peoples. The distribution of proceeds amongst the group was a complex matter. Within the last few years Pengiran Samah had renewed dissension by claiming more than his share. The Pengiran's motive was not simply greed, for he well realized that tight control over the caves was vital for their security as the power of Sulu waned. The collection of the nests became a matter for guile and secrecy; indeed the Pengiran was prepared to frustrate collection rather than have the produce seized by interlopers.

To him, the new government was an interloper, to be received without trust. Pryer's interest was the share formerly paid to the Sultan, and now transferred to the new government; he also wanted to end the Pengiran's disruption of the general trade of the river. Three months after his arrival at Sandakan in

May 1878 Pryer sailed up the Kinabatangan to visit the Pengiran. He had heard reports of recent violence at Malapi, and he took with him an imposing force of nine or ten boats, with a number of leading Sulus and the Segaliud Buludupi chiefs in attendance. The Pengiran prevaricated, but, when threatened with the use of force, he laid his kris before Pryer in token of submission, acknowledged the government's share in the birds' nests caves, and accepted Pryer's plans for a customs house at Malapi. For stealing goods from traders he was fined $2,000 and ordered to restore some of the stolen goods.

Well pleased with the apparent success of his confrontation, Pryer returned to Sandakan. Neither the royalties on the birds' nests nor the fine were subsequently paid, the Pengiran explaining that he was holding the revenue from the birds' nests until it was settled who would govern the country. Complaints about him from up- and down-river continued, and Pryer had to resist appeals to overthrow him. Instead he sent Anderson, his West Indian servant, to Malapi with four policemen, to collect customs and hear court cases. But the accustomed time for collection of the birds' nests passed, and the government received no revenue. Pryer rejected Alfred Dent's suggestion, from London, that the caves be burnt out[46]—that would be killing the goose which might yet lay golden eggs—and managed, in later confrontations with the Pengiran, to extract $1,500 in royalties. But he believed that the caves could yield vastly more. In 1880 Haji Datu Ansarudin was made chief of Malapi, though not of the caves. To Pengiran Samah this must have looked as if his worst suspicions were being realized. Having long resisted Sulu domination he now had a Sulu chief. The more things changed the more they stayed the same, and perhaps, since this Sulu chief had European backing, could grow worse. This type of suspicion about the Company's intentions and methods was to become common throughout Sabah in the next two decades.

1. The deeds of cession of all territories which eventually constituted the territory of the Chartered Company may be found in C.O. 874/17–23, 36–40, 43–55. (The reference C.O. 874 denotes papers of the Chartered Company, now held in the Public Record Office, London.)

2. For accounts of the cessions by Brunei and Sulu see N. Tarling, *Britain, the Brookes and Brunei*, Kuala Lumpur, 1971, and *Sulu and Sabah*, Kuala Lumpur, 1978. See also G. Irwin, *Nineteenth Century Borneo. A Study in Diplomatic Rivalry*, Singapore, 1955, and L. R. Wright, *The Origins of British Borneo*, Hong Kong, 1970.

3. Spenser St. John, *Life in the Forests of the Far East*, London, 1867, Vol. 1, p. 295.

4. K. G. Tregonning, 'American Activity in North Borneo, 1865–1881', *Pacific Historical Review*, Nov. 1954. G. N. Appell, 'Early American Adventurers in Borneo', *JMBRAS*, 42, pt. 2, 1969.

5. S.G.A. File 1416: Report by Governor Treacher, p. 5. (S.G.A. denotes papers of the Chartered Company now held in the archives of the Government of Sabah.)

6. N. Tarling, *Sulu and Sabah*, Kuala Lumpur, 1978. L. R. Wright, 'Historical Notes on the North Borneo Dispute', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 25, 3, 1966. *Philippine Claim to North Borneo (Sabah)*, Manila, 1963. M. O. Ariff, *The Philippines' Claim to Sabah. Its Historical, Legal and Political Implications*, Kuala Lumpur, 1970.

7. E. Belcher, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Samarang*, London, 1848, p. 189.

8. ibid., p. 124.

9. The ensuing passage on Pretyman's activities in the Tempasuk region is drawn from C.O. 874/70–72, Diary of W. Pretyman, 1878–80.

10. ibid., 8/5/78.

11. op. cit., p. 248.

12. C.O. 874/231, p. 231, 24/8/82.

13. S.G.A. File 1416: Report of T. S. Dobree.

14. C.O. 874/229, p. 481, 7/3/82.

15. The ensuing passage on Everett's activities at Papar is drawn from C.O. 874/73, Diaries of H. L. Leicester and A. H. Everett, 1879–80.

16. ibid., 30/4/80.

17. ibid., 9/3/80.

18. C.O. 874/232, p. 294, 1/12/82.

19. C.O. 874/111, A. Dent to Everett, 30/4/80, 9/7/80; C.O. 874/112, A. Dent to W. H. Read, 30/7/80.

20. The ensuing passage on Pryer's activities at Sandakan, 1878–81, is drawn chiefly from C.O. 874/67–69 Journals of W. B. Pryer.

21. C.O. 874/187 Overbeck to Pryer 10/2/78; Treacher to Pryer 28/1/78.

22. See Cesar Adib Majul, 'Political and Historical Notes on the Old Sulu

Sultanate', *JMBRAS*, XXXVIII, pt. 1, 1965. T. M. Keifer, 'The Sultanate of Sulu: Problems in the Analysis of a Segmentary State', *Borneo Research Bulletin*, 3, 2, 1971, and 'The Tausug Polity and the Sultanate of Sulu: A Segmentary State in the Southern Philippines', *Sulu Studies*, 1, 1972.

23. S.G.A. File 1416: Report of T. S. Dobree.

24. op. cit., 14/3/78.

25. ibid., 16/2/78.

26. ibid., 26/7/79.

27. S.G.A. Pryer ms.

28. op. cit., 24/3/78.

29. F. Hatton, *North Borneo. Explorations and Adventures on the Equator*, London, 1886, pp. 186–92. C.O. 874/235, Pryer, p. 308.

30. N. Tarling, *Sulu and Sabah*, Kuala Lumpur, 1978, pp. 210–12.

31. See ch. 3, and also K. G. Tregonning, *A History of Modern Sabah*, Singapore, 1965, ch. 4.

32. op. cit., 5/9/78.

33. ibid., 26/7/79.

34. ibid., 27/1/79.

35. N. M. Saleeby, *The History of Sulu*, Manila, 1963, pp. 139–44.

36. op. cit., 26/10/79.

37. ibid., 9/3/79.

38. C. A. Sather 'Sulu's Political Jurisdiction over the Bajau Laut', *Borneo Research Bulletin*, 3/2/1971; 'Cultural Affiliations in Eastern Sabah and Sulu Province', *Borneo Research Bulletin*, 6/1/1974. J. F. Warren, *The North Borneo Chartered Company's Administration of the Bajau 1878–1909; The Pacification of a Maritime, Nomadic People*, Papers in International Studies, South-east Asia Series, Ohio University, 1971. On the general subject of piracy see N. Tarling, *Piracy and Politics in the Malay World*, Melbourne and Singapore, 1963.

39. op. cit., 24, 25/5/79. C.O. 874/110, A. Dent to Pryer, 8/8/79. S.G.A. File 1436, W. B. Pryer, *British North Borneo, Past, Present and Future*, p. 2.

40. C.O. 874/110, A. Dent to Pryer, 31/10/79.

41. op. cit., 3/9/79.

42. op. cit., 23, 31/3/78.

43. op. cit., 20, 26–30/7/80, 15/10/80.

44. S.G.A. Pryer ms. p. 15.

45. C.O. 874/233, p. 294, 22/2/83. S.G.A. File 200–Petition from Haji Sandukong.

46. C.O. 874/192, Pryer to A. Dent, 7/2/81.

2

A GAMBLING STYLE OF GOVERNMENT, 1881–1887

The Company's Approach to Government

WILLIAM HOOD TREACHER, formerly colonial secretary at Labuan, returned to the tiny island colony on 7 August 1881. Having been 'loaned' by the Colonial Office, he was now the Company's first governor, and was to make his headquarters at Labuan until it was decided where stations were to be established on the mainland. Strictly speaking, the 'Company' was not yet in existence, and Treacher was responsible, for the present, to the British North Borneo Provisional Association, formed in March 1881 to act, in effect, as a formal lobby for the granting of the Charter, and to manage affairs while the Chartered Company was brought into being. The Charter was officially granted on 1 November 1881, and the Company created in May 1882, taking over all the possessions and activities of the Provisional Association by July 1882. Alfred Dent, to whom the territories in Sabah had first been ceded, transferred his rights to the Company, but remained, as managing director, the most important figure in the administration in London. Overbeck, who with Dent had obtained the cessions of territory from Brunei and Sulu, sold out his rights and titles in 1880 and was not involved in the Company, which had become an exclusively British concern.

The activities in London during the formation of the Company are not of consequence to the present work, except in two significant and related aspects. First, the Company was

financed by the sale of shares; the capital thus raised was to prove (although this was not imagined at the time) dangerously inadequate. Secondly, some consideration was given (voluntarily, and at the insistence of those opposed to a revival of rule by Chartered Company, not least in the British government) to the question of ruling the people of Sabah; the notions arrived at were embodied in the Charter and subsequently influenced developments in administrative policy. These two matters are related in that the first reinforced, even enforced, the other. Essentially, the stipulations of the Charter required a policy of respect for indigenous custom; the need of the Company for extreme economy required that the administrative machine remain tiny, and that interference in Sabahan life be kept at a minimum. The result was that the Company set out with no intention of revolutionizing Sabah. It undoubtedly precipitated considerable change, but it was to be only in small degree planned change. If theory argued respect for traditional ways, the Company's poverty insisted that governmental activity be minimal.

The sale of shares by the Provisional Association brought in £362,010. After all payments and expenses the Provisional Association transferred to the Chartered Company £150,000. It was planned therefore, that £30,000 would be spent per annum during the first five years, assuming that within that time the Company would begin to receive revenue to cover further operations.[1] The plan went wrong, both in terms of expenditure and receipts. Treacher at first had a remarkably free hand, and his rate of spending was obscured by careless bookkeeping at the various stations. The chairman complained in December 1882 that no accounts had been received from Sandakan for twelve months. Early in 1883 Alfred Dent visited Sabah to investigate activities, since the Court of Directors and the governor were now joined in very bitter correspondence on the matter of expenditure. If necessary, Treacher was to be removed as governor.[2] Dent stayed in Sabah for six months, and became a firm defender of Treacher's policies, although he did initiate efficient bookkeeping. He and Treacher reached the

compromise with the Court, after substantial cutting of the administration, of a net expenditure of £35,000 per annum, agreed to by the Court 'with reluctance and considerable misgivings'.[3] Subsequently Treacher worked with strict economy, although he continued to exceed the stipulated figure. At the same time, receipts failed to be as substantial as the Court had hoped. The Company had decided to confine itself to the administration of Sabah, rather than engaging in trading, planting, or mining,[4] but it soon was to find that other concerns were not, as yet, eager to enter these fields. The Company did not show an excess of revenue over expenditure until 1888, when a boom in land sales, which was to last three years, revived early enthusiasms, suddenly easing a desperate situation.[5] Throughout most of Treacher's governorship, then, (he left Sabah in April 1887) the first consideration in the formulation of administrative policy was the avoidance of all unnecessary expense, and hence unnecessary activity. The fact that the Company set out to rule Sabah for £30,000 per year combined with the lack of revenue to produce a government of extreme parsimony and very limited action.

The confidence of the Company that it could govern Sabah for such a small sum suggests, apart from over-optimism about short-term returns, that it had an administrative model for inexpensive colonial government. That model was Sarawak. The two regimes, of the Company and of Brooke, seem to stand in striking contrast. Charles Brooke, the benevolent patriarch, placing first emphasis on the well-being of his subjects, claiming to respect their patterns of society and hoping to ensure that the changes forced upon them were gradual and beneficial, seems far removed from the Company, an unabashed example of the economic drive behind British colonial expansion, turning Sabah, in effect, into a business enterprise. However, the elementary problem of the two governments was the same—to rule at minimum cost. Whatever the motives, both governments were constrained to find ways of maintaining authority with a handful of Europeans. It would have been surprising if the Company had not looked to Sarawak, where the Brookes

had had a forty-year start in the search for suitable solutions, in a country which seemed similar to that which the Company was planning to rule.[6]

So, at first, the Sarawak example was kept in mind. Edward Dent wrote to Alfred Dent in April 1878:[7] '. . . the territory I suppose will have to be managed in much the same way as Sarawak is', noting in other letters the sources of revenue in Sarawak. Treacher, after his service at Labuan, was familiar with the nature of the Brooke government. The Company also appointed William Crocker as manager of its London office. Crocker had spent a total of sixteen years in Sarawak, becoming one of Brooke's most senior officers; in London, in 1881, he and Treacher conferred on the planned administration.[8] A. H. Everett, already in Sabah since September 1879, had also served in Sarawak. Other former Sarawak hands soon to join the Company were E. P. Gueritz and C. A. Bampfylde, the latter a promising young officer whose transfer of loyalties, which was to prove short-lived, much upset the Raja.[9] In 1881 Brooke was hostile to the Company, and was to remain so, especially when the two governments began to vie for further cessions of Brunei territory. The Brooke mood is reflected well in an article written by a 'Resident in Borneo' which appeared in the Pall Mall Budget of 26 June 1885. The Company was charged with being an '. . . association of European capitalists whose every motive in native eyes is the acquiring of wealth and the disregard of native religion, customs and happiness'.[10] To be strictly fair, it would be wrong to make comparisons of a moral sort between the Brooke and Company governments at that time. The Company's officers had not had the time to gain the knowledge of, or passionate interest in, the people they ruled which Brooke had developed in a lifetime's work in Sarawak. After many years the Company would produce a number of officers with a similar attitude of devotion to Sabah. However, Brooke's criticisms did have substance. The Company was not greatly interested in the well-being of its subjects at this time. There is a striking lack of comment upon the question in the surviving papers and correspondence, a lack illustrated, for

example, in the list of matters Dent was instructed to inquire into on his visit in 1883. The list contained no particular reference to the indigenous population.[11] If the Company sought to emulate the Sarawak system, it was more impressed by the system's cheapness of operation than by Brooke's theories of native rule, which the Company neither consciously imitated nor opposed with theories of its own. The Company in fact at no time in its history made any theoretical contribution to colonial rule, except in that its formation encouraged others to resurrect the idea of imperial development by Chartered Company.[12]

At the same time, the leading figures in the Company were at least conventionally humanitarian, and quite prepared to accept the generally current ideals of colonial rule. The requirements of the Charter[13] did not only reflect the requirements of public and official opinion; they also reflected the attitudes of the Company, which had drawn them up for approval. With the exception of the article on slavery, the injunctions in the Charter regarding administration of the population were in the nature of restraints. The Company was required:

> . . . to the best of its power, discourage and, as far as may be practicable, abolish by degrees any system of domestic servitude existing among the tribes of the coast or interior of Borneo; and no foreigner, whether European, Chinese, or other, shall be allowed to own slaves of any kind in the Company's territories.

Regarding the 'Religions of Inhabitants' the Company was forbidden to '. . . in any way interfere with the religion of any class or tribe of the people of Borneo, or of any of the inhabitants thereof', and regarding the 'Administration of Justice to Inhabitants' was required to pay careful regard to:

> . . . the customs and laws of the class or tribe or nation to which the parties respectively belong, especially with respect to the holding, possession, transfer, and disposition of lands and goods and testate or intestate succession thereto, and marriage, divorce and legitimacy, and other rights of property and personal rights.

The British government claimed final right of judgement in the article headed 'Treatment of Inhabitants generally':

If at any time our Secretary of State thinks fit to dissent from or object to any part of the proceedings or system of the Company relative to the people of Borneo, or to any of the inhabitants thereof, in respect of slavery or religion or the administration of justice or other matter, and to make to the Company any suggestion founded on that dissent or objection, the Company shall act in accordance therewith.

These requirements were substantial, but they were also not inconvenient, given the Company's limited resources and capabilities. The Company was prepared to respect the integrity of indigenous societies, but it had excellent practical reasons for doing so. The attitude of the Company was succinctly put by Alfred Dent in February 1880:[14]

I think it should be our policy to place the tribes within our boundaries under our control as much as possible . . . provided that such was done with the full consent, and at the special request of the Chiefs and people: as also that no objectionable conditions be suggested by them; and that we did not thereby incur any undesirable responsibilities.

It remained to be seen how the requirements of the Charter would be interpreted later, as the Company became involved in the business of government. For although the stipulations of the Charter were substantial, they were also general in their wording, and somewhat ingenous. They left wide scope for abuse, either deliberate or unwitting. In general, however, the continuing poverty of the Company was to preserve for many years the attitudes to the peoples of Sabah with which it began. Well enough intentioned, it was not profoundly interested in them.

In this situation, the choice of Treacher as first governor seems to have been highly apt, despite his disagreements with the Court in the matter of finance. A pleasant, moderate, and well-liked man (in 1883 half the staff threatened to resign if the Court deposed him)[15] he held no views on colonial government which were not conventional. He accepted the stipulations of the Charter as rules of guidance which needed neither flouting nor developing, and devoted most of his atten-

tion to the organization of the administration and the development of the economy. In his papers there are no considerations at length of policy towards the indigenous peoples, except in the matter of slavery which he was prepared to investigate, as he was the other 'horrible practices' of tribal feuding, head-hunting, and human sacrifice.[16] But in the main he was fortunate to find (as later governors were not) a population:[17] '. . . so docile that the representatives of the Company have been enabled without any military force and with the assistance only of a few undrilled native policemen . . . to uphold the prestige of the white man's government' and in the main he was prepared to leave it at that. The nature of the local societies and the scale of the Company's operations did not during his period as governor bring into play, to any substantial extent, a factor that would later force major rethinking—the growing anger of the local peoples at the Company's style of government.

The Company's policies were perhaps symbolized in the placing of government stations by Treacher. Much controversy was aroused amongst Company officials by this question, but it almost all concerned the appropriateness of possible sites for entrepôt ports. Treacher was not impressed with the pioneer stations at Tempasuk and Papar, but neither was he enthusiastic about Sandakan, and he was not prepared to make the ramshackle *kampong ayer* which had sprung up under Pryer's rule his headquarters. Pryer, however, was adamant for Sandakan, and believed generally that Sabah's future lay on the east coast rather than the west.[18] Shortly before Treacher's arrival he extended Sandakan's influence by establishing a post at Silam, in Darvel Bay, and by sending a European officer, Hewett, far up the Kinabatangan to establish a station at Pinangah.[19] The Darvel Bay station was designed to tame the 'pirate' peoples of the district; the up-river station to pre-empt the vexatious activities of Pengiran Samah at Malapi. Treacher agreed to try out Silam as a station because of its good anchorage, and in 1882 set up an experimental garden there to test potential plantation crops. It

ceased, however, to be permanently manned by a European officer when Dent's visit in 1883 revealed the weak state of the Company's finances. The up-river station at Pinangah was also tolerated for two years, but closed down in 1883. Thereafter the Company's administration of the east coast and its interior was conducted on a permanent basis solely from Sandakan.

On the west coast Tempasuk and Papar were already in disfavour when Treacher arrived, and he decided to establish new stations on Gaya Island and in Marudu Bay. Gaya Island, favoured by Dent,[20] was uninhabited and faced territory on the mainland still unceded to the Company, which therefore limited the possibilities for involvement with the local peoples. Marudu Bay, in the mid-nineteenth century, had been, under Serif Usman, the most significant centre of trade and power in Sabah, with an estimated population of 57,000 living on the rivers flowing into the bay.[21] Prior to the arrival of the Company this population had been partly scattered, following the destruction of the Serif's power by the British navy, and partly decimated by smallpox epidemics which appear to have affected most of the coastal areas of Sabah. Now, a sparse population of Bajaus, Sulus, and Orang Sungei commanded the mouths and lower reaches of the rivers running into the foot of the bay, and the Bengkoka on its eastern side. Their relations with the non-Muslim peoples of the interior were poor; one river had been completely blocked to boat traffic by large boulders.[22] Treacher preferred, however, to keep even the meagre population of the bay at a distance, and he opted for an uninhabited site on the western side of the bay, at Kudat. Both this site and Gaya offered good facilities for the anchorage of European vessels. For two years Treacher dreamed of Kudat as the Company's capital, and built himself a substantial government station there, but Kudat too suffered the financial prunings of 1883, and he was forced to move his headquarters to Sandakan. The west coast was then left with three stations—at Kudat, Gaya Island, and Papar—none of them permanently manned by European officers. The station at Papar, unlike that at

Tempasuk, was not completely closed down, but under Treacher's direction was dismantled and reconstructed two miles down-river, away from the population of the river.[23]

The Company's financial difficulties, and limited administrative ability, did not however prevent it from expanding its territory, and under Treacher several major acquisitions of territory occurred. His reasons for the expansionist policy were threefold. Each additional river was a potential source of revenue in terms of customs and taxation, and an extension of the possibilities for mineral exploration and commercial agriculture; the non-ceded rivers provided sanctuary for opponents of the Company, and channels for trade which by-passed the Company's customs posts; and the Company feared the interest of other Europeans in Borneo, particularly Charles Brooke. On the other hand, the Company could not afford lavish cession payments, and therefore when negotiations occurred between the Company and the Brunei court they usually meant prolonged haggling. Also, and perhaps most importantly, the Brunei system of territorial holdings, and the tortured internal politics of the sultanate in that era, delayed further acquisitions both by the Company and Brooke.[24]

In Brunei ultimate sovereignty over the lands and people within the orbit of the sultanate was vested in the sultan, but traditional rights gave the nobility who had lands or followers a wide degree of independence. The sultan could not collect revenue from the lands or people which were *tulin*, that is, belonging to and descending by inheritance to, members of the nobility; nor could the sultan dispose of such lands without reference to the owner. A sultan usually held *tulin* rights of his own, to one or more rivers or groups of followers, but these came to him by inheritance, not by virtue of his office. Attached to the office of the sultan were certain lands and people (*negeri kerajaan*), which were at his disposal while he reigned; likewise attached to the ministerial offices were rights to the revenue from certain lands and peoples (*kuripan*). In 1877 the Sultan had disposed of the lands in Sabah to which he had rights (the rivers Benoni and Kimanis were ceded by the Pengiran Temeng-

gong); subsequently the rights of others had to be considered. It was not, however, always to be the central power which was willing to dispose of Brunei territory—on the contrary. The Company found itself caught up in a battle of wills between the competing interests of the one or more owners of the rivers, the sultan, and the sultan's ministers, whose interests on their own account and on behalf of the sultanate as a whole were sometimes in conflict.

The first major cession, following the initial grants, was achieved without difficulty. The owner of the Putatan sold his rights to the Company for $1,000 per year. The Putatan was the most prosperous and peaceful district on the west coast.[25]

> . . . the valley had broadened out so that on the right and left is seen a vast expanse of cultivated, jungle-cleared padi land extending for miles north and south, and bounded on the east by the mountain range running parallel to the coast. The natives had just commenced ploughing the land with their wooden ploughs shod with iron, and, where the plough had not yet passed, the whole country was covered with emerald green grass such as one would expect to see in an English meadow, while the absence of lalang was also a pleasing feature. The numerous villages scattered over the plains had an air of peace and contentment . . . every inch of ground is owned by private individuals and the boundaries are carefully marked by large blocks of stone . . . land rarely changes hands, but when it does it is said to fetch about $30 an acre.

The commentator remarks on the wealth of the people in brassware and old jars, openly displayed. The former Brunei owner lived in Brunei and appears to have rarely visited his domain. The large, and prosperous, Kadazan population paid taxes to him, but kept the Muslim people of the district at a distance—in 1880 the Illanuns were reported to be barred entirely from the district, after an affray during a trading visit; some of the Bajaus also had been forced to settle at some miles distant, at Api Api and Sembulan, after their cattle-raiding activities had infuriated the Kadazans.[26]

The Kadazans met their new European masters too with some reluctance:[27]

> . . . after dinner a fine looking young Dusun, named Si Panggol, came in. He had evidently been drinking, and expressed his opinion freely in consequence. He asked what we wanted in the country, and said he would prefer paying the Brunei rajahs a pikul (say $25) a year per head to allowing the white man to come and settle down in his country, he apparently preferring the Brunei rajahs because they live at a distance and do not interfere in local affairs. He also said he had heard dreadful accounts of the white man's government, that the police interfered in everything, and that men were shut up in prison, and revenue required in cash instead of in kind. However, we parted very good friends and as he got on his buffalo he shook me cordially by the hand and begged me to stop at his house on our morrow's walk. Mr. Daly and Mr. Dalrymple did so next morning, when he apologised for having been drunk the night before and drank their health in a bowl of samsu.

But the condition of the Putatan was not typical, and in the same year as its cession, 1884, an uprising on the Limbang river, close to the Brunei capital, revealed that the opposite state of affairs also existed. There, the Kadayan and Bisaya people revolted against exorbitant arbitrary taxation, possibly due in part to the anxiety of the Pengiran Temenggong to extract all that could be got from the river. The Pengiran hoped soon to succeed the present aged Sultan, thereby losing his rights on the Limbang, held by virtue of his office. The revolt revealed the extreme weakness of Brunei. The rebels advanced almost to Brunei Town, and the Brunei government, defenceless and without resources, appealed to Treacher for aid. In his capacity as British consul he was asked to mediate with the rebels; in his position as governor of North Borneo he was asked for a loan of $30,000 and was promised further cessions of territory. On the Limbang he successfully negotiated terms, only to find his work undone by Brunei, which had urged the Muruts of the Terusan to attack the rebels. With a British warship he sailed into Brunei and had the captain administer to the Sultan and his ministers 'a sharp telling off'. A few days later, most of the Padas-Klias peninsula, and the river Tuaran, were ceded to the Company for $3,000 per year.[28]

The reasons for the cession lay partly in Treacher's dubious use of his dual authority (he claimed that Brunei was quite able to distinguish his roles),[29] partly in the feverish rivalry for power at the Brunei court. On either side of the aged and infirm Sultan, the Pengirans Temenggong and di Gadong were battling for supremacy. The Pengiran di Gadong was effectively the sultan of the moment and he held the seal and kris of office, but the Pengiran Temenggong aspired to the succession. The Limbang revolt therefore simply precipitated the situation in which the rival Pengirans vied for the support, and money, of outside powers, and made them amenable to further cessions of territory. Both Treacher and the Sarawak government took advantage of the situation. Treacher, lending $15,000 to the Pengiran di Gadong, and making 'free use of money' amongst the nobility, the Sultan's Dutch secretary who was influential with the Pengiran, and members of the harem, won a large cession for a very small price. Brooke's representatives found that they enjoyed the favours of the Pengiran Temenggong, who ceded his own river, the Terusan, to them, and also attempted to lease the Limbang, until thwarted by the Pengiran di Gadong, for it was not his to cede.[30] The Pengiran Temenggong succeeded to the sultanate in the following year, as Sultan Hashim, and became a ruler of resolution, achieving supremacy within Brunei and resisting further encroachments upon Brunei territory. But a heavy price had been paid in the last days of his predecessor. The cession of the Terusan, east of Brunei, signified the encirclement of Brunei by Sarawak, and brought the Company and Brooke into direct competition for the remaining territories.

The lands ceded to the Company in 1884, however, had been of little value to Brunei and almost beyond its control. The Brunei owner of the Tuaran, Serif Jahir, had met with opposition from the Kadazans on his tax-gathering expeditions, and they were reported to be willing to accept Company authority.[31] In 1885 the Serif sold outright to the Company for $1,300 another river, the Kawang, which the obstreperous Bajaus had put beyond his control. The Bajau mood

was soon revealed to the Company. When a police detachment tried to recruit porters for an expedition inland against cattle thieves, some of the Kawang Bajaus ran *amok*, killing two European officers and three native policemen and wounding ten others. It was believed at first that the attackers were followers of Pengiran Abdul Rauf, the head Bajau on the still unceded rivers of the central west coast, who claimed a share in the ownership of the Kawang. Later it became clear that this was not so, and the Pengiran's son revealed the most probable reason for the *amok*, when asked whether the Bajaus preferred their old or new masters.[32] 'The old one is better, because although the Brunei Pengirans fine people tens and hundreds of piculs, it is all mere words, they can give what they have, but the white man's two dollars is two dollars and no less.'

On the Padas Brunei had maintained more authority, but it was of a fragile sort. When the Company first advanced into the river, they met sporadic opposition from a number of chiefs including one, Pengiran Karim, who was a subject of Sarawak and who had the support of Brooke. Some of the opposition however was based on legitimate grievances, which formerly had been held against Brunei and which now were transferred to the Company. The Padas at one time had belonged to one Brunei noble, Pengiran Bendahara Alam. On his death he had divided it between three heirs, two of them female, who had all passed the major part of their shares to their relative, the Sultan Mumin; a number of followers, mostly slaves, were however bequeathed by the women to a number of minor heirs.[33] The taxation claims of these minor heirs had become a source of confusion and irritation to the people of the river, who, six years before, had rebelled, only laying down their arms when it was agreed that henceforth all government and taxation would be vested in the Sultan. A single agent was appointed to collect taxes. But the Company had to face the resentment of the minor heirs, who had never been compensated for their loss of rights by the Sultan; only when Treacher spent a month in Brunei, in 1887, were all claims settled. Treacher drove a hard bargain, for

all claims were paid out of the originally agreed cession price of $3,000. One Brunei pengiran held out, going to the Padas in the same month in an unsuccessful attempt to raise a force. An expedition was sent against him and he retired again to Brunei.[34]

When most of the Padas-Klias peninsula was ceded, a river excluded from the cession was the Padas Damit, ruled by the Pengiran Shahbandar on behalf of an elder step-sister. The Pengiran became unhappy with the boundaries claimed by the Company, in a low-lying district where watersheds were difficult to determine, and his quarrel with the Company was to lead to armed hostilities. The 'Padas Damit War' will be dealt with in a later chapter.[35] After Treacher's acquisitions there still remained substantial areas of Sabah to be incorporated into the 'North Borneo' of the Company, most prominently the rivers of the central west coast, which would fall to the Company in the aftermath of the Mat Salleh rebellion. These too will be treated later in the narrative.[36] For the time being, however, it is enough to note that Treacher's acquisitions, particularly of the Padas and therefore of its vast hinterland, increased the territory for which the Company was responsible by as much as one-third, at a time when the Company was desperately attempting to retrench its administrative expenses.

Makeshift Government and its Significance

In his first months as governor Treacher displayed enthusiasm for his task as the architect of a government aiming quickly to attract large-scale plantation agriculture, and one which might even preside over the discovery of valuable minerals—tin, coal, diamonds, or gold. By 1887, when he left Sabah to resume regular duty with the Colonial Office, no such major economic developments had occurred. Worse, the rickety state of the Company's finances had become apparent within twelve months of his arrival. As he then contemplated how to govern Sabah, Treacher became the first of several governors to per-

ceive themselves caught in an unresolvable dilemma. While the territory failed to be governed adequately, it was unlikely that it would ever prosper; on the other hand, without prosperity the Company would never receive enough revenue to govern properly. This dilemma would plague all the Company's governors until, after the turn of the century, the combination of a world boom in rubber and a programme of public works instituted by Cowie, by then transformed from petty trader to managing director of the Company, would give the Company a degree of financial buoyancy. Treacher's reaction to this dilemma, apart from bitter disappointment, was to tack together whatever kind of administration could be afforded, to deal with only the most pressing of administrative needs, and to govern without great concern for formality or contemporary British colonial practice. This philosophy came to be shared by all the European staff of the Company who stayed long in Sabah.

As with all aspects of the administration in these years the staff situation is difficult to trace. Numbers fluctuated, positions were made and unmade, officers were moved from one occupation to another or combined several, and these changes are only casually detailed in Treacher's despatches or in the Company's publications, the *Herald* and *Gazette*. Most of the European staff were recruited in the East, or in Sabah itself if they had come there looking for jobs. Alexander Cook, the treasurer, had worked for a coal-mining company in Labuan. He well suited the free-wheeling atmosphere of Sandakan which Pryer's close relations with the local peoples had helped to create, and which Treacher perpetuated. Over the years Cook's treatment of the Company's finances was never to be questioned, but he probably used his position as dispenser of revenue farms and other government contracts to some personal advantage, a situation deplored on some occasions by his European colleagues but considered natural by his Chinese and indigenous suppliants.[37]

A. H. Everett, the Papar pioneer, was very quickly to resign, as was another officer appointed by Treacher for his Sarawak experience, C. A. Bampfylde, who returned, disillusioned with the Company, to Sarawak. But a third officer with a Sarawak

background, E. P. Gueritz, began in 1882 a career with the Company which would take him to the position of governor in 1903.[38] Two other long-term officers who began under Treacher were G. L. Davies, formerly of the Singapore Telegraph Company, and R. M. Little who arrived in Sandakan looking for a job as a clerk. A man who briefly held the position of superintendent of agriculture, Von Donop, was engaged by Treacher in Ceylon. Only one or two officers arrived directly from Britain, for example Frank Hatton, hired for his mineralogical expertise, and W. Raffles Flint, an erratic young man with training as a naval cadet and connections with the Court of Directors in London. Another recruit through personal connections was D. D. Daly, who arrived in 1883 as Dent's secretary and who decided to stay. Daly was a remarkable catch—he had spent seven years in the Straits Settlements service and could speak Malay fluently.[39]

Few of the early officers had had direct experience of colonial administration. Exceptions were Treacher himself, Daly, those recruits who had known the essentially *laissez-faire* methods of Brooke in Sarawak, and the string of men with colonial military experience appointed in succession to command the Company's police force. The first of these, A. M. Harington (not to be confused with the long-serving C. H. Harington, who began his Company career in 1899) could not establish good relations with Treacher and resigned in 1882. The next, de Fontaine, a former inspector in the Straits Settlements police, was shot and killed in the affray in 1885 on the Kawang following its cession. His successor, Smith, was also from the Straits Settlements police. The next, R. D. Beeston, was a veteran of the Bengal Army, though he found in Sabah that like most Company officials he had to turn his hand to many tasks. Apart from supervising the police he explored, prospected for minerals, and acted as sessions judge at Sandakan. Few of these early administrators could speak Malay well, and none knew any of the indigenous languages and dialects of Sabah. Treacher, though a good Malay-speaker himself, was reluctant to force his overworked staff to give further of their time to language study, and

training in Malay for Company officials was not to be instituted formally until the early 1890s. Formal study of the other Sabahan languages and dialects would not begin until the twentieth century. Accordingly the early administration was heavily dependent on interpreters and go-betweens in its promulgation of policy to the peoples of Sabah, and in its comprehension of popular attitudes, needs, and grievances.

The staff themselves suffered from the Company's parsimony in a number of ways. They were paid less than their counterparts in the British colonial service, regular leave with pay was not guaranteed, and there was no pension scheme for those who persisted with the Company until retiring age, or whose health was damaged in Sabah. Most eked out their salaries by speculating in town land as Sandakan slowly grew, and by involving themselves in the town's business and trading ventures. This was acknowledged as perhaps bad from an administrative point of view, but justified as interesting the staff in the economic development of the territory. The returns did not in any case compare with the profits which had been made, and at this time still could be made, by officials engaging in private business in India, the Malay States, or other colonial territories.[40] Death and illness took a substantial toll amongst the early officers of the Company, no doubt giving an urgency to the accumulation of some savings in Sabah. Witti, the pioneer officer on the Tempasuk turned explorer disappeared in 1882. Hatton the mineralogist shot himself by accident while exploring the Segama in 1883. In 1885 a doctor, Fraser, was shot dead along with the police commandant, de Fontaine, on the Kawang. De Fontaine's successor, Smith, became ill and died within months of arriving in Sabah. In 1886 two officers died, one of hepatitis and the other of typhus. In 1889 D. D. Daly was to die of malaria, and Beeston, the police commandant, was to retire following a nervous breakdown. Tropical disease was, of course, an occupational hazard, and was considered so by the staff. Bouts of 'fever' are mentioned quite casually in their reports and letters, frequently at the end of detailed descriptions of a hard day's work or travel. Many of the staff, however,

had to leave Sabah to avoid wrecking their health forever. By 1889 the territory had a bad reputation, and the Company was finding it difficult to recruit staff.

As a proportion of the total the loss through death or illness was substantial, but the main reason for the smallness of the staff was the poverty of the Company. Once this had become clear, in 1882, many early recruits were retired, and those who died or left voluntarily were not always replaced. The total number of European staff in 1887 stood at eighteen, including two young cadets and one 'taken on more from charity than anything else'.[41] With such a staff it is scarcely surprising that the early years of the Company were to be unimpressive, except for the remarkable creation of the illusion that Sabah had been brought under Company control. In this regard Treacher and his staff may be seen as minor but pertinent examples of the self-confidence, indeed the bravado, of European empire-builders in that age.

To most of the peoples of Sabah, in most parts of the territory penetrated by the Company in the early years, the Company was personified in non-European representatives. These were known by the administration as 'native chiefs' and 'native police', although these were misleading terms. The chiefs were mostly of Sabahan or Sulu origin, but were not necessarily related ethnically to the peoples they supervised, and had acquired their authority from the Company. Some had had no status or authority before the Company's arrival. The police were 'native' purely in the sense that they were not European, and only a few before the twentieth century were Sabahans. Most of the peoples of Sabah were, however, used to the concept and in varying degrees the practice of alien authority. Under Brunei and Sulu rule they had acknowledged chiefs and taxation agents of differing origins, language, and custom from themselves. The Company, in seeking to control the country, found this most convenient. It made for cheapness in administration, and it also seemed to fit with the restraints in the Company's Charter upon interference in native life. On the other hand it also made a mockery of the Company's self-

justifying claims to be sweeping away the abuses and injustices which had existed under the previous regimes, for the Company's non-European agents, quite untrained in Western-style administration and inadequately supervised, could only govern—or misgovern—according to familiar standards. The Company, indeed, enlarged the possibilities for petty tyranny by its creation of a 'native' police force, which upset the existing balance of forces in Sabahan society. The police gave new power to chiefs who would previously have been dependent on popular goodwill, and new security to traders to drive unfair deals. In many parts of the interior the police taxed and traded for themselves, and were a wholly novel intrusion into the economies and customary ways of these areas. Treacher's successor as governor, C. V. Creagh, was to write in 1888:[42]

> The chiefs that I have been seen here have not impressed me favourably. They seem to have very little in common with the people they are supposed to rule by whom they are only regarded as Foreign tax gatherers and traders.
> Although I am not yet in a position to say how the public and private business of these chiefs is usually performed, I think the plan of sending men of this class backed with all the authority of the Government to work amongst the natives of the interior without any European control or supervision is a dangerous one.

Treacher's attitude to the use of non-European administrators and police is difficult to assess. Certainly he never enunciated any theory of 'indirect rule' to justify it, and he never showed much enthusiasm for developing the system. In 1885 he announced a plan for a consultative council on the west coast, consisting of 'natives and Chinese' nominated by the people or their representatives, but it seems that such a council never met.[43] A council of similar intention on the east coast did meet on a handful of occasions, but it consisted purely of chiefs appointed by the Company. Nevertheless, Treacher had arrived in 1881 to find Pryer and the other pioneers using non-Europeans extensively, and under Treacher many more were put on the Company's payroll. During the 1880s the

Company established chiefs or paid headmen (these titles, and the status and duties attached to them, were not clearly distinguished) in all areas visited by European officers, even areas visited only briefly on journeys of exploration. The exact numbers were not recorded, nor the names or activities of most of them. Information about them can only be gleaned from passing references in the Company's records, or in the *Herald*. Even their payment, as regards amount or method of receipt, cannot now be established, and it is doubtful if this was ever very clear. William Crocker, the Company's business manager, who came out to Sabah as acting governor after Treacher's departure, thought that the chiefs received 10 per cent commission on the poll-tax they collected, but Creagh was to understand that they received one-third.[44] Unofficially they probably took what they could get, steering a delicate course between what could be extracted from the people and what could credibly be forwarded to the Company. Some chiefs also received salaries, which varied between $5 and $50 a month.

The picking of the chiefs was a rough and ready affair, a matter of elevating those who seemed to command authority, or who impressed the Europeans. Haji Datu Ansarudin, the Sulu chief appointed over Pengiran Samah at Malapi, received his position partly because of his former status in Sandakan, partly because of his friendship and support for Pryer. There were complaints about him from the peoples of the river, but he was left at his post and his death in 1892 was noticed in the *Herald*.[45] Another old friend of Pryer's, Banjer, once a slave, was given the title of 'confidential agent' for the Company on the east coast, and in 1887 the title of Panglima.[46] On the Sugut and Labuk rivers another Sulu, Haji Durahim, was the principal representative of the government. All these had a roaming jurisdiction, as appeared to befit the riverine life of the east coast. Elsewhere in the territory the chiefs had fixed locations, although the bounds of their territories varied according to the energies they were prepared to give to tax-collecting. Pengiran Subudin, a Bajau chief who had won Everett's confidence at Papar, was appointed chief of the Tuaran after its cession in

1884. A Kadazan, Gawang, was appointed sub-chief in 1887 and given the title Datu Setia Bakti. (The conferring of Malay titles upon non-Malays was a practice of the former Brunei regime.) In appointing a Bajau chief to the Tuaran the Company was apparently conferring upon the district a less alien ruler than under the older order. A Sarawak Iban, Nakoda Radin, had formerly ruled there on behalf of the Brunei owner. However the Pengiran was to become a prime illustration of the faults in the Company's 'chief' system, and was actually to be gaoled for fraud and extortion in 1891.[47]

In some areas the Company's system of chiefs and headmen perhaps worked quite well. Silence in the records might not only mean little or no European supervision; it might also mean that matters were proceeding harmoniously. The individuals who spring to life in the despatches were more usually the disturbers rather than the keepers of the peace. Many district authorities probably continued to act as before, as decent arbitrators of their peoples' interests, unimpressed and uncorrupted by the authority conferred on them by the Company, and reluctant to join forces with the Company's police, except to enforce standards acceptable to popular custom. Indigenous courts were reported to be working well in 1886 on the Papar, Klias, and Putatan rivers. On the Klias one chief, Pengiran Abbas, received $35 per month, and another eleven received $10. Three of these chiefs constituted a court quorum. Daly described the scene:[48] 'We went up to Kota native court, which Pangiran Abbas is carrying on well. There were 19 orang tuahs sitting, the unpaid ones giving their opinion as well as the paid ones and some 300 people present.'

Two years later this district was to be upset by a revolt of the local Murut peoples. It is not possible to know, since the records provide no details, whether all the peoples of the district made use of the district court, or, if they did, whether they received equal justice. The revolt suggests that the court had not solved the problem, common throughout Sabah, of dispensing justice to disparate peoples.

The composition, and size, of the Company's police force was

initially a bone of contention between Treacher and the Court of Directors. To Treacher, and his officers, none of the native peoples seemed suitable. The largest indigenous group, the Kadazans, seemed, as one officer put it, 'entirely unwarlike'.[49] Indeed the concept of anything like a policeman, and the paraphernalia of gaols and imprisonment, were foreign and alarming to these people, whose enforcement of order, within communities, depended upon popular antagonism towards any infringer of communal custom, the affair being settled by one or more popularly approved headmen. Kadazans were not to be recruited as policemen until after 1900. However it may be noted that some Kadazan groups were engaged as baggage carriers and auxiliaries to police expeditions, particularly those of the Tuaran. A European missionary wrote in 1896:[50]

> . . . the peaceful Dusun farmer did not always spend 'the idle time of the year' (i.e. 2–3 months following harvest) as innocently as he does now. On no subject will an old Dusun wax more eloquent than in recounting the deed of valour of his tribe in a *mongaiow* (head-hunting) expedition.
>
> Thanks to the energetic measures of the Government, the present generation, of the plains at least, may be said to have abandoned the practice, but the remnants of the old customs are . . . faithfully kept up wherever opportunity is afforded. This is best shown by the eagerness with which the people I am referring to answer the appeal of the Government when an expedition is set on foot. Although they are enrolled only as paid coolies, many join on their own account, and the return of all is celebrated with the former pomp and rejoicing. This is especially the case when, as it not infrequently happens, they manage to bring home a 'trophy'. The law, it is true, enacts severe punishments against the offenders; but somehow they manage to elude the vigilance of the officers and under cover of night the corpse of some vanquished foe is noiselessly dragged into the bushes and the much prized treasure, after having been smoked, is carefully enveloped and concealed at the bottom of the *binabo* (basket) of some valiant warrior.

If the Kadazans seemed too unwarlike to make policemen, the Muslim peoples, the Bajaus and Illanuns, were considered

unsuitable precisely because their activities seemed most likely to provide the main work of the police. In 1922 I. H. N. Evans[51] epitomized Company feeling about these people, even at that late date, when he described the Bajau as '. . . a lazy spendthrift, a liar, a cheat, a thief, a wheedler, a blusterer and a swaggerer'. Evans offered as his one redeeming feature his sporting instinct, which revealed itself in his enthusiasm for racing and hunting, and also for piracy, raiding, burning Chinese shops, cattle-thieving, and cock-fighting. The Illanun was like the Bajau 'only more so'. To the Company these people clearly would not make policemen.

The Court of Directors preferred that a police force be recruited locally, both for reasons of expense and to avoid criticism that imported aliens were to be used to subdue a native population. Treacher, however, was convinced of the need to recruit outsiders,[52] and in January 1882 despatched his commandant, A. M. Harington, to Bengal, to recruit Sikhs. The Court ordered the commandant back to Borneo, but not before he had recruited about 100 Sikhs, Sepoys, and Somalis (in so far as he was clear about their origins) in Singapore, Perak, and Penang. Their arrival, G. L. Davies reported from Papar, 'put the fear of God into the natives'.[53] Well it may have, for these first alien police were an 'undisciplined rabble, practically the refuse of the Sikhs scattered through the Straits Settlements, who only came to Borneo because they could not obtain employment elsewhere'.[54] They were, however, the nucleus of a police force of aliens which was slowly to grow. The composition of the Company's police in 1883 and in 1898 is listed on p. 53.

The Iban component in the police force was a most significant one. They, more than the police of other ethnic origins, were to be used to patrol the interior, where they were to be responsible as much for disruption as for peace-keeping. In the interior they also joined forces with other groups of Ibans, in Sabah ostensibly to collect jungle produce. It was commonly the custom for young Iban men to leave home for a period and to travel in search of adventure and profit. The length of time away from

1883	3 Europeans	*1898*	5 Europeans
	50 Sikhs		2 Eurasians
	50 Somalis		209 Sikhs
	20 Malays		72 Pathans
	30 Dayaks		85 Dayaks
	153 *total*		6 Sulus
			25 Malays
			5 Hindustanis
			39 Punjabis
			3 Chinese
			5 Brahmin
			2 Bisayas
			1 Kling
			1 Manila
			460 *total*

home varied, probably depending upon such matters as the individual's domestic circumstances, his enthusiasm or aptitude for life in alien surroundings, and his success abroad. The custom was encouraged by the community—the individual was free to roam even after his marriage, until he became male head of his family, or the senior active member—and it was an important means of achieving status and prestige in the community.[55] While the journey, the reported adventure and the wealth brought home all contributed to the young man's prestige, there can be little doubt that the taking of heads was a major incentive, quite consciously maintained.

Ibans had been visiting Sabah before the arrival of the Company. The earliest Company representatives refer to their presence on both the west and east coasts. It seems possible to surmise that if Europeans had not intervened in Borneo in the nineteenth century, the eastward expansion of these peoples would have continued until land was taken up in Sabah by Iban communities. After the advent of Brooke in Sarawak the Iban communities had found their warlike migratory activities forcibly checked. Brooke also sought to restrain the wanderings

of the young men, but in this he seems to have had little success. Most of the Ibans found in Sabah were Saribas Ibans,[36] that is, they were from a region of Sarawak supposedly obedient to Brooke's decrees. On at least four occasions between 1881 and 1897 Brooke ordered the withdrawal of all Sarawak Ibans from the Company's territories,[37] but there seems to have been no diminution of numbers. Sabah offered too many opportunities to the adventurous young Iban intent on his community's conception of a man's life.

As well as opportunities for trading, collecting jungle produce and whatever other commodities might come their way, the Company offered the Ibans good openings in its administration, particularly in the police force and as auxiliaries to police expeditions. In this it was imitating the Sarawak administration, though on a much smaller scale. At Papar, Everett and his successor Davies began recruiting Ibans for the police force with the approval of Treacher. By 1883 the two west-coast stations, Gaya and Papar, were mainly policed by Ibans.[38] One must assume that they were hired because of their warlike capabilities and capacity to strike terror into the Sabahan population. The taking of heads in Sabah was by no means unknown, but none of the Sabahan peoples seem to have been such determined fighters and head-takers as the Ibans of Sarawak. If controlled by Europeans, the Iban police created no serious problems in regard to head-taking. Uncontrolled, however, as they were to be in many outstations, their presence in Sabah, under the Company's banner, would soon create as many problems as it solved.

But, generally, the polyglot and widely scattered police force of the early Company was undercontrolled and underdisciplined, and it was to play a very ambivalent role in the Company's extension of authority. Until the turn of the century it experienced no continuity of command, its European officers had to mix their police duties with other tasks, and its non-European N.C.O.s supervised their detachments with little knowledge of Western-style police work beyond an elementary training in drill. Far from pacifying Sabah, the police force was to become

to the peoples of many areas an outrage and a spur to revolt.

To give his administration a legal framework Treacher borrowed from many colonial sources. The Indian Penal Code, the Indian Criminal Procedure and Civil Procedure Codes, the Indian Evidence Act and the Indian Contract Act were adapted for use in the Company's territory. He also adopted from Labuan weights and measures, as well as revenue farms for opium, tobacco, pawnbroking, and gambling, from Hong Kong land sales and registration, from the Straits Settlements labour protection and the police force, and from Fiji limited liability. The resulting ordinances appeared to give the territory a body of laws quite up to date by the standards of the day. In fact, most of it was intended only for Sandakan, and the majority of Sabahans continued to live under customary law, or experienced the rough-and-ready 'law and order' of the Company's non-European agents. Only in limited respects did Treacher's legislation have a wide impact.

Treacher's law-making on slavery had perhaps the widest consequences, for this was the only area in which the Charter specifically required intervention in indigenous custom, and the Company knew that its administration in this regard would be closely watched by the anti-slavery lobby in Britain. Upon his arrival in 1881 Treacher had called for reports upon the nature of slavery in Sabah from those officers who had had time to observe local custom, Pryer, Everett, and Witti. From London in March 1882 the directors demanded that he lose no time in the abolition of slavery; the Company had just survived a debate in the House of Commons at which the granting of the Charter in the previous November was criticized, and it was necessary that the critics be appeased.[59] Treacher was aware however, as the anti-slavery elements in Britain tended not to be, of the complexities of abolishing slavery amongst the Muslim communities in a country like Sabah. He could not enforce immediate and total prohibition. He did not have a large administration, and he dared not disrupt these societies violently. He was also aware, to some extent, that the repugnance felt by the abolitionists towards slavery, arising as it had

done from European legal and social preconceptions, and European practice, was inappropriate in Sabah. The elementary European conception of slavery, whereby the slave was the property of his master, tended to discount the mutual loyalties and responsibilities which might operate between master and slaves in other systems of slavery. The European horror at the brutalities of the African slave trades tended to associate all systems of slavery with bad treatment of slaves. The patterns of slavery in Sabah did not necessarily fit such simple categories.

From Papar, Everett reported rather brusquely that no slave trade 'properly so called' could be said to exist between that district and the neighbouring coasts, and that the condition of slaves living in the district was 'not generally one of hardship'.[60] Pryer, at Sandakan, had already been tackling the slave question, buying slaves from their owners (paying $60 for women and $40 for men) and recompensing the administration by requiring the freed slaves to work for the government for an appropriate period. He bought only slaves who were maltreated, or who expressed a wish to be freed. Maltreatment, he claimed, was declining since the disruption of slave trading by British and Dutch naval vessels and his own efforts; masters now found it difficult to replace runaways. The number of slaves seeking their freedom was increasing:[61] 'When first I arrived in Sandakan I could not get a single person to work for me for wages, they offered to work for me if I would buy them, but to work for wages was then looked upon (and by many now still is) as much more degrading than being a slave.'

Now, Pryer claimed, the slaves were getting an inkling of what it meant to be a free man. Conditions for slaves seem to have varied between masters. An early European visitor to Sandakan reported:[62]

> While I was at Sandakan, three Prahus came in with slaves for sale from the Sulu group of islands; the slaves were in a wretched state of starvation, and several died of dysentery.
> One that died at Oopak was taken on shore, and the natives practised with their Krises on the dead body: however, on the whole, the slaves were, I think, very well treated while alive, and they look as well fed

and dressed as their masters: those bought in the Prahus had been suffering from the famine at Sulu before they were caught.

The most vigorous activity on the slave question had been carried on by Witti, whose interest in indigenous custom was extraordinary for the time. Sending to Treacher a detailed report on slavery in his area,[63] he noted that there were two classes of slaves—those who had been captured, purchased, were debt slaves, or were the children of slaves, and those, known as *anak amas*, who were children of a slave mother, the father being a freeman other than the slave's master. Male *anak amas* were virtually free, being able to live elsewhere than with their master and being called to serve the master only in cases of special need; they could not be disposed of by sale. Female *anak amas* were also unable to be sold, but usually had to contribute more to the master, for example half of their earnings. By marriage with freemen they became free, after some payment to the master. In cases where a slave woman conceived by her master she became free, the offspring was born free, and the woman might become one of the master's wives. But Witti noted that in such pregnancies abortion was common.

Debt slavery, in which a debtor was enslaved until the debt was paid off, was widespread and frequently prolonged by the 'exorbitant usury' practised in Sabah. Sometimes it was also incurred voluntarily, for example to pay off gambling debts. Witti went on to describe the condition of life of the slaves he had encountered. Slave couples sometimes set up home together and kept themselves. Usually they belonged to a common master, but, if slaves of different masters married, a *brian*, of 1 *pikul* in 3 of the girl's value, was paid to the girl's owner. Married slave girls never slept with their owner. Slaves could acquire property, including other slaves. Masters might punish slaves for laziness, attempting to escape, and other minor offences, and put them to death for grave offences, all without enquiry by the authorities, but Witti claimed that '*vox populi*' imposed restraints on ill treatment. Some well behaved

slaves of long standing were honoured within the family that owned them by being granted the rank of 'brother', or 'sister', or 'mother'. The granting of freedom, however, occurred only in rare circumstances, for example where a slave had shared a major peril with his master. Witti assessed the numbers of slaves in the districts he had visited as enormously high. In the Tempasuk district 'we have per 3 Muslim inhabitants only one who is not somehow a slave'; in Marudu Bay the ratio was 4 slaves to 1 freeman. Some masters owned as many as 30 slaves, but the average number was 2.

It is clear from this information that the conventional European image of slavery, as applied to Sabah, was not entirely appropriate. The cash nexus between master and slave certainly existed; as did examples of inhumane treatment, but 'slavery' was implicit in the social order, rather than being merely an inhumane economic device. Witti noted that many slaves shifted for themselves, rather than working for, and being maintained by, their master. In these cases the slave relationship involved, no doubt, obligations invoked by the master on special occasions. Words drawn from the European feudal experience—vassal, liegeman, or homager—might more aptly describe the content of the relationship than 'slave'.

Treacher legislated in 1881 and 1883 to bring about the gradual abolition of slavery through banning the trade in slaves and new enslavement, including that of children born of slave parents. In 1902 the Company was able to abolish all slavery outright. It is interesting to ponder, however, why the abolition of slavery caused so little apparent disruption. Granted that the abolition was gradual, some slave-owners must nevertheless have felt the pinch. Probably some discontent over the banning of the slave trade, and this erosion of the old social order, was reflected in the troubles of the decade 1893–1903. The Mat Salleh revolt and associated troubles were predominantly Muslim revolts, in which the Company could count on the loyalty of few of its Muslim peoples. The revolts were never, however, attributed by the Company, or by the rebels in their recorded grievances, to the attack on slavery.

The results of the Company's anti-slavery campaign may in fact have been quite limited. Open trading in slaves disappeared. Slaves who disliked their masters, and had the courage to leave them, moved elsewhere and obtained free status. For the rest, the economic foundations of slavery and the social relationships involved remained in existence, somewhat eroded and somewhat transmuted. The network of social obligations took other names, probably with the acquiescence of the more knowing Company officers. Men who once would have been termed slaves became 'followers', women 'junior wives';[64] debt-slaves became, simply, debtors. By the same token, men who formerly had owned many slaves continued, somewhat mysteriously, to be men of great patronage and influence in their districts.

In contrast to the attention given by Treacher to the slavery question his legislation on land was dilatory and inadequate, although his first intentions had been good. In 1881, still in the first flush of enthusiasm, he recommended that all land owned indigenously should be surveyed before the expected large-scale immigration of Chinese, and lands 'for the support of the various tribes' be set aside.[65] In 1884 he was impressed by the system of demarcation of holdings on the Putatan, where large blocks of stone marked the boundaries. He gave instructions that the district should be regarded as a 'purely native one', not recognizing that there were already fifty or sixty Chinese in the area, many of whom had intermarried with the Kadazan people, which would later produce problems over the definition of 'native' lands.[66] Treacher did, however, grasp the difficulties of land demarcation where the cultivation of dry, or hill, padi was practised, and where shifts in settlement had left residual rights, for example to particular fruit trees. On a visit to the Bengkoka river, on the eastern side of Marudu Bay, the Orang Sungei pointed out that their system of cultivation required a large acreage, the land being used for cultivation in five to seven year cycles. Treacher promised at least a rough demarcation, noting that surplus land might be available here for estate development.[67]

The reduction of the Company's staff to a minimum put paid, however, to Treacher's concern for protection of indigenously owned land. A proclamation of 1883 forbade land transactions between 'natives' and foreigners without government supervision, but it was quite impossible to implement. Another thirty years were in fact to pass before indigenous land holdings were to be surveyed and registered. In the Treacher years properly supervised land transactions under Company land law occurred only in the Sandakan area. Fortunately, land sales to outsiders in these years were not large. Before 1887 the only estates of significance to be established were those of the Chinese Sabah Land Farming Company on Sandakan Bay (an enterprise which quickly foundered leaving debts to the Company of $54,000) and the German Borneo Company on Pulo Banggi, which successfully produced tobacco leaf of high quality.

In 1886 a Dutch tobacco planter leased 30,000 acres at the southern end of Marudu Bay, heralding a brief boom in land for tobacco in the late 1880s. This boom was to catch the Company, with its inadequate lands department and ignorance of indigenous holdings, off guard, and produce a number of disputes over land-ownership in the Marudu Bay area. It did not, however, produce any substantial efforts to reverse the basically *laissez-faire* attitudes to land which Treacher had been forced to adopt. To the Company the population of Sabah seemed small, and much of the territory appeared to be vacant land. Broadly this attitude had validity, but it ignored the problem that settlers and indigenes might lay claim to the same stretches of more desirable land, and that neither land legislation nor administration were adequate to ensure justice for indigenous land-holders.

On the question of revenue collection Treacher also displayed good intentions towards the indigenous peoples, but turned a blind eye to the ill-effects produced in practice by his ramshackle administration. In 1887 the total revenue of the territory amounted to $157,192 made up principally of the following items:[68]

Licences	$39,553
Profit on copper coin	32,297
Customs	26,644
Rents exclusive of land	14,235
Land sales	14,505
Poll-tax	9,976
Fines and fees	6,625

The balance consisted of such items as local rates, harbour dues, land rents, and postal revenue. It is clear from this list that the burden of revenue-raising was intended to fall upon the town populations, which meant principally the 4,000 then living in Sandakan, although traders were beginning to cluster around the other stations of the Company where, in return for paying customs dues and other taxes, they enjoyed the protection of the Company's non-European police and an occasional visit from a European district officer. The principal item, 'licences', included a variety of revenue farms supervising, and arguably encouraging, the sale of opium, spirits, and imported tobacco (tobacco grown by the indigenous peoples was not taxed) and gambling, pawnbroking and prostitution. The licences were designed to tax the Chinese population, and, in the words of W. H. Read, the Company's agent at Singapore, to tax their 'vices, not their virtues'.[69] Upon their introduction there was some opposition in Sandakan. Pryer, and forty-nine Chinese traders, sought a ban on gambling, fearing it would cause indebtedness and crime, and the Company itself discussed the effects the farms would have on its public image. A rival petition, signed by fifty-one people, requested a gambling farm, however, and the Company decided it could follow what was then the current practice in other British colonies. Shops housing the 'farms' then began to appear not only in Sandakan but wherever trading settlements appeared across the territory. The item 'profit on copper coin', obtained as the Company replaced a mixture of currencies in the territory with its own coinage, was to be a major source of income until 1893, although it galled Treacher to see his administration propped

up by such an artificial means of revenue raising. The item 'rents exclusive of land' concerned the hiring of shops, godowns, wharves, and market-stalls.

In proportion to the total revenue the sums raised directly from the indigenous population—in poll-tax and some of the 'fines and fees'—were very small, and Treacher was to be criticized by the Company's business manager in London, William Crocker, for extracting an 'inadequate' and 'insignificant' amount from a population estimated at 150,000.[70] The lack of staff in fact made systematic taxation impossible, but in any case Treacher doubted whether the local population had much to give. He hoped that commercial enterprise and an immigrant population would ultimately make Sabah pay. His attitude towards poll-tax was therefore rather casual. The actual amount of poll-tax levied varied, since he attempted to follow the customs of the former regimes. The general principle was that each adult pay $1 per year. In some districts $2 was levied on each door; on the Padas each married male paid $2 and bachelors $1.[71] Far greater variations occurred between districts, however, because of the system of collection by unsupervised non-European agents, both in the amounts levied and in the amount the Company received. Collection appeared to the Company to be desultory, but in the late 1880s and 1890s the government was to be taken aback to discover how much unacknowledged and excessive poll-tax collection had occurred.

It remains difficult, however, to generalize about the effects the early Company had on the indigenous peoples in terms of taxation. For those living on the coast and rivers who had been accessible to Brunei or Sulu authority it is quite possible that life was made somewhat easier; in the old days the incidence of taxation varied from river to river with the enthusiasm, or lack of it, of the holders of taxation rights. At the coming of the Company a host of possible taxes were swept away.[72] For the peoples of the interior, on the other hand, hitherto inaccessible to the old rulers, the requirement to pay poll-tax was a novelty, and here more than on the coast the tax-collectors of the

Company abused their authority. In the interior poll-tax was to be seen, at best, as a kind of protection money, to be paid rather than suffer a visit from the Company's police. Finally, in this consideration of the Company's initial taxation policies, the 'flow-on' effect of the taxes levied on the town populations might be noted. Not intended for the indigenous population, the range of taxation devices aimed principally at Chinese traders and shopkeepers did have to be recouped in the prices they charged, and in the interest rates on the credit they extended to their clients. Ultimately these charges percolated along the trading routes to the heart of the territory.

Government by Expedition on the East Coast

Between the years 1885 and 1888 the naturalist John Whitehead visited Sabah, his chief aim being to climb Mount Kinabalu. He saw much of the west coast, and his lavishly produced account of his travels, published in 1893, contains detailed descriptions of many parts of the country as it then was, and of the peoples he encountered. In his comments upon the Company's administration he was harsh, contemptuously describing the unprepossessing stations from which the Europeans supposedly ruled. Kudat, he wrote:[73]

> in 1885 looked anything but a prosperous port of the young colony; a greater part of the town was built of attap houses over the sea on piles, and on a sandspit between the sea and a swamp, but nearly all were tenantless and dropping to pieces, two Chinese brick shops being the only buildings worthy of the name. The Government bungalow was a fine substantial building, both cool and comfortable, being built with expectations of great things, which up to the present have not been realised.

Whitehead pictured Gaya Island as 'hot and unhealthy', with a few atap houses clustered near the pier and above them, perched at the top of a steep hill, the Company's station. Of Mempakul (a station established in 1884 to administer the newly ceded Padas-Klias peninsula) he wrote:[74]

The village is built close to the sea on a narrow sandspit, and at the back is, at low tide, a filthy stinking mangrove-swamp; the whole country round about is swamp for miles, and a more depressing and unhealthy looking place I have seldom seen. The officials of the Company who are doomed to this place of exile must have a sorry time indeed and nearly all are victims, as might be expected, to malarial fever.

Whitehead's attitude to European colonialism was clear. He condemned the 'civilising (?) white man' who:[75] '. . . goes into countries to which he has not the least right in the world, armed with weapons of the most improved pattern and other Christian-like inventions for the improvement of his dark-skinned brethren.' His chief complaint against the Company was not, however, its invoking of violence, but rather that it was unable to govern competently, having assumed sovereignty. The Company's officers, he claimed, saw little or nothing of the people they were supposed to be ruling; the native peoples would not bother to visit the Company's coastal outposts, and the occasional visits by Europeans to troubled areas settled nothing. He was especially critical of the establishment of alien native chiefs:[76]

If this philanthropic company, the shares in which are held by rich Englishmen, cannot afford to place trustworthy European officers over these tribes, for God's sake leave them alone and avoid the stirring up of strife by placing such unprincipled blackguards in authority.

By contrast, Treacher and his contemporaries seem to have thought that these methods were on the whole satisfactory. Upon the Company's coming it had met with no serious opposition, and from this Treacher had concluded that it had a docile population to deal with. Nothing happened during his period of governorship to challenge seriously this view. The occasional expedition to proclaim the Company's presence in Sabah, to settle feuds or stop head-hunting seemed to be all that was required of the European administrators to keep the peace. This notion of government failed to take into account two things. Firstly, it failed to acknowledge the profound ignorance

of the country in which the Europeans, essentially, remained. It also failed to perceive the changes which the Company's presence in Sabah, its expeditions, and its non-European agents were precipitating, despite the apparent lightness of government. The occasional expedition, undertaken in ignorance, changed things, but not always in the way the government imagined. The Company was ultimately to meet with hostility in almost all parts of its territory, from Darvel Bay to the Padas-Klias peninsula, and throughout the interior. Some of the hostilities were self-generated by conflict between groups and were not directed primarily at the government, but many were, and were the result of government policies. A previous historian of the Company claims that it met resistance of only a minor kind, and argues that:[77] 'The Company was too weak to be arrogant, too poor to be powerful. A grumble of discontent from a kampong was viewed as seriously as others viewed the rising of a Zulu nation. . .'.

This correctly emphasizes the poverty, and therefore the weakness, of the Company, but draws the wrong inferences. The fact is that the Company never heard most 'grumbles of discontent', ignored many of those that it did, and quite often only acted when the grumbles became screams of defiance. During the 1890s the Company faced general revolt, and the only reason for its security of tenure in Sabah was to be the fragmentation of the population. The Company was never confronted with united opposition, and, except where the remarkable leader Mat Salleh contrived to alienate at once a large number of communities, the Company was able to isolate and suppress opposition with relative ease. Until the twentieth century, and the extension of regular European supervision to all parts of the country, and the beginnings of a proper understanding of local problems and discontents, Company government was of the kill-or-cure variety.

During Treacher's governorship there were a number of forays from the coast into the interior, designed to settle overt hostility. These will be discussed in the following chapter, in the context of the wave of disruption and revolt with which

Treacher's successors had to deal. It is appropriate here, however, to examine the Company's early government of Darvel Bay, the Kinabatangan, and other east-coast rivers. In Darvel Bay the Company met opposition from the beginning, and its authority there, in real terms, was to remain questionable for many years. William Pryer, from his pioneering establishment at Sandakan, had assailed what he considered to be piracy, and the opposition of the Company and other European governments in the region rapidly brought to an end its open practice. But whilst overt lawlessness was being brought to an end, the settlement of the peoples of the area as peaceful subjects was a different matter. There were few, if any, permanent settlements in Darvel Bay. The blue-green waters of the bay were dotted with innumerable islands, and a loose chain of islands connected south-eastern Sabah with Sulu, making quite artificial any political boundaries established by the Company or by the Spanish and the Dutch. Here, the Bajau peoples remained elusive and reluctant to accept any permanent subjection to the Company. The mainland was almost empty of people, thousands of acres of uninhabited forest country. The effect that the slave trade had in depopulating this country cannot be gauged, but it may have been substantial. In 1883 Banjer, Pryer's native agent, explored the Segama. Four days up he discovered his first kampong, of six houses, the people 'Tumbunwhas', some Muslim, some 'still Kaffirs'. He was told that the district had only been resettled in the previous three years; for years previously it had been deserted because of attacks by 'Sakais', warlike people from the Sembakung, who were now afraid of the White man and no longer visited the area. The country had, however, also been ravaged by smallpox in the early 1870s. Two small non-Muslim groups in the region between Silam and Sandakan Bay, the 'Subans' and the 'Bagahacs', were reported to have been devastated by the disease. The remnants now lived near Silam.[78]

One other group existed in Darvel Bay. At Silam a small group of Buludupis existed, under Sulu sponsorship. As with the Buludupis on the Kinabatangan they worked birds' nests

caves. Pryer, in the hope of developing this possibly lucrative trade, had urged the establishment of a station at Silam, and in 1881 an experimental garden was established there, under the direction of the Company's agricultural officer, Von Donop, and his assistant, Callaghan, both formerly from Ceylon. Some 50 acres were planted, by a team of imported Javanese labourers, with cocoa, coffee, pepper, sugar, and a variety of other possible plantation crops. Ironically, Von Donop rejected the idea of experimenting with tobacco, the one plantation crop which was to prove valuable to the country until the advent of rubber, and the garden never became of significance. Nor did Silam prosper as a trading station. In 1883 Bampfylde reported that there was little need for a station in the area; the population did not work the jungle produce and they seemed to be 'about the poorest people and live in the meanest dwellings of any I have seen in Borneo, especially for coast people'.[79] Early in the following year Von Donop and Callaghan were retrenched in the economy drive.

The outlook in 1883–4, therefore, in economic terms, scarcely encouraged the Company to devote much attention to Darvel Bay. In February 1884 Treacher ordered Pryer to subsidize native chiefs and agents to uphold the Company's authority. Nakoda Gumbah, a Sulu trader, was appointed magistrate at Silam, and Usman customs clerk on Pulo Omadal. Writing of the endemic violence in the area Treacher stressed:[80]

> the paramount importance of not risking any collision with the natives in Darvel Bay, this year at any rate. Our expenditure for 1884 has been distinctly limited . . . the number of the constabulary cannot be increased and its present strength is not sufficient to warrant us taking active steps to thoroughly open up the Darvel Bay district.

To the worried directors in London he explained that 'smuggling' went on in every country, that in the absence of police it was surprising how little violence, thieving, and robbery there was, and that Silam had failed as a trading station because no one owning slaves would visit it in case their slaves were freed. But two faintly glittering prizes maintained the Com-

pany's interest in the area—birds' nests and gold. A European explorer on the Segama in 1884, H. Walker, later Commissioner of Lands, reported many traces of gold. Further exploration suggested the metal might be present in workable quantities. The existence of the Madai birds' nests caves was already known to the Company, but their yield had been carefully obscured; the Sultan of Sulu had received his tribute only irregularly, and the new government was similarly treated.

In 1884 Daly, with a party of Sikh and Iban police, prevailed upon the owners of the caves to open them for inspection. Daly[81] reported that they entered the caves at ground level, and, struggling through guano sometimes waist deep, were shown a series of small caves connected by passages. The collectors reached the birds' nests by lowering themselves into the chambers on rattan ropes through holes in the roofs. The party also visited the Baturong caves and others in the area, and attempted to discover ownership. There were more than twenty owners of the Madai *lobang*, with at least one owned communally. In October 1884 Pryer visited the owners.[82] He took with him a detachment of police, and at Silam the Company's chief, Datu Temenggong Gumbah (formerly Nakoda) provided an additional force of about 100 Bajaus and Sulus. All claims, shares, and interests in the caves of the Darvel Bay district were transferred to the Company for $6,000 per year. To force a lease on the caves of this sort did not settle the matter, as the government was to learn. The collection and sale of the crop needed supervision. After the following harvest smuggling reduced the total declared worth of birds' nests to $7,694. In 1886 Treacher therefore concluded a new agreement with the people with interests in the caves. They were permitted to collect the birds' nests in exchange for $1,500, and were to sell the nests at Silam or Sandakan, where the government could charge duty of 20 per cent of value.[83]

Gold was the chief lure which kept the Company at this time in Darvel Bay and for a brief period raised the hopes of the directors in London in a time of desperate worry about the Company's financial standing. In June 1885 a call was made

upon the shareholders to save the Company from insolvency. Sir Rutherford Alcock wrote to Treacher, 'unless something turns up trumps very shortly we shall be in a serious if not a critical position'.[84] The promise of gold on the Segama persuaded the Company to reverse Treacher's decision to withdraw European oversight from Darvel Bay and Callaghan returned to Silam. He was required as his most important task to develop the 'gold fields'. He was not encouraged to involve himself in local affairs. Trade was not to be harassed with the Company's regulations, and he was to interfere as little as he possibly could in slave and criminal cases. The latter were to be left to the Company's chiefs and agents, and settled 'according to native custom'. It was expected that the gold finds would attract many Chinese; these were to be settled where they could not be robbed or murdered by the Bajaus and Sulus. The sole positive instruction, other than to find gold, was to collect the proper amount of birds' nests revenue. A Bajau chief of tough but dubious character, Pengiran Laut, was to be paid $500 a year to assist Callaghan in this task. As a further reward for assisting the Company the Pengiran was given the title Panglima.[85]

The search for gold came to nothing. A considerable number of Chinese panned for gold on the river and about a dozen Europeans arrived, hoping to spearhead another gold rush. In London two companies were floated. No significant amounts of gold were discovered and the dense, unhealthy jungle claimed heavy casualties. In February 1887, two months before his departure, Treacher issued a proclamation forbidding entry to North Borneo to any European arriving without means; the proclamation signified that neither the Company nor anyone else would get rich quick in this frustrating country. The sea peoples of Darvel Bay displayed little interest in the miniature gold rush. Instead they concentrated upon the one source of wealth they knew existed. In April 1886 an affray occurred between a group of Bajaus and the harvesters of the birds' nests. The Company's paid Bajau chief, Panglima Laut, was implicated, and Callaghan wrote to Treacher that there was no

trustworthy Bajau in the district. The Bajaus were reported to be defiantly gathered on Pulo Omadal.[86]

Treacher decided to take a stand. After an unsuccessful appeal to the British administrator at Labuan, Leys, who was highly critical of the Company, Treacher sailed to Singapore and prevailed upon the Commander-in-Chief of the China station, returning to Sabah in the gunboat HMS *Zephyr* with a detachment of sixty police. At Sandakan he added sixty of the Company's Sikhs and Ibans. The Bajau communities fled before this show of force, and it was left to the Company's police to capture deserted boats, and burn the houses and chop down the coconut trees of three kampongs. Later, the Bajau chiefs visited Callaghan at Silam and sought pardon.[87] The government undertook no further reprisals, and Bajau loyalties soon wavered. In Sulu the young Sultan Amir-ul-Kiram was engaged in a struggle for power with the Spanish and their Sulu client, Datu Harun ar'Rashid. The Bajaus sailed for Sulu to offer their services to the young Sultan.[88] They were choosing the losing side, and they were certainly not prepared to submit to the Spanish, but neither were they yet ready to submit genuinely to the Company.

The Bajaus had the misfortune to be considered 'pirates', and therefore British naval assistance had been gained in the Company's expedition against them. It was not used elsewhere, and even visits to the Company's waters were infrequent, although Treacher had appealed to the directors to use their influence to increase the visits. The *Zephyr* action in fact precipitated a court of inquiry, and in October 1886 Treacher was advised[89] that in future naval assistance would be granted only on the highest authority, unless the lives of British subjects were in danger.

The Company's main interest in the Kinabatangan centred upon the Gomantong birds' nests caves, and the capture of its share of the precious revenue, as successor to the former rights of the Sultan of Sulu. In 1884 its rights were enforced, violently but successfully, and the swifts which built the delectable nests began to contribute regularly to the Company's meagre fi-

nances. Otherwise, the Company's activity on the river was negligible during Treacher's period. Hewett, who had been stationed far up the river at Pinangah, was withdrawn in 1883 for reasons of economy; he was replaced by a small detachment of non-European police. The only Company representative of note to remain on the river was the Sulu, Haji Datu Ansarudin. In September 1881 Treacher visited Pengiran Samah and other headmen who controlled the Gomantong birds' nests caves, and promised to settle their grievances against the Sulu chief, though he was quietly pleased to see the Pengiran powerless.[90] The government nevertheless still did not receive its share of the birds' nests caves. When therefore the services of Bampfylde, the Brooke protégé, were secured in 1882, he was appointed Special Commissioner for the east coast, and as his first task was required to investigate the caves and the collection of nests. Bampfylde reported that Pengiran Samah was allowing the nests to go uncollected rather than allow the government to have its share.[91] He urged that the government take the caves over. The complex ownership of the caves was set out, and Bampfylde suggested compensation to all but Pengiran Samah. Treacher wanted to be fair, and in January 1883 the owners of the caves were brought to Sandakan to discuss the take-over. The Pengiran sailed from the Bay before any agreement could be reached. Treacher hastily despatched Bampfylde, with some collectors at odds with the Pengiran, to take possession of the caves and supervise the harvest. With the assistance of policemen and the Sulu followers of Haji Datu Ansarudin the harvest was gathered in. Pengiran Samah was awarded a flat sum equivalent to the share to which he was supposedly entitled but 'not perhaps to that which he dishonestly secured'.[92]

As the harvest period for 1884 approached Treacher decided that the government would again supervise the proper collection of the nests, and distribute one-third of the net profits 'amongst such of the Buludupis as to the Governor shall seem fit'.[93] Any who interfered were threatened with severe fines and imprisonment. From Malapi came reports that Pengiran

Samah was preparing to resist. He was calling in all the Bludupis and requiring them to swear on the Koran that they would oppose the government collectors, and he was threatening to burn out the caves. Pryer urged Treacher that the Pengiran be 'dealt with now once and for all'. The commandant of police, de Fontaine, concluded that it might be 'an attempt to attest native supremacy on the Kinabatangan' and sought 'prompt and energetic action'.[94] Treacher sailed up the Kinabatangan with a party of thirty police and at Malapi augmented his force with the Sulu followers of Haji Datu Ansarudin. The police surrounded the house in which Pengiran Samah was bailed up with a small group of followers, and cut off all hope of assistance from up-river where his family and other supporters were. Treacher appealed to him to come out, but he would come no further than the door. His behaviour to the last was as double-edged as it had always been, without scruple and tenaciously brave. From the door he told Treacher that he had no quarrel with the government, that it could do what it liked with the caves, and that his followers were to blame, for it was they who had persuaded him to defy the government. Yet he would not surrender. When Treacher ordered the house to be rushed, the Pengiran and his followers charged, and, 'fighting desperately', he was shot down in front of the government lines.[95]

Up-river, at Bilit, Treacher met the Pengiran's wife and daughters, and his brother-in-law Dait, who was also related to the Pengiran through a common great-great-grandfather. Dait and the other owners surrendered their rights in the caves to the government, being 'satisfied with whatever share of the proceeds the Government may assign . . .'.[96] In the following year the government began a system whereby Dait (later given the title Panglima) supervised the collection and sale of the birds' nests in return for a sum reached by agreement with the government.

After the death of Pengiran Samah there was no more opposition to the government on the Kinabatangan. No European supervision was considered necessary. Pryer urged that the

potential of the long river should be evaluated, and in July 1884 Daly was despatched to explore it. His report was depressing. He estimated the population living along the river at about 7,500, though they were scattered and migratory. Malapi, with its population of about 100, he considered to be the only place worthy of the title 'village'. Other smaller centres of trade existed at Bilit and the *kuala* of the rivers Kuamut, Karamuak, Imbak, and Pinangah. The natives appeared to settle for only two or three years, planting hill padi and other crops, and then moving on to virgin jungle. He saw few signs of wealth. Pryer had been convinced that the peoples of the rivers were wealthy but kept their wealth concealed; Daly reported seeing brassware and jars, but described them as inferior to those seen on the west coast.

Two features of Daly's report require particular notice. Firstly, he advised that poll-tax could be imposed without difficulty; at the rate of $1 per head it might yield $1,500 per year. The tax might be collected by headmen who would be paid 10 per cent commission. Secondly, he praised the industry of the Ibans from Sarawak who penetrated far up the river in search of jungle produce.[97] On this river, unsupervised by Europeans and scarcely known to them, both these matters were to have unhappy consequences. The Europeans had staked their claim on the peoples of the river, and opened up the river to trade, but the implementation of that claim, as taxes were gathered, and the conduct of trade, now that Ibans, Chinese, Bruneis, and Sulus were able to gain unrestricted access, were matters out of their hands. The impact upon the peoples of the river was beyond the government's foresight. In Sandakan Pryer deplored the absence of any European on the Kinabatangan and wrote,[98] 'It would be about as easy to manage New Guinea from here'. The comment was apt, but it was ignored.

Much the same story was to be told on the other rivers of the east coast. For long periods they were left entirely without visits from Europeans and the collection of poll-tax and trading activities went unsupervised. On the Labuk Pryer had pro-

claimed the Company's authority but, apart from a journey by the mineralogist, Hatton, and a visit in August 1883 by Pryer, little attention was paid to it. In 1886 the Company's native agent Banjer was despatched to increase the collection of poll-tax, which task was put in the hands of the Company chief, Haji Durahim.[99]

As little attention was devoted to the Paitan and Sugut. The Paitan received one single visit, in September 1883. Gueritz described the Orang Sungei as 'very intelligent and obliging' and delighted to have been visited.[100] Gueritz visited the Sugut in 1882 and 1883, but it was not revisited until 1886, when R. M. Little inspected the small detachment of police posted at the river's mouth and ordered the Company's chief, Serif Hussein, to collect poll-tax, the collection of which hitherto had been 'very dilatory'.[101] In Ulu Sugut, above Kaingaran, Little discovered a long-standing feud between two groups, the 'Tinagas' and the 'Kagasingan'. In perhaps three or four generations only three lives had been lost on either side, but the feud was pursued bitterly. Fourteen years before, the 'Kagasingan' had offered some prized jars in settlement, but the 'Tinagas' had refused them, claiming that the jars had been bewitched. Now, Si Babong, headman of the 'Tinagas', requested the Company's aid, in return for the poll-tax which his people had sent to the Company.

Little was unable to get the two sides to meet as he had hoped at Merungin, a kampong containing intermarried members of both groups. He later sent up Haji Durahim, whose efforts were equally unavailing. He reported that the dispute had originated when the 'Kagasingan' had first arrived from the area at the 'foot of Kinabalu'. The 'Tinagas' had allowed them to settle, provided that they observed 'Tinaga' custom and assisted the 'Tinagas' in their feuds. They had done neither, nor had they made payment for the land taken up. The feud had now become quite complicated by the mutual killings and seizure of property. The 'Kagasingan' threatened to renew the attack after the next harvest, and invited the White men to come up and see which of the two groups fought best. Haji Durahim

returned to the coast and collected a force of 600 followers. The White men were pleased to learn that, confronted with this force, the 'Kagasingan' decided that discretion was the better part of valour and submitted to the government. Haji Durahim thus merely extended his collection of poll-tax.[102]

The area around Marudu Bay was also little patrolled by the Europeans. Here Haji Durahim held considerable sway. He originally lived on the Bengkoka, but in consideration of his services to the Company and in recognition of his considerable influence he was granted land near Kudat. He first pleased the Company by providing information on an affair on the Bongan. In March 1883, it was reported, a Chinese trader accidentally shot a Kadazan woman, presumably the slave of a Bajau man. The Bajau man and his 'friends' killed the Chinese and rebuffed the Malay sergeant of police sent from Kudat to investigate. A party of thirty police were then sent, and in an affray the Bajau and seven followers were shot. Throughout the episode the paid government chiefs, the Serifs Sheh and Alam, remained carefully out of the way; Serif Alam, indeed, was suspected of encouraging resistance to the government. He was later reported to have closed the Bongan river, and to be sheltering two of the murderers of the Chinese. Gueritz, then resident at Kudat, promptly took over a party of police, invited Serif Alam to meet him, and had him arrested.

Gueritz urged that the Serif be deported as a trouble-maker but Treacher was unhappy about his treatment. He asked Serif Sheh, his brother Usman, and others to go surety for him but all refused, and the Serif was packed off to Singapore. He died of cholera at Mecca in the following year.[103] The incident had an interesting sequel more than twenty years later when the government was investigating charges of misconduct by the Muslim chiefs of Marudu Bay against the Kadazan peoples of the area. A Company chief, Datu Undok, was sent for to explain his conduct, but refused to attend, pointing out that, long before, Serif Alam had been sent for and had been deported. The European officer at Kudat then, Gueritz, was now governor.[104] The incident illustrated the infrequency of European

attention to the area. The Company knew little of what its native chiefs were doing, and they in turn could only infer the nature of Company government from a few summary visits by Europeans.

1. C.O. 874/119, Chairman to Governor, 10/4/86.

2. C.O. 874/116, Chairman to A. Dent, 1/12/82, 15/2/82.

3. C.O. 874/116, A. Dent to Chairman, 3/3/83, Chairman to A. Dent, 22/3/83.

4. The Company was not prevented by its charter from engaging in commercial activities, but it decided to confine itself to administration to avoid the clash of interests which commercial rivalry with other enterprises might entail. This is not to suggest, however, that the Company conducted its administration independently of commercial pressures. Through loans and other inducements the Company became deeply involved in the fortunes of many enterprises operating in Sabah.

5. C.O. 874/88, Reports of Annual General Meetings.

6. See R. Pringle, *Rajahs and Rebels*, London, 1970.

7. C.O. 874/180, 12/4/78, 10/5/78; E. Dent to Overbeck, 10/5/78.

8. C.O. 874/112, A. Dent to W. H. Read, 13/5/81.

9. C.O. 874/102, Treacher to A. Dent, 4/4/82.

10. C.O. 874/239, 21/8/85, p. 679.

11. C.O. 874/116, Chairman to A. Dent, 15/11/82.

12. e.g. the Royal Niger Company, chartered (as the National African Company) in 1886, and the British South Africa Company, chartered in 1889.

13. C.O. 874/169.

14. C.O. 874/111, A. Dent to Everett, 13/2/80.

15. C.O. 874/116, A. Dent to Chairman, 3/3/83.

16. C.O. 874/229, 8/8/82, p. 305; C.O. 874/241, p. 241.

17. C.O. 874/228, 29/12/81, p. 102.

18. C.O. 874/192, Pryer, 31/7/80; Pryer to A. Dent, 5/8/80.

19. C.O. 874/187, Hewett to Pryer, 8, 12, 25/8/81; 14/9/81; 15, 30/10/81.

20. C.O. 874/111, A. Dent to Everett, 12/12/79; C.O. 874/112, A. Dent to Read, 14/1/81; C.O. 874/102, Treacher to A. Dent, 31/8/81; C.O. 874/228, Treacher to A. Dent, 29/8/81, p. 80.

21. Spenser St. John, *Life in the Forests of the Far East*, vol. 1, p. 393*f*., vol. 11, p. 217*f*.

22. C.O. 874/70–72, Diary of W. Pretyman, 8–15/5/79, 30/6/79; C.O.

874/74, F. X. Witti, 10–12/11/80, 3–16/5/81; C.O. 874/235, Gueritz to Treacher, 6/9/83, Treacher to Chairman, 31/7/83, p. 141. F. Hatton, *op. cit.*, pp. 166–8, p. 218*f*.

23. C.O. 874/230, Treacher to A. Dent, 29/4/82, p. 237.

24. I. D. Black, 'The Ending of Brunei Rule in Sabah, 1878–1902' *JMBRAS*, XLI, pt. 2, 1968; D. E. Brown (ed.) 'Two Colonial Office Memoranda on the History of Brunei', *JMBRAS*, XLII, 2, 1968; D. E. Brown, 'The Social Structure of 19th century Brunei', *Brunei Museum Journal*, 1, 1969; D. E. Brown, 'Brunei: the Structure and History of a Bornean Malay Sultanate', *Brunei Museum Journal*, 2, 1970; W. H. Treacher, 'British Borneo', *JSBRAS*, XX, 1889, and XXI, 1890.

25. C.O. 874/236, 14/5/84, p. 530; 6/2/84, p. 156.

26. C.O. 874/74, F. X. Witti, 28/2/81, 1/3/81.

27. C.O. 874/236, 14/5/84, p. 530.

28. C.O. 874/237, 8/10/84, p. 458; 28/10/84, p. 514; 10/11/84, p. 577; 20/11/84, p. 608.

29. C.O. 874/241, 14/5/84, p. 263.

30. C.O. 874/237, 20/11/84, p. 608; 20/12/84, p. 776; 20/12/84, p. 790.

31. C.O. 874/70–72, Diary of W. Pretyman, 11/9/79, 12/10/79, 16/12/79.

32. C.O. 874/238, 25/2/85, p. 276: 15/3/85, p. 317; C.O. 874/239, 15/5/85–25/5/85, pp. 45–68; 8/6/85, p. 179; 10/8/85, p. 549. C.O. 874/253, 7/6/92, p. 149.

33. C.O. 874/238, 15/3/85, p. 317.

34. C.O. 874/241, 25/5/86, p. 442; 2/6/86, p. 492; 2/6/86, p. 762; C.O. 874/242, 20/1/87, p. 659; 6/1/87, p. 661; 17/2/87, p. 807.

35. See chapter 3.

36. See chapter 4.

37. C.O. 874/248, 16/12/89, p. 743; C.O. 874/263, 6, 8, 12, 20/12/98, pp. 294–298; 7/3/79, p. 321; 16/6/99, p. 953.

38. Gueritz's career in the Company was interrupted by a period in the Malay States, 1885–90.

39. For comment on some of the early Company officers see C.O. 874/248, 16/12/89, p. 743.

40. C.O. 874/247, 14/4/89, p. 543; 17/4/89, p. 540; C.O. 874/253, 14/1/93, p. 1005.

41. C.O. 874/244, 29/9/87, p. 294.

42. C.O. 874/245, 4/7/88, p. 709.

43. C.O. 874/238, 1/1/85, p. 62.

44. C.O. 874/244, 17/8/87, p. 74; C.O. 874/249, 10/4/90, p. 336.

45. C.O. 874/238, 19/11/84, p. 33; *Herald* 1/7/92, p. 218.

46. C.O. 874/245, 4/7/88, p. 709; *Herald* 1/6/86, p. 91.

47. *Herald*, 1/7/87, pp. 149–59, 1/8/87, p. 195; *Gazette*. 1/8/87, p. 201; C.O. 874/252, 9/11/91, p. 20.

48. C.O. 874/241, 1/4/86, p. 332.

49. C.O. 874/233, 25/1/83, p. 139.

50. 'A.V.D.B.', 'Headhunting', *Journal of the North Borneo Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, p. 21 (supplement to the *Herald*, 1/10/96).

51. I. H. N. Evans, *Among Primitive People in Borneo*, London, 1922, p. 195.

52. C.O. 874/102, Treacher to A. Dent, 26/5/82, 18/10/82.

53. ibid. 4/4/82.

54. C.O. 874/233, Everett to Harington, 25/1/83, p. 139; C.O. 874/236, p. 21; C.O. 874/263, p. 204.

55. See J. D. Freeman, *Report on the Ibans of Sarawak*, Kuching (H.M.S.O) 1955, p. 320f. See also I. D. Black, 'Dayaks in North Borneo', *Sarawak Museum Journal*, XVII, 34–5, 1969.

56. C.O. 874/255, 23/11/94, p. 683.

57. In 1881, 1885, 1894, and 1897.

58. C.O. 874/233, 28/1/83, p. 144; C.O. 874/236, p. 21.

59. C.O. 874/113, A. Dent to Read, 17/3/81.

60. C.O. 874/229, 20/11/81, p. 317.

61. ibid. 5/10/81, p. 309.

62. S.G.A. File 1416: Report of T. S. Dobree, p. 13.

63. C.O. 874/229, Nov. 1881, p. 319.

64. See e.g. O. Cook, *Borneo: The Stealer of Hearts*, London, 1924, p. 270.

65. C.O. 874/228, 29/12/81, p. 102.

66. C.O. 874/236, 10/5/84, p. 541.

67. C.O. 874/235, 31/7/83, p. 141.

68. C.O. 874/243, 28/3/87, p. 290.

69. C.O. 874/110, Memorandum of W. H. Read, 15/9/80.

70. C.O. 874/244, 17/8/87, p. 74.

71. ibid; see also C.O. 874/237, 24/11/84, p. 684; 27/12/84, p. 832.

72. On Brunei taxation see P. Leys, 'Observations on the Brunei Political System 1883–1885', *JMBRAS*, 41, pt. 2, 1968, and W. H. Treacher, 'British Borneo', *JSBRAS*, 20, 1889.

73. J. Whitehead, *The Exploration of Mount Kinabalu*, London, 1893, p. 41.

74. ibid., p. 29.

75. ibid., pp. 27–9.

76. ibid., pp. 60–1.

77. K. G. Tregonning, *A History of Modern Sabah*, Singapore, 1965, p. 197.

78. C.O. 874/235, 12/9/83, p. 368; C.O. 874/237, undated, p. 207.

79. C.O. 874/235, 13/11/83, p. 675.

80. C.O. 874/236, 6/2/84, p. 181; 16/2/84, p. 280; 2/5/84, p. 613; 4/3/84, p. 315.

81. C.O. 874/237, undated, p. 207.

82. ibid., 1/10/84, p. 417.

83. C.O. 874/240, 3/3/86, p. 684.

84. C.O. 874/119, 15/5, 26/6, 27/8/85.

85. C.O. 874/240, 6/10/85, p. 106; 16/12/85, p. 348; 11/12/85, p. 350.

86. C.O. 874/241, 20/5/86, p. 427; 18/5/86, p. 432.

87. C.O. 874/241, 21/6/86, p. 589; 16/7/86, p. 667; 11/7/86, p. 669; *Herald*, 1/7/86.

88. C.O. 874/243, 21/12/86, p. 768; 14/5/87, p. 489.

89. C.O. 874/242, 13/10/86, p. 607.

90. C.O. 874/228, 29/9/81, p. 187; 4/12/81, p. 67.

91. C.O. 874/231, 24/8/82, p. 250; S.G.A. File 200, Report on the Gomantong Caves, 1882.

92. C.O. 874/233, 2/1/83, p. 12; 18/1/83, p. 65; 4/2/83, p. 145; 27/2/83, p. 288; 22/2/83, p. 294.

93. C.O. 874/235, 4/12/83, p. 701.

94. C.O. 874/236, 27/1/84, pp. 257, 260.

95. ibid., 31/1/84, p. 262; 6/2/84, p. 175; 20/2/84, p. 251; 18/2/84, p. 264.

96. ibid., 12/2/84, pp. 272–3. Panglima Dait supervised the caves without incident until his death in 1901, when trustees took charge until his elder son, Madas, assumed supervision in 1905. In 1915 his second son, Haji Sandukong, succeeded him. In 1923 the Company let the contract to Pengiran Guliga, the grandson of Pengiran Samah, following complaints about Haji Sandukong's distribution of the shares in the caves. Haji Sandukong then began a long campaign to restore his position. One of the last documents in the archives of the Company is a petition addressed by him to the Japanese emperor, following the overthrow of the Company in 1942 (S.G.A. File 200: Petition of Haji Sandukong).

97. C.O. 874/238, 19/11/84, p. 33.

98. C.O. 874/235, 20/6/83, p. 62.

99. *Herald*, 1/6/86, p. 91; C.O. 874/243, 13/5/87, p. 493.

100. C.O. 874/235, 6/9/83, p. 486.

101. C.O. 874/241, 15/1/86, p. 105.

102. C.O. 874/242, p. 676; C.O. 874/243, 14/7/87, p. 838.

103. C.O. 874/231, 19/7/82, p. 184; 1/8/82, p. 136; C.O. 874/234, 24/3/83, p. 182; 30/3/83, p. 194; 6/4/83, p. 226; 29/3/83, p. 246; 16/5/83, p. 383; C.O. 874/235, 21/7/83, pp. 103, 113; 25/7/83, p. 130; C.O. 874/236, 6/5/84, p. 505.

104. C.O. 874/276, 18/10/05, p. 405.

3

REACTIONS TO COMPANY RULE, 1888–1895

The Padas-Klias Affair

THE veneer of calm consolidation of Company rule which Treacher had managed to sustain was punctured within months of his departure. In 1888 a Murut revolt in the lower Padas, and the affair known as the 'Padas Damit War', exposed the Company's shortcomings, and heralded over a decade of revolt against the Company, climaxing in the rebellions incited by Mat Salleh. With these events the shoddy improvisations of the first years of Company government began to yield their consequences.

The Limbawang district where the Murut revolt occurred is situated on the Padas-Klias peninsula, ceded to the Company in 1884 and subsequently dubbed Province Dent. The province seemed a valuable acquisition to the financially hard-pressed Company. Treacher pointed out, in justification of his energetic work at the Brunei court to obtain the cession, that the area had exported sago in one recent year to the value of £11,850. As well as sago, padi and sugar were cultivated. The Company's revenues would benefit from the duties on exports and from poll-tax,[1] and Everett and Cowie were interested in the mineral prospects. Over this promising area he appointed Daly, Malay-speaking and trained in the Straits Settlements service, as assistant resident. A government station was established close to a sago mill at Mempakul.

The cessions of 1884, enacted with the approval of some but not all who had rights on the rivers, created opposition to the Company's administration in the area for several years, but Daly was usually able to make remarks in his reports from

Mempakul such as 'no disturbances', 'perfect tranquility', and even 'a monotony of tranquility'.[2] He established customs posts at Mempakul, Kuala Penyu, Batu Batu, and Gadong, each with a detachment of police, and encouraged an influx of traders, notably Ibans, who arrived in large numbers to travel up the Padas into the interior in search of jungle produce. To these and other traders he advanced credit. He also established a court of local chiefs and headmen which appeared to work well.

The optimistic tone of his reports made the news of the Murut revolt in February 1888 a surprise to the Company. The first information was that a Brunei trader, Radin Salleh, and some of his assistants had been murdered. An Iban corporal and three Iban constables volunteered to investigate, going unarmed to meet Datu Stia Bukti, a Muslim Murut who had been appointed a Company chief. The Ibans were murdered, and the Murut peoples of the lower Padas reported to be 'on the warpath' under the the leadership of the Datu.

William Crocker, acting governor between May 1887 and March 1888, was at this time preoccupied with stimulating a boom in land for tobacco growing, and as the Company's business manager, was little interested in indigenous affairs. He was anxious, however, to prevent the revolt from giving the territory a bad name. At Labuan he persuaded the administrator, Leys, to lend him rifles and to despatch a gunboat with a complement of marines to Mempakul. Meanwhile officers of the Company rounded up all available police, about thirty, and supplemented these with the followings of Pengiran Subudin, Bajau chief on the Tuaran, and Nakoda Usang, an Iban trader outlawed from Sarawak who also lived on the Tuaran, and who acted as patron to many of the Ibans visiting Sabah.[3] The Pengiran and the Nakoda also brought with them a group of Kadazans from the Tuaran.

While the force was being organized, news came of the burning of the Company's station at Batu Batu. The hostile Muruts were numbered at about 300. The Iban members of the contingent were despatched to take the rebels in the rear, while

Pengiran Subudin's force was sent up the river, being followed a day later by the Europeans with the remainder of the force. The Ibans found that the rebels had built a stockade facing down-river, and, approaching from the rear, soon forced its abandonment. Pengiran Subudin set about looting and burning the rebels' villages. When the Europeans arrived they ordered mopping-up operations; all the remaining houses were to be destroyed, with their food stocks, and the rebels brought in. There were a number of skirmishes, though no pitched fighting. One European officer was concerned about the numbers of women and children amongst the dead, but was told that they had been used by the Muruts for shelter.[4] A contemporary, not associated with the Company, provided a description of the scene in Labuan after the action. He found:[5]

> the place simply swarming with the Chartered Company's hireling troops, a miscellaneous gathering of Asiatic ruffians of all kinds, officered by a few Europeans most of whom were untrained to warfare of any kind, and who, with good reason, devoutly wished themselves elsewhere. Sikhs, Klings, Dyaks and natives of many a tribe lounged about Labuan with Snider rifles slung across their backs openly seeking whom they might destroy.

In a particularly colourful vignette the writer pictured the Iban members of the gathering smoking Murut heads on the lawns of Government House.

In all, 57 rebels were established as killed, including the leader Datu Stia Bukti, while 441 were taken prisoner or surrendered later. Amongst the survivors 22 'ringleaders' were distinguished, who were tried at Mempakul. Six were sentenced to three years' hard labour, 12 to shorter terms, and 4 were sentenced to be hanged.[6] The remainder of the rebels, including women and children, were shipped off in groups to Sandakan and to Marudu Bay, to provide labour for the estates, although a year later most of those taken to Sandakan were authorized to return to Mempakul. This group resettled in their old area on the lower Padas.[7]

When Crocker heard that the authorities in Singapore were

alarmed at the news of the uprising and its repression he felt that a mountain was being made out of the 'Mempakul mole-hill'.[8] Leys at Labuan had claimed that increased poll-tax and a newly introduced government salt monopoly had precipitated the trouble. Crocker correctly pointed out that poll-tax had not been increased and that a salt monopoly, though mooted, had not been implemented. The reasons for the revolt were guessed at, but never clearly established. It was pointed out that these Murut communities had been persistently troublesome, having twice before required the attention of the Company's police. It was also pointed out that they had a number of chiefs and headmen who were 'trouble-makers', and whose indebtedness to traders had made them attempt to throw off the debts by a display of violence. Not least, the revolt had occurred after harvest, when heavy drinking commonly excited the Muruts to seek heads.

With hindsight the revolt can be seen as the first of a series of revolts by Murut peoples which would indicate their frustration with the Company's administrative and trading policies. Three years hence, in 1891, the Murut peoples above the Padas gorge would express their anger and bewilderment at the activities of traders and police, partly through bloodshed, partly through a millenarian cult which would itself seriously disrupt their customary ways. Still later, in 1915, it would be the turn of the 'southern' Murut peoples to reject the inroads made by the Company and its agents into their highlands, in the violent cultural upheaval known as the Rundum Revolt.

The Company tended to portray the Murut peoples as 'primitive', irrational—especially after they had been drinking—and unable to comprehend the advantages of modern commerce and government. But the tragedy of miscomprehension was equally the Company's. In 1888 the government failed entirely to follow up hints that the Muruts of the lower Padas had been driven to desperation by their indebtedness to Radin Salleh (the Brunei Malay initially reported murdered), to Pengiran Subudin (whose forces were used to crush the revolt) and to other traders, all of whom had been backed by the court of local

chiefs set up in the district by the Company. A final aspect of the affair to be noted is that the government's action was cheerfully supported by other ethnic groups, for whom the conviction and hanging of the rebel leaders at Mempakul provided a popular spectacle. Some Murut communities in the area also assisted the government. The ethnic, cultural, and community fragmentation of Sabah's population helped the Company here, as elsewhere, to restrict the scale of revolt. Crocker gave no sign that he thought any lessons might be learned from the episode, or even that any alarm should be expressed about the Company's style of administration. On the contrary, at the height of the revolt he turned his attention from it, sailing for Sandakan to meet the incoming governor, C. V. Creagh. He summed up:[9]

> The work of trying to raise a native population to a higher grade of civilisation is very interesting and having taken over the country with all its inhabitants we cannot shirk the responsibility, but it is on the East Coast with its large area of uncultivated land and scanty native population that we hope to prove how governing can be made to pay. . . .

The Company continued to pursue its dream of economic development in Sabah unfettered by administrative responsibility.

But trouble in Province Dent would soon again capture the Company's attention and resources, when a minor war developed in November 1888 between the Company and the Brunei ruler of the still independent Padas Damit. In the context of the troubles the Company faced elsewhere in the territory this affair had no great significance. It was a simple clash over boundaries and subjects, and, in the end, it was settled to the mutual satisfaction of the parties involved. The other troubles were more complex in their causes and less easy of solution. Yet the Company's conduct of the Padas Damit War did lay bare its pervading inefficiency at this time, and its extraordinary weakness when confronted with a really determined opponent. The affair hints of the muddle the Company was to make of its campaign against Mat Salleh.

In September 1885 some followers of the ruler of the Padas Damit, Pengiran Shahbandar, attacked the kampong of Kabajan, pulling down the houses, some fruit trees, and the markers set up by the Company to delineate its territory from the Pengiran's. Upon hearing the news at Mempakul Daly promptly sent for Nakoda Usang and his Ibans, who had been so useful in the Murut revolt. The Pengiran and his followers were reported to be making preparations to run *amok*, to die rather than submit to the White man.

The new governor, Creagh, was seriously concerned, for at this time particularly the Company could not afford bad relations with Brunei. At the moment of the Pengiran's attack at Kabajan, Sir Hugh Low was in Brunei to proclaim, with the Sultan, the Protectorate which was the British government's solution to the tangled relations between the Sultanate and her hungry neighbours. Creagh was quite ignorant of the Pengiran's case, and believed that the Pengiran's attitude had been created by Europeans hostile to the Company (Brooke, Leys the administrator of Labuan, and W. C. Cowie, who was about to sell his interests in Borneo to Brooke) and also by some of the Brunei nobility, who, Creagh believed, were trying to raise future cession prices by creating trouble. Daly was despatched to Brunei to see what settlement might be reached, and he was authorized to pay a lump sum of up to $10,000 in return for the Padas Damit.[10]

If anyone was at fault in the whole matter it was Daly, who resented angrily the irritations the Pengiran was causing in Daly's province. He portrayed the Pengiran as a madman, a Muslim fanatic. His view was rather different from that of Treacher, who had called the Pengiran one of the 'most respectable and intelligent' of the Brunei rajas, and had made some effort to satisfy the Pengiran's claims against the Company.[11] After the Padas-Klias cession in 1884, Treacher had seen that the Pengiran would be compensated out of the cession money for a number of followers who had now found themselves in Company territory. The Pengiran had not received his compensation and this seems to have been the reason for his hos-

tility. It is not clear whether the fault was the Company's (for Creagh only discovered the existence of the agreement when the fighting was over, and the Pengiran claimed that it was the Company which had fallen into arrears), or the Sultanate's (for Treacher had claimed that the compensation should be paid out of the $3,000 the Company was already paying for the Padas-Klias cession).[12] At all events Daly, as the district officer, and the one constant factor through the three governorships of Treacher, Crocker, and Creagh, failed completely to discover the source of the Pengiran's anger. Indeed he made it worse, for he rigorously enforced the collection of poll-tax from the Pengiran's followers living in Company territory, and he also charged customs dues on the sago shipments from the Pengiran's river, claiming that in an area of interlocking rivers and waterways it was impossible to distinguish the source of the cargoes.[13] On two occasions the Pengiran had questioned the site of the boundary between his and the Company's territory, but Daly had constructed a barricade where he believed the watershed to be. The Pengiran signalled his defiance by collecting poll-tax on the disputed subjects and harbouring men wanted by the Company, including some of the Murut rebels of the previous February, and a man named Patch who was wanted for the murder of his brother, a Company chief. He finally gave full vent to his grievances in the attack on Kabajan.

Daly, in Brunei, was not prepared to make concessions, even though the Pengiran arrived looking for a peaceful settlement after being persuaded to do so by his cousin Pengiran Muda Damit Tajudin. Daly made no mention of Creagh's offer to buy the river, and rejected the Sultan's suggestion to divide the disputed piece of territory and its inhabitants. (At the same time, the Sultan and his two chief officials, the Pengirans di Gadong and Bendahara, refused to accept the legality of the Pengiran Shahbandar's claim.)[14] Instead Daly was delighted when Sir Hugh Low, as a visitor quite ignorant of the circumstances, permitted him to demand the extradition of the men wanted by the Company and to use force to release the Company's subjects captured in the raid on Kabajan.[15] On 7

November Daly entered Padas Damit with three other Company officers and a force of about 100 Company police, Sikhs and Ibans, augmented with Ibans and Kadazans from the Tuaran under Nakoda Usang. They were joined by some of the Bisaya chiefs of the area and their followers. It was to be three months before the campaign was over.

The Company force was soon discouraged to find that the Pengiran and his followers had built a series of stockaded houses and forts, strongly protected by elaborate earthworks planted with *sudah*, pointed bamboo stakes. From these the Pengiran's men forayed to harass the invaders, who were struggling in an unmapped district of sago plantations and padi fields, of mud, water, and swampland covered with thick, high grass. Daly decided on the improbable course of blocking the enemies' supplies, while he waited for more guns, ammunition, and men. He was alarmed by the poor discipline of his force and its almost complete lack of training. The commandant of police, Beeston, suffered a breakdown in health and had to be evacuated, as had the second in command, W. Raffles Flint, who was suffering from fever. Fever and dysentery took their toll among the troops as well.

Creagh anxiously sent off messages for every available means of assistance. In Singapore two parties totalling 170 Sikhs were despatched, together with ammunition, most of which was to be damaged in the waterlogged journey from Gadong, on the Padas, to the front. Two gunboats were sent from Hong Kong to patrol the coast, being ordered to give 'moral assistance' only. A 6-pound howitzer was received from Perak. In addition to the Sikh reinforcements, every available Iban in the territory was rounded up, the would-be warriors happily dropping their gutta-collecting on the Sugut and Kinabatangan to join the conflict. A party of fifty Muruts from the *ulu* Padas also arrived. By the time that all were collected the Company's forces numbered about 400. The Pengiran boasted about the same number of armed men; several hundred women and children were cooped up in the squalor of the forts. By the end of the year nothing had been achieved except an unsuccessful bombard-

ment of a minor fort. Creagh sent off for more Sikhs and trained police from the Sultan of Johore, and the Straits Settlements administration despatched more artillery, rockets, grapeshot, and other ammunition, in the charge of experienced gunners. Meanwhile the Pengiran's men emerged from the forts from time to time, destroying the Company's small station at Bengkalalak and, on one occasion, attacking the governor's launch on the Padas.

The desultory fighting continued through January and into February 1889. On the 17th the mounting bombardment told, and one fort, commanded by the Pengiran's sister, fell. Two days before, the acting administrator of Labuan, A. Hamilton, had arrived offering to mediate and, after Creagh had agreed to make concessions, the Pengiran volunteered to go to Brunei to have the matter settled by an independent inquiry. The 'war' was over, as much to the relief of Creagh as to the Pengiran. The Company's losses were put at 5 killed and 15 wounded, as against between 40 and 60 killed on the Pengiran's side, but the Company could scarcely celebrate a victory. Ironically, the *Hong Kong Telegraph* did the government a service by publishing concocted stories critical of the destruction by the Company's forces of towns and villages and the slaughter of women and children.[16] The stories were exaggerated, and were denied abroad, but, to the Company's relief, such stories spread within Sabah, carried presumably by the Iban police and auxiliaries as they returned to their occupations. Bungling and stalemate would not have made good story-telling; nor would they have enhanced the Company's prestige within Sabah.

In Brunei the Company came in for some severe criticism from an informal court of inquiry set up by Hamilton, consisting of the Sultan, Pengiran Bendahara, Raja Brooke, and two of Brooke's officers. Criticism from a group so constituted was expected, and ignored. Creagh and Daly concentrated on obtaining a peaceful settlement with Pengiran Shahbandar and other holders of rights in the river, and after three days' bargaining the river was ceded for $1,800 a year, plus $330 for the Pengiran's followers in Company territory over whom

the dispute had arisen.[17] In Padas Damit the forts were dismantled, and the Pengiran called together his people and required them to obey the Company. He advised the government on the selection of chiefs. A free pardon was issued by the Company to all except Pateh, who was tried for murder by the Sultan in Brunei. The Pengiran retired to live at Muara, on the best of terms with the Company.[18]

As a result of the Padas Damit affair the administration found itself with a considerably enlarged police force. Many of the Sikhs and Ibans, enlisted hurriedly in order to combat Pengiran Shahbandar, remained in the Company's employ, and police strength now stood at about 400 men, twice the number Treacher had had at his disposal. The Court of Directors wanted the numbers reduced, for Daly's careless use of force to settle the grievances of Pengiran Shahbandar was still freshly in mind:[19]

> The Court are strongly averse to the maintenance of any more force than is absolutely necessary for the protection of life and property. Having an armed force at hand is apt to make Residents and others less temperate and more dictatorial than they otherwise would be. It is for this reason that we have been all along and are anxious to keep down the force: to endeavour to win over the natives by kindness and sympathy, and only to use armed power in the last extremity.

Whilst being a valid statement of the Court's benign desires, the letter might also have mentioned that a modest police force and peace were cheaper than a large force and war. The cost of the Padas Damit War was estimated at $60,000, a sum which would have played havoc with the Company's budget if a tobacco boom had not begun. This boom, however, more than allowed for the unforeseen expenditure, and gave Creagh the confidence to maintain the enlarged police force, primarily because the estates which were opening in territory lacking European oversight were demanding police protection and assistance. The extra police were soon absorbed on the east-coast rivers.

After the breakdown of the former commandant, Beeston,

during the Padas Damit affair, he was replaced by E. A. Barnett, formerly a captain in the British Army, but the quality of discipline in the force did not improve. Barnett knew no Hindustani or Malay, and, kept busy commanding expeditions, made no attempt to learn. The expeditions precluded disciplined drill, and he, with one assistant officer, could scarcely supervise the entire force scattered through the territory.[20] He soon succumbed therefore to the relaxed standards of the Company's administration.

The Interior

Apart from the troubles in the Padas-Klias peninsula the Company was confronted with ominous problems in the interior. In 1890 Pryer sounded the alarm:[21]

> For several years the policy towards the natives pursued in North Borneo was one that taught them to look up to the Company officers as their natural advisers and protectors, punishing them when they were guilty, encouraging them when they were good and teaching them above all things to submit their quarrels and disputes to the arbitration of government officials, employing a regular system for that purpose in serious cases.
> Within the last twelve months or so a quite fresh policy seems to be springing up, one of behaving to the natives as though we were at war with them. . . .

In suggesting that there had been a change of Company policy Pryer was wrong. If there was now 'war' between the Company and the peoples of Sabah, it flowed naturally from the Company's administrative practices. However his letter does indicate the cheerfully ingenuous attitude of the Company in the early years, and the grim mood now replacing it.

When the violent disturbances which occurred in the interior in the late 1880s and early 1890s are plotted, they describe virtually a full geographical circle, northwards along the Crocker Range to the upper reaches of the rivers flowing into Marudu Bay, southwards through the upper reaches of the

east-coast rivers, and across Murut territory from the interior tributaries of the Kinabatangan to those of the Padas. All these areas appear to have been disrupted by intruders from the coast, acting with the supposed authority of the Company. The Company's method of dealing with the disruptions was to despatch police expeditions, sometimes under a European officer. These expeditions were instructed to investigate and report grievances, but primarily they enforced acquiescence through the display, or use, of their fighting power. Both Indian and Iban police invoked a terrified respect for the Company in the interior, until after 1894 Mat Salleh called their bluff and instigated a second phase of revolt.

Along the Crocker Range the Company was regularly troubled by 'head-hunters' in the late 1880s and early 1890s, and several expeditions were mounted against them. There is a lack of material on this problem, which makes an examination of it difficult, but a number of clues suggest that the Company's view of the troublemakers was over-simple. Creagh's opinion was that:[22] 'they were men of the mountains, possessed of the love of independence common to mountain peoples and jealous of their head-hunting customs and other barbarous practices, who would naturally resent the imposition of the Company's laws'. His view may have contained some truth, but it is questionable. Far from resenting the imposition of law and order, it seems as likely that the troublemakers resented the lack of it, and the injustices, in the Company's mode of government. The scene was the *ulu* of the Papar, Putatan, Tuaran, and Tempasuk (Kadamaian) rivers, where these and their tributaries flow down the western slopes of the Crocker Range. The peoples involved were referred to as Tagaas Dusuns, though the name was variously spelt. They were regarded as the most serious nuisances of the administrative district, Province Keppel, which was governed intermittently by European officers from Gaya Island, and which reached from the Kimanis to the tip of the Kudat peninsula (excluding the unceded enclaves on the mainland opposite Gaya Island). On the east, Province Keppel

was bounded effectively by the Crocker and Sir James Brooke Ranges; there had been as yet no formal attempt to administer the peoples beyond the Crocker Range.

A number of expeditions had been launched against the Tagaas in Treacher's time. The first, in 1883, was led by the commandant of the period, de Fontaine, who took a party of Sikhs and Ibans into *ulu* Kimanis, where a Brunei trader had been killed on the order of the headman at Puroh. No resistance was met and four prisoners were taken. De Fontaine wrote that the ability of the police to reach the interior had stricken the natives with terror. In the following year de Fontaine led another expedition, against the supposed head of the Tagaas, Kandurong, who had attacked the coastal Kadazans, stealing buffaloes and taking heads. The expedition, of 4 Europeans, 24 Sikhs and Ibans, and over 300 Kadazans killed a few Tagaas and burned their houses but could not find Kandurong.[23] In February 1886 another expedition was mounted against the Tagaas who lived in *ulu* Tempasuk and who had attacked the Kadazans of the Tuaran. The latter, claiming that their payment of poll-tax to the Company should afford them protection, persuaded the resident at Gaya, Davies, to move into the interior with a force of Sikh police and volunteer Ibans; Kadazans and Bajaus from the Tuaran accompanied the expedition. A few minor engagements occurred, about eight villages were burned after being looted, and the Company's troops returned well satisfied. The chief 'head-hunter', Gadong, of Tiong Tiong in *ulu* Tempasuk, was not found. A total of fifty-two villages subsequently tendered their allegiance. In July of the same year Davies met Gadong and made peace with him. Gadong told Davies that a rumour had spread that the Company was about to attack his district with 400, even 700, Ibans.[24]

The Ibans of the Tuaran, under their leader Nakoda Usang, were used again in April 1888. The by now legendary Kandurong was attacked in a village, Dampong, in *ulu* Putatan, by the Ibans and Kadazans of the lower Tuaran. The force was led by two Europeans, and the Bajau Company chief Pengiran Subudin. Dampong and other villages were looted and burned,

and then the Ibans were despatched across the Crocker Range to attack Bankau, a kampong reputed to be 'the refuge of all the bad characters'. This and the surrounding kampongs were destroyed.[25] By November most of the headmen had come in to make their peace.

Kandurong eventually came in to submit in January 1892. He met a Company officer, Hewett, on the Kinarut, an unceded river. Hewett was the first of the Company officers in Province Keppel, as far as the records show, to take any serious interest in the opinions of the supposed head-hunters. He found Kandurong (whose proper name, he wrote, was Sikundong) to be a 'brave and independent man' and chief headman of the Tagaas communities in the Tambunan district, a position in which he had succeeded his father, and which he had kept 'by force of character and ferocity'.[26] He was appointed *orang kaya** of the *ulu* Papar, at $10 a month. Later in the year, however, the Tagaas were again reported to be head-hunting, and a breach had occurred between Kandurong and his former followers. Creagh reported, with some satisfaction, after meeting Kandurong while touring the west coast, that the former troublemaker had lost all influence. He did not explain the reasons for the decline in power. The Tagaas of the Tambunan district were to resist Company rule until 1900, when they succumbed before the final successful attack of the Company's troops on the rebel Mat Salleh, whose ally they had become. Meanwhile they cherished their independence on the heights of the Crocker Range. They refused to accept traders from the coast, and to the Company they sent a message that they never wanted to see a force of police in their country again.[27]

The hostility of these people to the Company is intriguing. It might be sufficient explanation to cite the nature of Company rule as they saw it in their looted and burned villages, but possibly there is more to be considered. Whitehead, the naturalist who visited Sabah in 1885–8, was prevented from climbing Mount Kinabalu on his first attempt by the reports of head-hunting by the peoples of the Kaung district. Whitehead, although highly critical of the Company's government,

accepted the head-hunting as customary. An earlier European traveller in Sabah, however, Spenser St. John (who visited the territory in the late 1850s while consul at Labuan) commented with surprise upon Whitehead's findings:[28]

> If Mr John Whitehead is not mistaken, these races must have greatly deteriorated, as he writes a good deal about the practice of head-hunting among them in 1888. When we were there we heard like reports and met many parties of armed Dusuns, who were said to be on the warpath, but as at the same time we also met numerous parties of Dusun men, women and children carrying tobacco to the coast villages through what was said to be an enemy's country, we did not pay much attention to such statements. We also saw small parties of women and children working in the fields miles away from their villages, which could not occur if there was any real danger from hostile tribes. Either Mr Whitehead was deceived by similar stories to those which were constantly dinned into our ears, or the Dusuns have sadly deteriorated. These stories of enemies were fabricated chiefly with the object of preventing our visiting neighbouring villages.
> I am afraid we should find great changes if we returned to Kinabalu, as Mr Whitehead mentions that the Company have found it necessary to send punitive expeditions against these Dusuns. I trust, however, that this is a mistake.

Whitehead was not, of course, mistaken about the punitive expeditions, though he may have been about the extent of the head-hunting. The Bajaus and Kadazans of the coastal districts stood to gain by setting Company expeditions against 'head-hunters' in motion, to loot and destroy the upland villages. On the other hand, even if there had been an upsurge in head-hunting by the peoples of these villages, it was essentially retaliatory. In 1891 Hewett uncovered the unscrupulous practices of Pengiran Subudin, Company chief on the Tuaran,[29] and had him gaoled. He had enforced exorbitant taxation and usury from the Sulaman to the Padas. One can only speculate on what the hill peoples thought of him and other coastal chiefs, traditionally seen as predatory and now vested with the authority of the Company and utilizing Ibans as their agents. At least one hill community expressed surprise that they had been attacked

for head-hunting; they were merely aware that they had refused to pay the taxes that had been demanded of them.[30]

The early years of Creagh's governorship were also disturbed by troubles in *ulu* Padas, where disturbances occurred among the Murut peoples. As with the peoples of Province Keppel, it seems probable that these disturbances were to a great degree the result of the Company's advent, and of the policies of the first few years. As elsewhere, the Company was to find itself probing *ulu* Padas[31] not of its own initiative but as a result of the changes wrought by the non-European heralds of the Company's distant occupancy of the coast.

There is little information available about the degree of penetration of this area by outsiders before the Company's coming. Daly claimed in 1885 that little jungle produce came down the Padas and that the Muruts of the highlands were 'self-contained'.[32] The reason he gave for their isolation was fear of the former Brunei rulers; equally it might be supposed that travellers were afraid to venture into the interior. At that time also, he may not have understood that for communication between the coast and the Keningau area a track across the Crocker Range was preferred to the deep unnavigable gorge of the Padas. Communication with the interior districts to the south was probably made via the rivers south of the Company's then border, the Mengalong, and the Lawas. Travellers and traders probably also came northward into the area up the river Sembakung from the eastern coast of Dutch Borneo.

Outsiders had more to contend with than problems of access and difficult terrain. The Murut population was small, scattered, and semi-nomadic, and divided into innumerable groups; unpredictable feuds between groups might involve the traveller in additional hazards. Daly, when he had penetrated to the head of the Padas gorge in 1885, found a feud between 'Murut' and 'Peluan' groups. He found, however, both groups friendly and hospitable, as had an earlier European traveller, de Crespigny, who had regarded the Muruts as a 'vile race' of thieves and cheats, lazy, dirty, and too fond of drink, but nonetheless appealing in the extreme solicitude they showed for

his health and safety. De Crespigny had wondered if the Muruts were the long-sought 'missing link', in what he perceived as their 'unmistakeable' and 'ludicrous' resemblance to the orang utan.[33] His reaction to the Muruts was to be a typical European one for many years; they were dismissed as inferior racially to the other ethnic groups of Sabah. A contemptuous attitude towards the Muruts was not, of course, exclusive to the Europeans; for the Muslim, Iban, Chinese, and other traders the Muruts were there to be exploited and, in some cases, enslaved. Whatever the degree of penetration from outside before the Company's coming, Murut country was no Arcadia. But, before the Company's coming, travellers into the area had lacked protection. Venturing into unpredictable country and amongst unpredictable people they had little recourse to outside authority in the event of danger or dispute. This situation began to change with the Company in charge of the lower Padas, and Daly at Mempakul, anxious to extend the Company's authority, collecting poll-tax, and stimulating trade.

Daly's first contact with *ulu* Padas occurred in April 1885, when four headmen came down to visit him at Mempakul. It was their first sight of the sea. They were presented with salt, tobacco, and $100 as an advance on the jungle produce they agreed to collect and send down. In the following month Daly ascended the gorge, settled a feud (or at least held a peace-making ceremony), established a *tamu* at Tenom and initiated the collection of poll-tax. The collection was to be made in kind, since the people were not familiar with money. A station was established for Company police and three policemen posted. Head-taking was forbidden.[34]

So far, the new regime was a happy novelty, and Daly received further visits from Murut representatives eager to see Mempakul and Labuan, one coming from as far as Rundum. But the traffic into the interior exceeded by far the trickle of visitors to the coast. Brunei Malays, Bisayas, Kadazans from Kimanis and Tuaran, a handful of Chinese, and, above all, Sarawak Ibans, soon began to journey into the interior in search of the scarcely tapped stocks of rattan, gutta, beeswax, and other

jungle produce the Murut country offered. In one month in 1886 Daly counted 175 Ibans proceeding up the river.[35] He was delighted at the influx, for the visitors, apart from tapping the country's wealth, explored and provided information about districts and people as yet unknown to the Europeans. The visitors were encouraged to spread the news of the new government, and to collect what poll-tax they could on its behalf.[36] The journey, of course, even though undertaken now with government sponsorship, remained an arduous and dangerous one. As one officer pointed out,[37] only the toughest survived. No doubt it seemed natural to them to reap any rewards they could, on their own behalf as well as that of the government. The variation in prices between the *ulu* and the coast reflected the difficulties involved in getting jungle produce out, if also the ignorance of the isolated peoples of the *ulu*. Above the gorge 100 rattans went for one cup of salt worth 4¢; at Labuan the rattans fetched between $1 and $1.20.

A report in September 1886 that Ibans were fighting Muruts (here named as 'Paluans') on the Tomani drew the Company's first armed expedition into the area, and it demonstrated that the new government had the will and the power to intervene on behalf of the visitors. The officer in charge, W. F. Mosse, found large groups of Ibans (one numbering 104, another 143) on good terms with most of the Muruts but they had been attacked by a 'Paluan' group under a chief named Sendipok. The Ibans had retaliated, and four heads had been taken by either side. Mosse was unable to visit Sendipok but sent gifts with a messenger, and later he received profuse apologies and promises to permit free access to Iban and other traders. Other Murut groups welcomed the subjection of Sendipok, apparently regarding the Europeans, like the Ibans, as useful new allies in old feuds. Mosse found himself showered with gifts, and all the riotous hospitality extended by Muruts towards accepted visitors. He noted, in the course of a vivid description for the *Herald* of Murut longhouses at Peputak, that his hosts had a poor idea of values, exchanging $45 worth of gutta for beads worth $4.[38]

The following year Daly commanded another expedition to the Tomani river to punish a group believed responsible for the murder of an Iban gutta-seeker. He was cheerfully joined by the traders and collectors in the area, and by twenty-one boats filled with Muruts of the Tenom area. The enemy houses were looted and burned.[39] Three years then passed before a European again ventured into Murut country; when at last Company officers did so, late in 1890, they found an astonishing degree of disruption.

The visit was prompted by a report that Company police had arrested Kandrang, an agent employed by Pengirans Abubakar and Damit, the rulers of the unceded rivers Lawas and Mengalong, to collect slaves in Murut country. The police guards on Kandrang had been waylaid, and they had killed eight Muruts in retaliation. The incident was the culmination of a series of reports that these Brunei Pengirans were slave-dealing in the area, arming friendly Muruts, and collecting poll-tax due to the Company. The offending Muruts were supposedly those of Kutipak, a community on the Padas some distance above the junction with the Tomani and close to the headwaters of the Lawas, Pengiran Abubakar's river. Barnett, the commandant of police, was sent to deal with them, and, after unsuccessfully offering peace terms, he burnt down their houses. The Kutipak people remained defiant, and early in the following year they were again punished.[40]

It gradually became clear that the raids of the Kutipak people on other Murut groups were only one aspect of the troubles in the area. J. G. G. Wheatley, who spent most of 1891 in the Murut country, listed the traders murdered in recent months. Six traders had been murdered on the Dalit and other tributaries of the Sook, and fifteen on the Talankai and Sapulut rivers. As he wrote, putting it succinctly:[41] 'On the opening up of the Sipulote country a rush was made by Chinese, Dusuns and Dyaks to trade with the natives. Traders are sometimes very overbearing.' Later, Wheatley reported further troubles. On the Tomani a group who had paid poll-tax appealed for assistance against an enemy group, and on the Tagul Ibans,

who had been collecting poll-tax, were reported to have been attacked by the people of the district and by 'Lotang' Muruts who had arrived well armed from Dutch territory. The Company's acting governor at the time, L. A. Beaufort, complained of the Dutch administration's lack of control of its subjects, a criticism which, coming from the Company, must have sounded rather hollow to the Dutch. Beaufort did, however, also criticize the Company's policy of unchecked poll-tax collection. He pointed out the need for sustained European contact before the imposition of taxation; at the very least, no community should be taxed until the government could guarantee protection.[42]

The most remarkable disruption of Murut country was produced, however, by the cult of 'Malingkote'.[43] This cult was initiated by a man named Tahang who dreamed while ill that an angel, *malaikat*, had promised various powers, including invulnerability, the power to raise the dead, and the power to fly, if certain demands were met. The demands included the destruction of all crops and animals. The founder of the cult and his followers spread the belief over a wide area, adding to the promises of rewards the threat of violent destruction by thunderbolts and hurricanes if others did not join the cult. Tahang was described as a 'Sipulote' Murut, but the cult took hold along the Padas, from its upper reaches in the south, northwards to Tenom and the head of the Padas gorge, and on up the Pegalan through the Keningau plain. It did not spread to Tambunan, but went into *ulu* Papar and *ulu* Putatan and also east towards the headwaters of the Sugut and Labuk. Wheatley, in *ulu* Padas, and Hewett, who visited the Keningau area, found the peoples neglecting their crops, destroying their animals, turning all their padi into *tapai* and displaying thorough indifference to the authority of the government. The cult collapsed after three or four months in most areas, but was still in existence early in 1892.

The spread of cults across linguistic boundaries and barriers normally created by feuds was perhaps an occasional feature of Murut culture. It can be supposed, however, that 'Malingkote' was a response to the accelerated changes of the preceding few

years, with similarities to messianic and 'cargo' cults elsewhere in the world. At Sapong Wheatley was told by one group that they would tender their submission 'when the *orang puteh* are able to grow dollars on trees'. If, in some parts of Murut country, the response to the traders with their strange importations and demands had been to murder them, in others the response was an escape into a kind of hysteria. Little evidence is available as to the number of people who died because of the disruptions of 'Malingkote'. Wheatley's fears of famine and epidemic disease do not seem to have been realized, perhaps because the jungle could always yield some kind of diet, animal and vegetable, but he noted there could be 'no doubt that some people have died from want'.

The effects of 'Malingkote' were possibly more serious on the psychological, rather than physical, plane. If it is permissible to speculate about psychological reasons for the decline in numbers of the Murut peoples during the Company's rule of Sabah,[44] it might be suggested that the decline began at this time. Alien intruders had at last penetrated Murut country in large numbers, and many Murut groups responded to the disruption with an extravagant cultural disruption of their own. Neither accustomed ways nor cult magic offered any solutions to the problems with which they were confronted. If bewilderment, and disillusionment with a traditional culture unable to cope with novelty, can be linked in some way with a physical decrease in numbers, the dwindling of the Murut population began with the bewilderment and disillusionment reflected in 'Malingkote' and its failure.

The Europeans, as yet, were not aware of such issues. Beaufort, the acting governor, felt, however, some responsibility to the peoples of the disrupted areas. Against the advice of Barnett, the commandant, and other officers he refused to sanction expeditions against hostile groups, and ordered Wheatley, against the desires of the Court of Directors, to build a new station near the head of the Padas gorge, at Sapong, which Wheatley made his headquarters for a time. Beaufort acknowledged that he was running a risk in not mounting an

expedition, and that a costlier one might be required later, but in the event no further armed expedition was required, at least for the time being. His decision by no means solved the problem of the Murut areas, but Wheatley's presence seems to have moderated the turmoil.

On the east-coast rivers there were also troubles with similar features to those along the Crocker Range and in *ulu* Padas. Here too inadequate control by the Company of its agents, and the influx of traders, led to 'head-hunting', and to retaliatory expeditions. Two such expeditions were led by A. R. Dunlop into *ulu* Sugut in 1889 and 1890, each of them prompted also by the need to recapture runaways from the tobacco estates. The first was conducted to inquire into the supposed murder of a Sulu trader by the 'Gappoo' people, and the complaints by traders that these people had refused to trade. Dunlop took nine Iban police and a Brunei Malay trader who claimed that he had seen a piece of skull in the house of a headman, Gunsia. Dunlop recounts the confrontation with Gunsia:[45]

> After a short parley Gunsia came down and I told him that I wanted to enter his house. He replied that I may not whereupon I took the Brunei man and Lance corporal and entered. The Brunei pointed to a bamboo frame and said the piece of skull had been there but it was now gone. I had a search made but could find no trace of it, so went to the next house where immediately the Brunei pointed out a similar bamboo frame containing what looked very like a piece from the top of a human skull. Upon cutting it down however I was very much annoyed to find it only a piece of coconut shell. . . .
> I then told Gunsia he must accompany me back to Timbua and that he would be tried before six River people. He raised many objections, amongst them that he had not yet eaten so I told him to do so and he forthwith made the earliest [sic] meal I have ever seen anyone make, his food consisting of rice, wild pigeons and rats, great numbers of the latter of which hung in every house. After eating he still raised objections to following me and finally declined to follow me. He resisted violently and when a Dyak getting excited drew his parang, he tried to close with the latter but the Dyak threw him and was upon the point of taking his head when I stopped him. This however brought Gunsia to his senses. . . .

Gunsia was acquitted of the charge against him, but fined for resisting arrest, and told to bring in all the tribes not yet under the government. Representatives of six groups[46] appeared and swore loyalty to the Company, promised to pay poll-tax and give up head-hunting. Dunlop departed down-river, with fifty-one runaway labourers rounded up in the area. He subsequently protested to Creagh about the policy he was expected to pursue, arguing that head-hunting, if it did exist, was probably justified:[47] 'For the Government to punish these people and then to retire and leave them at the mercy of the rapacious traders only incenses them to a greater degree'.

In April of the following year his remarks seemed justified, when news came that the 'Nelumat' people of the Ranau district, as yet unvisited by the government, were fighting Ibans on the Sugut. They had defied the Company's chief, who had gone into the area seeking poll-tax, and attacked the house of an Iban trader at Linkabau. The Ibans had followed them, and at Ranau had killed about fifty of them. Dunlop arrived at Linkabau with nineteen Iban policemen, collected a further seventy Ibans, recruited baggage carriers amongst the local people and made the two-day journey up to the troubled area. Sinarut and other villages surrendered without a fight, but Bedukan and two other villages were defiant and were burned down. Thus the Company entered officially into the Ranau district. After receiving the submissions Dunlop returned down the Sugut, leaving the Company's chief in command, and noting that the chief, Pengiran Damit, was 'very energetic' in collecting poll-tax.[48]

The upper Kinabatangan required, in the same years, similar expeditions to investigate similar problems. The area around Pinangah had seen few Europeans since Hewett, who had established the station, had been withdrawn in 1883 as a result of the economies Treacher had been forced to make. Five Iban policemen now upheld the Company's authority. An officer who visited the station in 1887 reported that the natives had little idea of the Company's power and influence; the only power they understood was that of the traders, who practised

heavy extortion. He emphasized a 'great need' for a White officer.[49] In 1888 Pryer was sent up to investigate a report that the Tingalun people had attacked the police station. He regarded the affair as having arisen out of traditional inter-tribal feuding, the Tingaluns wishing to stop other groups from trading. A deputation of Brunei Malay and Iban traders claimed that they were owed 30,000 bundles of rattan by the peoples of the area; Pryer[50] put their complaints down to Tingalun disruption of trade, not realizing that the peoples of the district were falling into chronic debt to the traders.

More light was thrown on the situation that was developing on the river when, in 1890, the Iban sergeant at Pinangah, Bongin, was murdered, together with two other Iban policemen and three traders. A police expedition was mounted to investigate. Aware by this time that ill-feeling between natives and Ibans was becoming a problem, Creagh ordered Barnett, the commandant, to show restraint in approaching the village of the suspected murderers. Barnett arrived at Pinangah to find that an advance party of Iban police, sent to protect the Company's station, had already attacked and destroyed the village, and collected four heads in reprisal for the lost heads of their countrymen.

The chief of the suspected people, Panching, was persuaded to come in with his headmen and those of his followers who had actually been present at the murders. He also brought in the Iban heads, and exchanged them for the heads taken by Iban police; one of them was the head of Panching's mother. Barnett held a court, comprising himself, Dunlop, Panglima Banjer (the travelling Company chief), and a local Company chief, Panglima Dermatuan, and sentenced three men to be shot, while the headman responsible for them was sentenced to a gaol term at Sandakan. In the course of the trials and in subsequent inquiries Barnett came to the conclusion that the murders of the Iban police were justified. Sergeant Bongin, his police, and other Ibans in the district had exploited the local peoples by forced trade, and the seizure of food and goods. He had also bought into existing feuds, enlisting one community against

another. In one raid by the police up to ninety-two heads had been taken. Panching's people had, in fact, merely aided and abetted the attack on Bongin, undertaken primarily by another group in revenge for an earlier attack on them by the Ibans. This group, the 'Luidans', had retreated to their territory untraced.[31]

When Barnett's report arrived, Creagh issued an order forbidding Ibans access to the Kinabatangan, the Labuk and the Sugut. He also posted Hewett to Pinangah, to restore peace amongst the people Hewett had known of old. Before Hewett could reach Pinangah, or the Ibans be withdrawn from the rivers of the east coast, an incident occurred which was to alarm the Company because of its widely publicized demonstration of Iban capabilities as policemen.

While up the Kinabatangan, Barnett had recorded the death, from dysentery, of C. W. Flint, brother of W. Raffles Flint the Company officer. C. W. Flint had arrived in Sabah in 1887 during the miniature and unrewarded gold rush on the Segama, and had finally settled on the Kinabatangan, at its junction with the Kuamut. There he had opened a trading depot, acted unofficially as magistrate, and to all appearances enjoyed good relations with the local peoples. He had enlisted as a trading partner, Raja Semporna Numpal, a Tengara chief of the Kuamut river.[32]

> . . . a very superior man, and far and away above anyone else in the river. He is one of the best-looking natives I have had the pleasure of meeting, and what is of more consequence can be trusted. His family consists of two wives and four children—three girls and one boy. I need not add that the girls are all remarkably pretty—well-mannered and clean.

Flint, as was discovered later, had taken one of the girls for a wife. W. Raffles Flint, dissatisfied with the vague reports of his brother's death brought back by Barnett, accompanied Hewett up the Kinabatangan when the latter was despatched to Pinangah. On the Kuamut they were urged not to pursue the matter, and became suspicious. They finally decided to seek out

Numpal when Gabong, an Iban trader with a Tengara wife, promised to guide them to the Kalabakan, where Numpal was now reported to be. They took twelve Iban policemen with them on the difficult journey, and at Linidis the police frightened the headmen into revealing Flint's buried corpse: the head separated from the trunk. It had apparently been used in celebrations following the murder, and then buried in order to avoid identification. Their informants told them that Numpal was in debt to Flint, having received advances for trade, and also that Numpal objected to the 'marriage' of his daughter to Flint.[53] Numpal had left the Kuamut while Flint was absent, taking his family with him. When Flint had pursued him he had been murdered.

Advised that Numpal was now living a short distance downriver, W. Raffles Flint and Hewett decided to surprise him at daylight the following morning. The surprise was theirs, for they discovered, after an exhausting trek through a night of torrential rain, a house swarming with armed warriors, primed for fighting:[54]

> To have attempted a retreat would have simply been to sacrifice the lives of our poor little party. Cries of Amok! Amok! arose, and we at once perceived that our only chance of escape lay in preventing a rush from the house. As there was not a moment to be lost I at once gave the order to fire. . . .

More than 130 men and women were killed in the slaughter which ensued, as the 2 Europeans, with 6 Ibans each, covered the two end doors of the house. The occupants were prevented from escape through three side doors, for the rain had turned the river alongside into a swollen flood, and within twenty minutes all were dead. Two Iban policemen were wounded in the final rush into the house.

News of this incident was spread to the outside world by a letter to a Hong Kong newspaper praising 'this magnificent feat of arms'. A letter-writer in a Singapore paper took up the subject, querying the activities of C. W. Flint, condemning the injustice of the massacre, and listing stories of other bloody

incidents in the territory. The government of Dutch Borneo protested about the killing of its subjects (the boundary at this time was still not agreed upon), and the British High Commissioner at Singapore wrote asking for explanations, as did the Foreign Office when the news reached London. Creagh stood by the two officers, claiming that the slaughter had arisen out of the circumstances of the moment and had not been a premeditated act of revenge.[55] There was, however, fear for public opinion. As Pryer wrote:[56]

> In fights with natives in which Dayaks are used there are always awkwardnesses about heads which would simply horrify the outside world if they became known, in indulging in them therefore we are always treading upon the thinnest of thin ice and the tendency to seek the arbitrement of the repeating rifle (and parang hilang) instead of more constitutional methods should be sternly repressed instead of encouraged.

Although Creagh tried to smooth over the incident, it dramatized the trend of events in Sabah, and it was this affair which precipitated Pryer's protest about the emergence of a policy which suggested that the Company was at war with the peoples of Sabah.

The massacre was not, in fact, typical of the methods employed by the government against suspected wrongdoers, but rather a peculiarly bloody extension of them. Armed expedition, in the ten years of the Company's rule, had been the sole method employed to settle troubles in the interior, and it had been a matter of time before an expedition produced results that shocked. It was in fact ironic that one of the smallest expeditions mounted (two Europeans and twelve Ibans) should have been responsible for the goriest incident. Moreover, while the incident provoked concern, it was concern of a somewhat superficial nature. Humanitarian feeling was distressed by the thought of a houseful of corpses, but the wider implications of recent expeditions into the interior were only just beginning to be understood.

Most officials of the Company still saw the interior peoples as

savages who had to be tamed. They could no doubt rightly claim that these peoples had never lived in complete harmony, but they did not realize that usually a kind of political and economic balance had been maintained, both among the interior peoples themselves and between them and the coastal peoples, and that since the advent of the Company this balance had been upset. Formerly, the interior peoples had been able to defend themselves against the depredations of intruders from the coast, but now the latter enjoyed, legitimately or illegitimately, the authority and power of the *orang puteh*. Formerly even serious feuds had been conducted with decorum, but now they were liable to be elevated into unrestrained warfare. The Europeans, on the coast, talked of the need to 'open up the interior' by suppressing its apparent lawlessness. They were scarcely yet aware that the interior had already been assaulted and opened up, and that the lawlessness was a consequence of this process.

The Tobacco Boom: Problems of Land and Labour

Unlike most of his officers Creagh, governor from 1888 to 1895, did show considerable concern for the disorderly administration he had inherited, and some perception of its harmful effects. Before coming to Sabah he had served under Hugh Low in Perak, and was aware of the subtleties of constructing a colonial administration. He wanted to combine precision, discipline, and efficiency in the Company's government with a sensitive, flexible attitude towards the indigenous societies which the government was seeking to control. In this he had support from Beaufort, a young London barrister who joined the staff in January 1889.[57] Beaufort had no previous colonial experience but he was shrewd, hardworking, and a pungent critic of the administration's inadequacies. He was not popular with the old hands, but Creagh thought highly enough of him to appoint him deputy governor for sixteen months in 1891–2 while Creagh himself took leave.

They were largely to be frustrated in their good intentions. The directors in London tended to see Creagh's policies as Colonial Office pedantry inappropriate to Sabah, and the staff in Borneo questioned his desire for caution in dealing with indigenous disruption.[58] More critically, however, the boom in tobacco-growing, and its abrupt collapse, wrecked Creagh's and Beaufort's ambitions. The boom, and the administrative responsibilities associated with it, occupied most of their attention until 1891. The collapse of the boom, and a general depression throughout the East in the early 1890s, reduced the Company's finances to their most perilous state so far, and denied them the resources with which to implement much reform. Creagh found himself, as Treacher had done, struggling to maintain an *ad hoc* administration with a handful of staff. Beaufort was retrenched in the economies enforced in 1892–3. Before he left Sabah he criticized bitterly the policies of the Company, and, in regard to the administration of the interior, forecast the possibility of 'disaster'.[59] Within the decade Mat Salleh's revolts, and the Company's counter-measures, would bring his prediction close to realization.

The tobacco estates which so dominated the course of Creagh's governorship had multiplied rapidly in the late 1880s, uncritically encouraged by the Company. At the height of the boom 555,000 acres had been leased and about twenty-five estates had been established. Ten operated in the Marudu Bay area, on Banggi Island and the rivers Bengkoka, Tandik, Bongan, Bandau, and Langkon. Seven opened up on the Kinabatangan, beginning at Bilit and as far up the river as Lamag. Estates were also established on the Sugut and Labuk rivers, with total acreages of 79,000 and 123,000 acres respectively, on the Segaliud and in Sandakan Bay. In the Darvel Bay area one estate opened near Silam and another at Lahad Datu.

By 1895 more than half these estates had closed down, and the surviving ones—five in Marudu Bay, five on the Kinabatangan and the Lahad Datu estate—had severely curtailed their activities.[60] The principal reason for the slump was

the American McKinley Tariff Bill of 1891, which banished American buyers from the world tobacco market, but scepticism amongst investors about Sabah had also returned. Land had been taken up in relatively inaccessible areas, and the Company failed to warn the planters that its administration of these areas was negligible, that communications were primitive, and that little was yet known in these areas about such matters as soil and weather conditions, plant diseases and pests. The planters began in ignorance, and inevitably made mistakes. Finally, the planters lacked an abundant local labour supply, and found it hard to import labour.

During the boom the administration had to devote much of its manpower to estate-related problems, principally those of land demarcation and estate labour. Upon his arrival Creagh found that large areas of land claimed to be under indigenous ownership had been alienated to planters. Daly reported:[61]

> I find that large blocks of land, enclosing native homesteads, villages and even the rivers themselves, regardless of all Government reserves, have been alienated by the Government and paid for at so much an acre by the lessees, one of whom on the Bingkoka river actually claims the right of stopping all navigation in that river so far as it passes through his property, as he maintains that he has paid for that river as the area of its surface was computed in the 11,170 acres granted to him.

Creagh had seen a version of the Torrens system of land registration in operation in Perak and other Malay states, and had also seen during his service in Hong Kong the operation of the land ordinances which Treacher had adopted in Sabah. He considered the latter, which involved the registration of deeds, unsuited to Sabah and making for inefficiency as land sales, and transfers, proliferated. He urged the adoption of the Torrens system (as Treacher had once unsuccessfully done), and that urgent measures be taken to protect indigenous land rights.

Creagh's experience in Perak had also taught him that the definition of indigenous holdings could be a complex matter. Pryer, who should have known better after ten years in Sabah,

ingenuously suggested that only rights to land under permanent cultivation be recognized. Creagh pointed out that 'permanent' was difficult of definition, that the principle would be considered unjust in local eyes, and that to ignore indigenous custom would be to ignore practice in other British colonies. He also pointed out it would discourage local people from moving into waste land and cultivating it. He does not appear to have been concerned about the disadvantages of the shifting cultivation of dry, or hill, padi, nor do any other Company officers at this time. While the whole question of land registration was under review, Creagh issued a notification, and in 1889 a proclamation, which attempted to give protection to indigenous rights to land.[62] They required that, when land was applied for, the chiefs in the vicinity should be informed by the district officer of the application, and that the boundaries of the application, after survey, should be clearly marked with notices in Malay. The district officer and survey staff were to make careful inquiries, and any local claims were to be forwarded to the government secretary. Indigenous inhabitants were regarded as having rights to land under cultivation or containing houses, and as a rule to land three times the area of that actually occupied or cultivated. In addition rights were admitted to land containing more than twenty fruit trees to the acre, and to isolated fruit trees which the owners were willing to fence. Also to be reserved were grazing lands kept stocked, wet- and dry-padi land used within the past three years, burial grounds and shrines, and customary rights of way.

The settlement of land rights was to be attempted in either of two ways, both requiring the governor's sanction. Settlement by reservation could be made through clear demarcation of all indigenous holdings; if appropriate, the consolidation of holdings could be attempted, moving isolated occupiers on to liberal grants of land closer to other occupiers. Settlement by compensation could be made by agreement on a suitable cash payment. A period of time was fixed for the hearing of claims, and no lease could be granted until this period had expired. Those who encroached on indigenous rights without permission would be

required to pay compensation for the damage or inconvenience caused.

With this legislation secured, the administration set about compensating those people disturbed by leases already granted. For example, on the Segaliud a 700-acre reserve was resumed from one planting company.[63] In the Marudu Bay area there were 'thirty or forty' claims to land alienated to the estates, from Bajaus and Kadazans.[64] The problem here had become a serious one for, on the one hand, the local people were seeking holdings ten times the area used for cultivation in one year, since they engaged in shifting cultivation and, on the other, the planters were not willing to budge from the good tobacco-planting land they had been granted. In this they were supported by the local Company official, who regarded it as now quite impracticable to delineate native reserves. Creagh eventually concurred in a compromise which the method of tobacco-growing allowed. The local peoples would be allowed to cultivate land cleared of tobacco and not again required for a number of seasons. In return they would pay 5 per cent of their crops, in kind, to the owners as rent. The chiefs and headmen, with the district officer, would supervise the system and settle disputes.

Creagh regarded the Company's officers as 'independent arbitrators', a somewhat questionable judgement. One officer had suggested, as an alternative to the payment of rent in crops, that the local peoples clear jungle for the estates, his object being to educate them to work for the estates permanently. But the compromise, such as it was, seems generally to have worked well, with one or two exceptions. A notable exception concerned Count Geloes d'Elsloo, a Dutch planter who constantly took a high-handed attitude towards both the local people and the government; in 1893 he was described as 'one of the few managers who fail to recognise the expediency of maintaining pacific and conciliatory relations with native tribes'.[65] The Count owned 30 square miles of the flat land at the southern end of Marudu Bay, straddling the river Bongan, and he repeatedly irritated the peoples who worked the land or who

passed through it on their journeys between coast and interior.

Nevertheless, Creagh's legislation did help to avoid further disputes, and none arose in his period as governor as a result of leases granted after its passing. In 1894 he reaffirmed the principle of the protection of indigenous land rights in a proclamation of that year which revised the land regulations in general, and finally produced a type of Torrens system for the territory.[66] All dealings in land between Europeans and other foreigners on the one hand and natives of the country on the other were expressly forbidden, unless sanctioned by the governor. As yet, few indigenous holdings had been surveyed or had titles to them issued, a task the impoverished Company could not afford. Under Creagh's legislation, however, the absence of such titles was perhaps a blessing, for the legislation allowed a Sabahan who held written title to land to transfer his title to a European or other foreigner without government approval. Paradoxically, it was those holdings without title, transferable only with government approval, which were the better secured. His legislation on land may be counted as a mild success for Creagh. The Company had at last enunciated its good intentions towards indigenous land holdings with some force, and a greater degree of precision than before. Perhaps more importantly, his legislation impressed upon the administration an attitude of mind which it was subsequently never to lose. The protection of indigenous land rights was no longer a principle which could be overlooked.

The story of the treatment of labour on the early tobacco estates in Sabah is an appalling one, and Creagh and Beaufort were less successful in remedying the Company's inadequacies in this regard. Their moral outrage at the conditions over which they were forced to preside did, however, initiate gradual reform, and also they resisted pressures from their contemporaries to involve indigenous Sabahans in the near-slavery of estate labour.

The bad conditions arose primarily not from want of legislation, but from the evasion of the legislation by the employers, and the failure of the administration to police the estates

adequately. Treacher, in 1882, had adopted the then current legislation of the Straits Settlements regarding labour contracts, and in 1883 the Straits Settlements ordinance regarding the regulation of conditions and the protection of labour on estates. The legislation was adopted with a view to satisfying British colonial administrations in Asia, through whom the Company hoped to import labour. The 'protectors' entrusted with administering the legislation were, however, the residents of the east and west coasts, together with the territory's two doctors, all four of whom had much else to do. During Treacher's period of office even the few estates established were not properly supervised. They were visited, at best, four times in a year, and the administration's reports repeatedly mention bad conditions, ill-treatment, and high rates of illness.

After 1888, the conditions on the rapidly multiplying estates were in most cases atrocious. In 1889 the mortality rate in one case was 29.13 per cent, and in nine others over 10 per cent.[67] In the following year the statistics were worse. The total number of labourers employed was 13,316, comprised of about 8,000 Chinese, 5,000 'Malays', and 500 'other'. There were 2,631 deaths, and 525 desertions. Out of twenty-one estates enumerated, only five had a death rate of less than 10 per cent. The highest death rate was at Silam, where 41 per cent of the labourers had died. It was noted however that the death rate amongst Chinese was consistently higher than amongst the others. At Silam the death rate amongst the Chinese had been 57 per cent. At an estate on the Labuk 72 per cent of the Chinese employed had died, compared with 10 per cent of the others employed.[68] By the time that the labour returns were drawn up for 1891 the boom was over and many of the estates were closing. The depression, rather than the Company, would ease the problem. But Beaufort, as acting governor, advised the directors that he would not publish the returns because they were so bad, and perhaps even worse than they appeared; he suggested that the estate managements deliberately falsified their figures.[69] The figures were certainly bad enough. Only three estates boasted a death rate of less than 10 per cent. One,

on the Segama, had a death rate of 43 per cent, and three others of more than 30 per cent.

The lobbying by the estates interests, not only in Sandakan but also in London, forced Creagh and Beaufort to walk a delicate path. By 1889 the directors had already become aware that stories of ill-treatment of labour had given the territory a bad name in Singapore and Hong Kong, yet the policy the men on the spot were required to follow, for fear of driving away the planters, was one of moderate, restrained implementation of the existing regulations. Beaufort was rapped over the knuckles on at least two occasions for excessive zeal, on both occasions as a result of the complaints of planters about the 'youth', 'bumptiousness', and 'credulity' of himself and other Company officers. He did, however, take the opportunity to defend himself:[70] 'I honestly believe that every estate would have closed ere this—on account of sickness and death alone; look at the percentage of death, and the Governor's power to close with a 7% death rate . . .'. And in regard to a manager who had complained of Beaufort's zeal: 'What do you think of a manager not paying his coolies because they are sick and cannot work, and yet refusing to give them rations in lieu of pay because they were not in the hospital—when his only hospital was a small shed that they couldn't get into!'

The usual defence offered for the high rates of illness and death was that the labourers brought to Borneo were of inferior quality. Creagh wrote of the 'half starved wretches that are picked off the streets by the Hong Kong and Singapore brokers'.[71] Beaufort wrote that it was an acknowledged fact among planters that most of their coolies probably came to them after being kidnapped. But it could scarcely be doubted that poor conditions on the estates contributed to the high mortality rate, although ignorance also played its part. Two of the commonest causes of death were malaria and beriberi, neither of which diseases were at this time understood. It was noted that 'malarial influences' struck most in new estates, where the jungle was just being cleared. Beriberi was put down to a variety of causes, including 'bacteria',

which could be destroyed by vigorous disinfection, and 'a want of pluck' on the part of those workers who succumbed to the disease.[72]

No estates were closed down for breaching labour regulations, nor were any forced to follow regulations to the letter. However, a number of estate managers guilty of atrocities and extreme bad treatment of their workers were expelled from Sabah at the insistence of Creagh or Beaufort. They found that, despite the Company's fear of offending planter interests, the problem of runaway workers gave them some leverage over the estates.[73] The estates were dependent upon the Company to round up runaways, and many of the more outrageous discoveries about estate conditions came from officers called to the estates to deal with the runaway problem. In return for the use of the Company's police to round up fugitives it became possible for Creagh and Beaufort to lecture the estate managements on their duties to their workers. Beyond this, however, they were able to force few improvements.

On the estates imported Chinese labourers outnumbered non-Chinese by about two to one, and the origins of the non-Chinese are not clear. In 1891, 7,329 labourers were listed as Chinese, 4,010 as 'Malay', and 270 as 'other'.[74] The term 'Malay' was probably used to indicate those who were Muslim; the term 'other' to indicate non-Muslim indigenes of Sabah, such as the Muruts exiled from the lower Padas after the 1888 revolt, and a party of 100 west-coast Kadazans (their district was not stipulated) who were employed on the estate at Malapi on the Kinabatangan. Many of the 'Malays' probably came from within Sabah, particularly from the west coast. In 1890 Creagh heard complaints from village headmen on the Padas Damit that many men were leaving the river to work on the estates, and he noted that such complaints were widespread, for usually the migrants made no provision for the wives and families left behind. He noted also that the exodus reduced the authority, and taxation potential, of chiefs and headmen.[75]

He was not greatly moved by these complaints, but he displayed great caution whenever any ideas were proposed for mobilizing the indigenous inhabitants of Sabah for economic development. In 1892 a letter-writer to the *Herald* criticized the government on this score, and the *Herald*, echoing Creagh's attitudes, replied:[76] 'It is not the policy of the Government to plant, or to force the natives to do so, and even in 'encouraging' natives and Chinese some caution is necessary in view of the fluctuation in value of agricultural prospects.'

In 1895 the Court of Directors mooted the idea of a 'culture system' in Sabah, with the people being required to sell produce to the government at stipulated prices. The notion received no serious consideration from the administration in Sabah, and in the event the human resources of the territory were never to be systematically exploited by the Company. In later years substantial voluntary estate labour by indigenous peoples would occur when the rubber boom hit Sabah, but even this was to be quickly discouraged.

Creagh's antagonism towards indigenous wage labour was partly based on a concern to protect the local peoples from the patent evils of the estates, and this concern he bequeathed to his successors. However it has to be acknowledged that, fundamentally, his attitude was based on notions of colonial development drawn from the Malay States and Sarawak. In this view the indigenous peoples were to be undisturbed in their traditional economic pursuits and social organization, while the brunt of economic modernization should be borne by imported labour. The potential consequences for Sabah, of cleavages along ethnic lines between the 'traditional' and 'modernized' sectors, went, as they did elsewhere, unconsidered.

Makeshift Government Prolonged

The absorption with land and labour problems was reduced when the tobacco boom ended in 1891, but then the problem of the survival of the Company itself gripped the attention of Creagh and Beaufort. Creagh returned from leave in 1891 to

find that during Beaufort's acting governorship the reformist optimism they had shared before his departure, when land sales and other revenues flowing from the boom had enabled him to double the expenditure of the Treacher years, had evaporated. Now he found the Court of Directors nagging him to reduce, retrench, and whittle down expenses, as Treacher had been nagged. The same kind of acrimonious correspondence about administrative costs began to flow between Sabah and London as had flowed ten years before. Creagh acknowledged that the directors had the final authority, and tried to carry out their wishes, but could not resist pointing out that their stringently conservative policy of keeping expenditure within income would produce administrative disorder, and that that would not attract investors.[77]. Beaufort called the directors' policy 'absolutely suicidal'.[78]

In London the shareholders (whose original £20 shares were now worth £6) found themselves in the middle of a struggle for power. On the one hand Alfred Dent, the original moving force behind the Company, insisted on ruthless cost-cutting. On the other Cowie, now a comfortably-off shareholder living in London, preached a policy of deficit-financing until the economic potential of Sabah could be realized. Cowie, once the trader who had helped and hindered Pryer at Sandakan, had sold his interests in Borneo to Raja Brooke in 1888 for £25,000, and had invested £3,000 in the Company upon his return to England. There he dazzled the shareholders with tales of his long experience on the spot in Borneo (a distinction none of the directors could claim) and with his 'fortune' made in Borneo. His enthusiasm for Borneo, and his virulent criticism of the demoralized directors, soon won him a following. In 1893 he failed to be elected as a director by one vote. The election was bitterly fought, with Alfred Dent making derogatory remarks about Cowie's honesty, and Cowie pointing out that Alfred Dent and his brother Edward had been quietly divesting themselves of most of their holdings in the Company. At a special meeting in February 1894[79] Cowie was finally elected, and he immediately pitched himself into the Company's affairs,

working every day in the Company's offices, until in 1897 his services were to be recognized by his appointment as managing director. In the previous year Alfred Dent had withdrawn from the Company.

Cowie's expansionist policies were, however, concerned with long-term capital investment, in particular a railway, rather than with administration. Thus the latter years of Creagh's term of office were determined by the stringent policies on expenditure enforced by Alfred Dent in 1892. Cowie made no changes in this regard. Beaufort, retrenched in 1893 but in London reinvigorated by Cowie's optimism, was to succeed Creagh as governor in 1895. But he too was to suffer under Cowie's insistence that investment in capital works should take precedence over investment in day-to-day administration.

The improvements which Creagh had hoped to make ended up then as little more than paper improvements. During his period as governor, and Beaufort's first period in Sabah, almost all aspects of the administration were overhauled. A new accounting system was introduced, and the entire code of laws and regulations of the territory was revised. The various and confused customs regulations were also codified. In 1891 the territory's first, though not comprehensive, census was conducted. Generally, Creagh and Beaufort tried to end the casual approach to administration they discovered upon their arrival.

But the shortages of staff and government funds meant that in practice little real change occurred. In 1895 the European staff in Sabah totalled 28, 11 of whom administered the departments of government at Sandakan. Of the remaining 17, 2 supervised the police, 2 were doctors, and 4 administered Labuan (in 1890 placed by the Colonial Office under the Company's supervision). Perhaps 9 officers were therefore left for the remainder of the territory, but illness and leave reduced this number. Pryer pointed out that there were not more than half a dozen officers to patrol a country the size of Ireland.[80] The comparison was not unmeaningful, given the sense of rebellion simmering in each territory.

1 W. B. Pryer (centre) at Sandakan, 1885 (*Courtesy Muzium Sabah, Kota Kinabalu*)

2 First Train in North Borneo, 1898 (*Courtesy Muzium Sabah, Kota Kinabalu*)

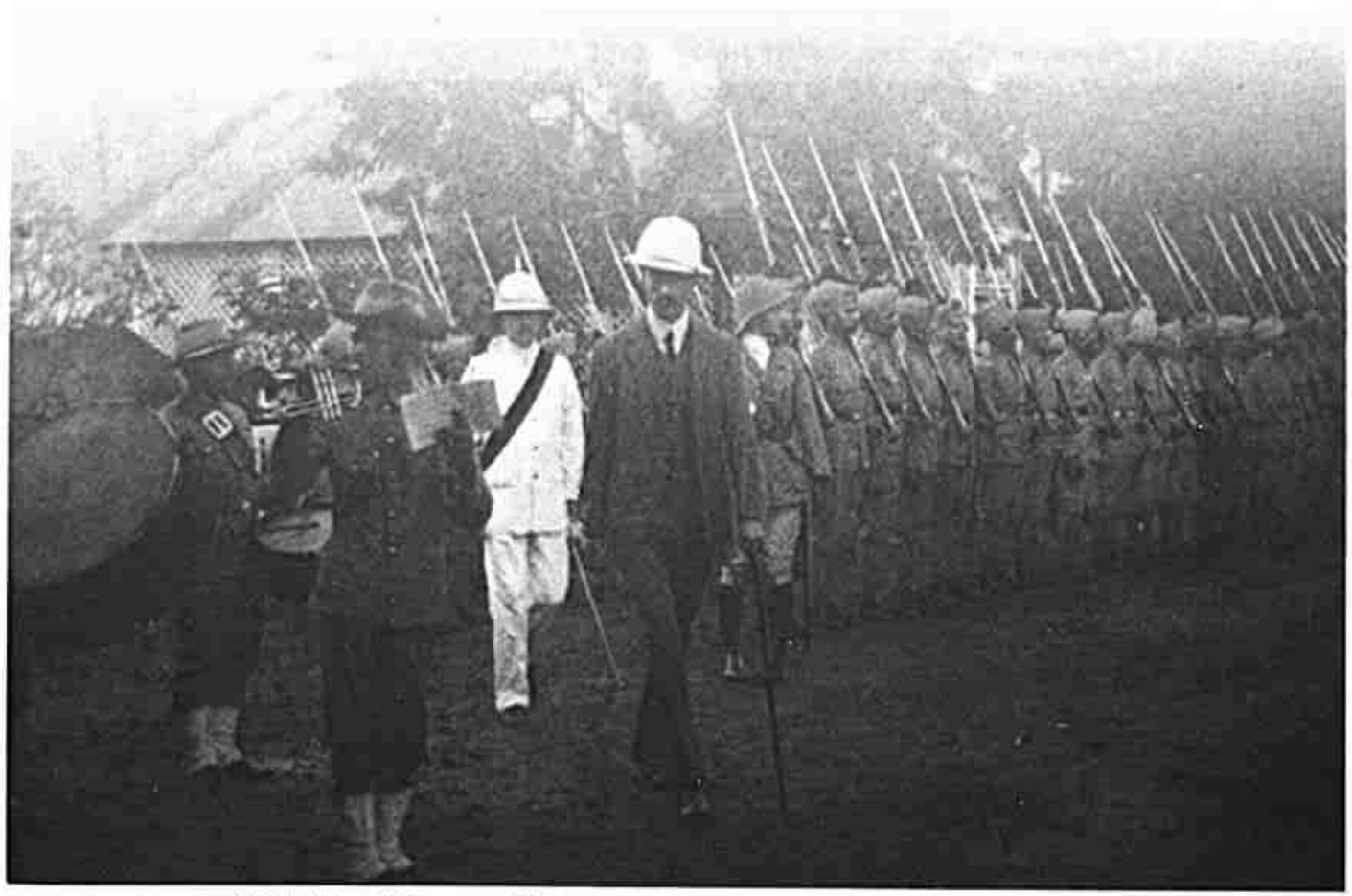
3 A Chartered Company Police Patrol *c.* 1909 (*Courtesy Muzium Sabah, Kota Kinabalu*)

4 Jesselton, 1911 (*Courtesy Muzium Sabah, Kota Kinabalu*)

5 District Officer's House, Mempakul (*Courtesy Muzium Sabah, Kota Kinabalu*)

6 At the Tamu, Tuaran, 1915 (*Courtesy Muzium Sabah, Kota Kinabalu*)

7 Buffalo Hauling Latex *c.* 1915 (*Courtesy Muzium Sabah, Kota Kinabalu*)



8 Sir West Ridgeway, Chairman of the Chartered Company, Inspecting a Guard of Honour at Jesselton, 1915 (*Courtesy Muzium Sabah, Kota Kinabalu*)

This situation reduced to virtual irrelevance Creagh's chief answer to the popular disruption bubbling throughout the territory—the Village Administration Proclamation of 1891.[81] The proclamation gave formal definition to the *ad hoc* practices of former years regarding the appointment of chiefs and headmen. Under it, the chief district officer (or Resident) was empowered to delineate the bounds of a village, to appoint one or more headmen, taking note of established custom on rights of nomination, succession, and other claims, and to draw up rules to govern relations between the headmen, and also between headmen and the paid Company chiefs. The proclamation deemed as appointed all headmen already in office.

The duties of the headmen were set out at length. Headmen were required to report 'bad characters', including absconding estate labourers, any sudden or unnatural deaths, and offences such as robbery or kidnapping. They were also required to report serious diseases such as smallpox and cholera. When serious offences had been committed they were required to investigate them, arrest suspects, and deliver them to the government. They were empowered to resist 'unlawful attacks' on their district, and to arrest persons 'found lurking'. They were also expected to provision government expeditions when required, collect revenue, allot unoccupied land, encourage industry, regulate building, and generally assist government officers when called upon to do so. The appointed headmen would receive warrants stipulating their duties and also their powers in the administration of justice. Normally a headman would try cases only when sitting with at least two others. They could not try cases involving 'non-natives'. They were not necessarily empowered to fine, but could award compensation following local custom. Written records were not required. A fee of $1 was to be charged for each complaint heard, to be paid by the accused if found guilty. If the headman was discovered to be neglecting his duties he could be fined, suspended temporarily, or dismissed from his office. His people could also be punished if they failed, without reasonable excuse, to support him.

Thus, for the first time, all the peoples of Sabah became answerable, at least in written law, to a central government, and their headmen incorporated into a kind of civil service. In terms of paper rights and formulations, this proclamation of 1891 was perhaps the most significant development for the peoples of Sabah since the Company had bought its powers of government from Brunei and Sulu. But the consequences of the proclamation, which was to provide the theoretical basis for district government until 1903, are difficult to assess. Any generalization suffers, like the proclamation itself, from the difficulties arising out of the variety of custom and local circumstance in Sabah, and the uneven impact of the Company's government.

The most significant aspect of the proclamation was perhaps the stress laid upon the duties and obligations of the headman towards the central government. In areas where the proclamation was implemented the extent to which it altered the relationship between headman and people would have varied a great deal, according to the degree to which, formerly, the community had acknowledged outside authority, and the headman had acted as agent or go-between, and also according to the degree of power and influence which the headmen had possessed and exercised. The personality of the particular headman was of great importance, arguably of greater importance than the distinction which it would seem valid to make between Muslim and non-Muslim communities and patterns of authority; a vigorous Kadazan headman, in custom reliant for his position only upon communal approval might well have wielded more authority than the inept amongst his Muslim counterparts. Perhaps the most important distinction to be made is however between traditionally self-contained communities and those which had previously acknowledged an external authority. Presumably the unpopularity of the headman, and of the post when it required filling, was greater in the former than in the latter, once the headman became an agent of the government, charged with collecting taxes, assisting expeditions, and obeying the wishes of government officers. In

these the cohesion of communal life was likely to be disrupted in new ways.

At the same time, if the proclamation of 1891 widened the duties of the headman and opened up for some a conflict of loyalties, it left with them wide and important powers. The supervision of most aspects of communal life remained theirs, particularly the allotment of land, and the hearing and settlement of disputes about land and property, where 'non-natives' were not involved. While the central government refrained from intervention in the day-to-day affairs of the community, the significance and prestige of the headman was likely to remain high.

But a discussion of the impact of the 1891 proclamation upon many communities is entirely academic, given the low degree of enforcement of the proclamation in the 1890s. The proclamation was made applicable to most part of Sabah between 1891 and 1893, and yet, while so few European officers supervised the country, the onus for implementing the proclamation rested heavily on the headmen themselves. In this situation the proclamation marked no serious departure in the social structures or patterns of authority in most of Sabah. It tidied up, on paper, the vaguenesses of Treacher's governorship, and it laid down patterns for the future, but it created no immediate revolution in the administration of Sabah, or in the lives of the country's peoples. Nor did it provide any immediate solutions to the causes of disruption throughout the interior.

These were met merely by further paper pronouncements and makeshift administrative devices which could only intermittently be implemented. For example the former indiscriminate collection of poll-tax by itinerant agents was theoretically abandoned, and improper taxation was threatened with severe punishment, but in 1895 it was recorded more in amusement than anger that a hitherto unknown 'chief' on the Labuk had arrived in Sandakan with $418 in poll-tax and $120 in fines and fees, extracted on his own initiative in the *ulu*. Likewise, arriving Iban traders and jungle-produce collectors now had to obtain

licences before proceeding inland, but their subsequent adventures remained largely a mystery.[82]

The continuing usefulness of Ibans to the Company was to be highlighted in a peculiar way in 1894, when news arrived from *ulu* Padas that Sayad, an Iban corporal, had turned against the government and with two Iban privates was raising the Murut peoples of the district. Barnett and the police were busy in the Sugut, on the east coast, chasing 'a Sulu named Mat Sali'. The future scourge of the Company was as yet considered a minor nuisance, and Barnett and his troops were pulled out and hurried by launch around the coast to the Padas. When the Ibans in the force heard of the object of the expedition they refused to move against their fellow countrymen, and Barnett found that he could only make use of the Sikhs. The expedition up the Padas and into still uncharted Murut territory, a bewildering country of fast-flowing streams twisting amongst thickly-jungled and precipitous ranges, was undertaken in torrential rain, and the Sikhs and their European officers found the going hard. The Sikhs disliked jungle work, and for the first time there were no Iban allies to explore ahead, and to make comprehensible and less frightening the alien environment. Murut rumour helped further to demoralize the Company's forces. Sayad had supposedly gathered 200 Muruts to his side, and was receiving guns and ammunition from Pengiran Abubakar, Brunei ruler of the river Lawas, in exchange for slaves. The Murut groups which had refused to join Sayad had hidden their valuables, sent the women and children into the jungle, and were preparing to follow.

The situation was an excellent illustration of the terror which Ibans could provoke—a terror hitherto harnessed to the Company's purposes but now turned against it. Barnett found himself virtually helpless against one Iban corporal and two privates. He could do little except settle near the head of the Padas gorge, at Sapong, hoping that this would give the friendly Muruts courage, and wait. Meanwhile he wrote to Creagh urging that Iban policemen in future be recruited from a variety of communities; at present they all came from the Saribas, and

communal loyalties had proved stronger than loyalty to their employers. Finally Dunlop heard that Sayad's Murut allies had deserted him and was advised of the existence of an Iban trader, Nakoda Bali, a Sarawak outlaw who organized many Ibans entering Murut country in search of jungle produce. The Nakoda was reported to be indifferent to Sayad and his services were sought. In February 1895 Nakoda Bali and his followers brought Sayad in, and the rebel was promptly banished from the Company's territory.[83]

The crisis over, the use of Ibans was resumed, and the Company's confidence in its police force returned. The Ibans were indeed to be more vital to the Company than ever in the next few years. For Nakoda Bali, the incident was his making; his assistance was remembered and he was soon to be appointed a government chief in Murut country.[84]

•*Orang kaya* (abbrev. O.K.), literally 'rich man', title for man of authority in Sabah, granted formally by the Chartered Company to some of its indigenous chiefs. *Orang kaya kaya* (abbrev. O.K.K.), literally 'very rich man', superior to O.K., also a title formalized by the Chartered Company.

1. C.O. 874/237, 20/11/84, p. 608.

2. C.O. 874/240, 30/6/85; C.O. 874/241, p. 332; C.O. 874/242, 31/7/86, p. 34.

3. Nakoda Usang was sometimes rendered 'Nakoda Unsang'. He was regarded by Ibans as a soothsayer and invulnerable to shot and sword (C.O. 874/255, 15/8/94, p. 314). There appears to have been a tradition of Iban influence on the Tuaran, the Brunei ruler before the coming of the Company having employed an Iban agent on the river, Nakoda Radin (*Herald*, 1/7/87, p. 149). Iban leadership possibly accounts for the employment of Tuaran Kadazans on the Company's punitive expeditions. Nakoda Usang became Company chief on the Tuaran in 1892, after the misdeeds of Pengiran Subudin were exposed (C.O. 874/252, 9/11/91, p. 20).

4. C.O. 874/245, 11/2/88, p. 213; 23/2/88, p. 227; 28/3/88, p. 396.

5. J. D. Ross, *Sixty Years: Life and Adventure in the Far East*, London, 1911, vol. 2, pp. 181–3.

6. C.O. 874/245, 28/3/88, p. 390; 1/5/88, p. 451; 28/4/88, p. 543; 17/6/88, p. 615; 12/6/88, p. 660. It was perhaps characteristic of the Company that the hanging was botched. The *Herald*, 1/7/88, p. 440, whitewashed the facts, but the rattan ropes used for the executions repeatedly broke. Years later Beaufort reminisced about the 'revolting scene' (C.O. 874/262, 19/10/98, p. 757).

7. C.O. 874/247, 20/3/89, p. 418; C.O. 874/248, 17/7/89, p. 96; C.O. 874/253, 13/6/92, p. 215.

8. C.O. 874/245, 17/2/88, p. 296; 23/2/88, p. 235; 2/3/88, p. 298; 28/3/88, p. 396.

9. C.O. 874/245, 23/2/88, p. 221.

10. C.O. 874/246, 9/9/88, p. 279; 8/10/88, p. 325; C.O. 874/247, 22/2/89, p. 303.

11. C.O. 874/247, 2/1/89, p. 99; 5/1/89, p. 102; C.O. 874/239, 13/5/85, p. 1; C.O. 874/242, 28/9/86, p. 204; 17/2/87, p. 807.

12. C.O. 874/247, 4/3/89, p. 336.

13. C.O. 874/249, 9/4/90, p. 286.

14. C.O. 874/246, 1/2/87, p. 583; C.O. 874/246, 14/9/88, p. 342; 12/11/88, p. 539; C.O. 874/247, 22/2/89, p. 303.

15. C.O. 874/246, 8/10/88, p. 325; 12/11/88, p. 539; 23/10/88, pp. 555, 557.

16. *Herald*, 1/5/89; C.O. 874/248, 5/8/89, p. 204.

17. C.O. 874/247, 4/3/89, p. 336; 12/3/89, p. 357; 14/3/89, p. 377.

18. C.O. 874/247, 1/3/89, p. 375; 9/3/89, p. 405; 12/3/89, p. 463; 2/4/89, p. 446; 3/4/89, p. 450; C.O. 874/257, 21/1/96, p. 361. Patch survived, and died in 1908 in Jesselton gaol, after being arrested for spreading rumours that Mat Salleh was still alive (*Herald*, 1/10/08, p. 188; 16/10/08, p. 199).

19. C.O. 874/119, Chairman to Governor, 26/7/89.

20. C.O. 874/252, 18/1/92, p. 394; 4/2/92, p. 534.

21. C.O. 874/187, Pryer to Crocker, 28/12/90.

22. C.O. 874/253, 23/2/93, p. 1099.

23. C.O. 874/235, 26/10/83, p. 483; 18/11/83, p. 578; C.O. 874/237, 11/9/84, p. 309; *Herald*, 1/9/84, p. 2.

24. C.O. 874/240, 12/2/86, p. 552; 6/3/86, p. 775; C.O. 874/241, 2/7/86, p. 685.

25. C.O. 874/245, 12, 15/5/88, p. 557; 11/6/88, p. 730; *Herald*, 1/7/88, p. 433.

26. C.O. 874/252, 24/1/92, pp. 448, 571.

27. C.O. 874/253, 23/2/93, p. 1099; *Herald*, 1/12/91, p. 512.

28. Spenser St. John, *Rajah Brooke*, London, 1899, p. 245.

29. C.O. 874/252, 9/11/91, p. 20; *Herald*, 1/12/91, p. 512.

30. C.O. 874/241, 2/7/86, p. 685.

31. The term '*ulu* Padas' here designates the country above the Padas gorge, drained by the Padas and its tributaries in the south, east (the Sook and its tributaries) and north (including the Keningau plain and the surrounding

hills, called Limbawan in early Company documents). The discussion also touches on the country drained by the tributaries of the Sembakung which flows south-eastward from Sabah into Kalimantan, formerly Dutch Borneo. The Company's knowledge of this area was very limited until the early part of the twentieth century (the boundary with Dutch Borneo, fixed in 1892 at 4° 10' North, was not demarcated until 1915). The term 'Murut' is here used loosely to refer to the indigenous peoples of these areas; where the records provide other identifying names, such as ethnic terms and place names, these have been included, but should probably be regarded with caution. See subsequent chapters for further material on the history of the 'Murut' areas.

32. C.O. 874/238, 22/4/85, p. 682.

33. *Herald*, 1/4/85, p. 8; 1/12/85, p. 2; 1/1/86, p. 3; 1/2/86, p. 21.

34. C.O. 874/240, 30/6/85, p. 323.

35. C.O. 874/242, 31/7/86, p. 39.

36. C.O. 874/252, 22/2/92, pp. 617, 621.

37. C.O. 874/252, 14/1/92, p. 374; *Herald*, 1/4/92, p. 105.

38. C.O. 874/242, 28/9/86; 19/10/86, p. 575.

39. C.O. 874/243, 14/6/87, p. 669; *Herald*, 1/10/87, p. 242.

40. C.O. 874/250, 20/10/90, p. 325; 9/12/90, p. 444; 4/3/91, p. 708; C.O. 874/251, 2/6/91, p. 429; 23/6/91, p. 525; 26/6/91, p. 927.

41. C.O. 874/251, 11/6/91, p. 521; 26/6/91, p. 927.

42. C.O. 874/252, 22/2/92, pp. 617, 621.

43. 'Malingkote' is mentioned or described in the following: C.O. 874/251, 23/6/91, p. 515; 11/6/91, p. 521; 11/9/91, p. 825; 23/9/91, p. 893; 26/6/91, p. 927; 9/8/91, p. 848; C.O. 874/252, 9/11/91, p. 25; *Herald* 1/4/92, p. 109; H. Wise, 'The "Malingkote" in Borneo in June 1891', *JSBRAS*, 26, 1894, p. 201.

44. See G. N. Appell, 'A Survey of the Social and Medical Anthropology of Sabah. Retrospect and Prospect', *Behavior Science Notes* 3, 1, 1968, for a critical review of investigations into the problem of depopulation among the Muruts. Appell suggests that population decline may have occurred generally in the interior. A 1902 report (C.O. 874/271, 16/12/02) reported a lack of children amongst communities in *ulu* Mengalong, Keningau, and Tambunan. If sociocultural disruption can affect population levels, the illustrations in the present work of the disruption of the interior in the 1880s and 1890s seem to support Appell's suggestion.

45. C.O. 874/248, 12/8/89, p. 264.

46. Listed by Dunlop as Gappoo, Inecado, Lansat, Tarra, Nelumat, and Mawan.

47. C.O. 874/248, 5/9/89, p. 398.

48. C.O. 874/249, 13/6/90, p. 916.

49. C.O. 874/243, 16/4/87, p. 504.

50. C.O. 874/246, 6, 8/10/88, pp. 453–7. Pryer described the Tingaluns as from the Sembakung and traditionally dominant on the upper Kinabatangan (C.O. 874/246, 18/8/88, p. 225; 5/11/88, p. 698).

51. Panching's people were described as Rumanau (spelt 'Romanow'). It is not clear from the Company documents whether Panching had been appointed as 'chief' by the Company. C.O. 874/249, 6/6/90, p. 486; 23/6/90, p. 533; 16/6/90, p. 540; 22/9/90, p. 857; 5/9/90, p. 869; 12/7/90, p. 696; 12/8/90, p. 872.

52. *Herald*, 1/1/90, p. 11.

53. Flint had paid Numpal $125 for his daughter, and had gone through a wedding ceremony. Hewett reported that the Tengaras were in debt to the Tidongs, and the Tidongs in debt to coastal traders.

54. C.O. 874/250, 4/11/90, pp. 180, 245; 10/11/90, p. 350. A. N. Keith, *Land Below The Wind*, London, 1939, pp. 201–9 gave what purported to be the 'native version' of this affair, but did not in fact offer any material not available in the European records, nor any explanation of Numpal's actions other than those assumed by the Europeans. In picturing him as a 'primitive savage' she also misrepresented his status as chief and trader in an area extending from Tawau to the Kinabatangan.

55. C.O. 874/250, 25/11/90, p. 403.

56. C.O. 874/187, Pryer to Crocker, 28/12/90.

57. K. G. Tregonning, *A History of Modern Sabah*, Singapore, 1965, is incorrect in asserting (p. 54) that when Beaufort was appointed governor in 1895 he 'had never been east before [and] spoke no Malay'.

58. C.O. 874/249, 17/4/90, p. 331; C.O. 874/253, 28/12/92, p. 874; C.O. 874/187, Beaufort to Pryer, 7/2/95; *Herald*, 1/6/95.

59. C.O. 874/253, 14/1/93, p. 1005.

60. C.O. 874/248, 31/8/89, p. 310; *Herald*, 1/8/88, p. 467; 1/1/89, p. 3; 1/3/89, p. 70; 1/6/89, p. 173; 1/9/89, p. 286; 1/12/92, p. 417; 1/1/93, p. 6; *Gazette* 1/2/90, p. 54; C.O. 874/256, 27/7/95, p. 648.

61. C.O. 874/246, 4/8/88, p. 40.

62. *Gazette*, 1/9/88, 1/2/89.

63. C.O. 874/246, 12/10/88, p. 414; 12/11/88, p. 585; C.O. 874/247, 26/6/89, p. 833.

64. C.O. 874/248, 9/7/89, p. 144; 25/7/89, p. 149; C.O. 874/249, 9/4/90, p. 291.

65. C.O. 874/254, 20/7/93, p. 182.

66. *Herald*, 1/8/94, p. 191; *Gazette*, 1/11/94.

67. C.O. 874/248, 9/10/89, p. 564; undated, p. 602.

68. C.O. 874/250, 18/10/90, p. 51.

69. C.O. 874/252, 12/4/92, p. 802.

70. C.O. 874/251, 23/7/91, p. 653; C.O. 874/252, 10/3/92, p. 629.

71. C.O. 874/249, 15/9/90, p. 851; C.O. 874/248, 25/11/89, p. 692; C.O. 874/119, Chairman to Governor, 23/8/89, 20/9/89.

72. C.O. 874/250, 18/10/90, p. 51; C.O. 874/248, 9/10/89, p. 564; *Herald*, 1/2/89, p. 46.

73. On one occasion the planters' association requested twenty Iban policemen for each estate, but the request was not granted (C.O. 874/249, 20/5/90, p. 473).

74. C.O. 874/252, p. 809.

75. C.O. 874/249, 9/4/90, p. 285; 26/7/90, p. 710.

76. *Herald*, 1/12/92, p. 417; 1/10/95, p. 248.

77. C.O. 874/253, 28/12/92, p. 874.

78. C.O. 874/253, 14/1/93, p. 1005.

79. *Herald*, 1/9/93, p. 247; 1/6/94, p. 140.

80. C.O. 874/187, Pryer to Lucas, 19/9/97; C.O. 874/256, 16/7/95, p. 619; C.O. 874/257, 1/1/96, p. 372.

81. *Gazette*, 1/3/91, *see also Gazette*, 1/10/93.

82. *Gazette*, 1/8/92, p. 138; C.O. 874/257, 24/12/95, p. 272. See also Hastings' report on the Sugut *Herald*, 1/10/92, p. 348.

83. C.O. 874/255, 15/10/94, p. 453; 25/10/94, p. 478; 6/11/94, p. 523; 3/12/94, p. 591; 17/12/94, p. 654; 9/2/95, p. 881.

84. Nakoda Bali became government chief at Rundum in 1899 (C.O. 874/263, 26/5/99, p. 639).

4

MAT SALLEH, 1895–1900

The Company in the Period of the Mat Salleh Revolts

> The least crime, a capsized boat, a swarm of bees, a coolie-shed robbed, the appearance of a stranger in a village—anything was enough to raise the cry of 'Mat Sali'; and anyone who wanted to extort food or property from a native could have his wish by merely stating that he was one of Mat Sali's men.
>
> It is evident that the whole country was—if not in sympathy with him—at any rate afraid of him.

So wrote Beaufort in his report for the year 1897.[1] In that year, when Mat Salleh achieved his greatest coup—the destruction of the government station and township on Gaya Island—his influence was at its height. But Beaufort's description of his impact on Sabah applies throughout the period from 1895, when he emerged from the Sugut jungle to make Sandakan tremble, until 1900 when he was killed and his last fort at Tambunan was levelled to the ground. Even afterwards his scattered but still rebellious followers could electrify the country. The revolts he led were of a different scale from any others the Company had to face. They affected in fact or rumour most parts of Sabah and not merely localities, and they shook the authority of the Company's entire government.

Beaufort never expressed sympathy for Mat Salleh, whom he saw as a rogue, but he was clearly aware of the Company's inadequacies, and of the reasons why Mat Salleh enjoyed so

much success. It is therefore worthwhile to examine the Company's activities during the period of the revolts. In June 1895, when Beaufort returned to Sabah as governor, his first major despatch to the directors in London set out for the record the state of the administration.[2] Beaufort made it plain that he wished to avoid any future blame for already existing deficiencies.

He could speak of Sandakan only 'in terms of shame', with its dilapidated buildings and uncared-for roads and boardwalks. Kudat was 'half-empty'. On the surviving plantations confidence was at a low ebb, and the planters were at cross purposes with the administration on the labour question. Cook, the Company's treasurer, had been too busy to audit the accounts for months. Like the rest of the Company's limited staff, he had to turn his hand to many chores, and also find time to eke out his salary with private business affairs. Beaufort noted that the annual vote for the police force was already, at mid-year, used up. The sums directed by Cowie towards the construction of a cross-country telegraph and a road up the Padas gorge were likewise exhausted. A grandiose plan for a road linking Sandakan and Kudat the new governor dismissed out of hand.

In his despatch to London Beaufort avoided the issue of administering the peoples of the territory. He knew that Cowie would place the funding of public works before any increase in staff for this purpose. But he gave vent to his feelings in a letter to Pryer. It was no use playing at governing, he wrote, by sending the natives badly copied Malay letters that they could not read.[3] The Company should give up all pretence of control in most parts of the territory, confining itself to the towns and stations on the coast, and to the route to be traversed by the telegraph, up the Kinabatangan to Pinangah, across the Witti Range to Keningau, and down the Pegalan and the Padas to Labuan. 'Concentrate efforts', he rationalized, in the unlikely hope that the ungoverned peoples might be impressed by the order and prosperity around the government stations.

But with these letters Beaufort's critical attitude to the

Company's deficiencies is revealed for the last time. Having written them he settled down, as his predecessors had done, to deploying without complaint his grossly inadequate resources. His record as governor, over the next four years, was to be an indifferent one, but it is fair to notice, as he requested, its inauspicious beginnings.

In London, on the other hand, spirits were rising. The trade depression began to lift about 1895, and the Company's revenues increased annually from then on, reaching again in 1898 the figures achieved during the tobacco boom. Under Cowie's spell the Company made calls on its shareholders to pay for public works, and raised loans for the construction of a railway in the territory. To Cowie, like most colonial developers of his time, enlightened and progressive government advanced on railway tracks.

The increased revenue, as distinct from the funds raised in loans and in the calls on shareholders, came from a variety of sources. By the end of the decade the surviving tobacco estates[4] were accounting for about one-third of the territory's exports, although there had been no further major land sales and no significant new estates opened. Of equal importance to tobacco was the export of traditional jungle produce—such as rattan, gutta, damar, and camphor—which revived with the upswing of trade throughout the east. Other items figuring in the annual lists of exports were rare timbers, sago, cutch, and dried fish. All these contributed to Company revenue through the customs dues levied upon their export, which Cowie increased in the period under review to give the Company additional benefit from the trade revival. Also increased were import duties, and the licence charges for opium, spirits, pawnbroking, and other revenue farms.

The heavier government imposts on trade and licences produced some protest, and it was claimed that they were hindering the immigration of Chinese, who nevertheless increased in numbers in Sabah between 1891 and 1901 by 41 per cent.[5] Particular hostility surrounded the customs dues levied on the import and export of rice, which, it was claimed, gave the

territory a bad name elsewhere in the east. The duties, which yielded the Company a mere $15,000 a year, were not, it was argued, worth the bad publicity. The attacks came mainly from the European and Chinese employers of labour in the country. There is no clear evidence that the rice duties caused serious hardship for the indigenous population, or that they helped promote Mat Salleh's rebellions. However the Company was so ignorant of the state of most indigenous communities that it was impossible to say with certainty how much hardship the rice duties caused in particular areas suffering harvest failures or pre-harvest shortages. The import duty, of 20¢ per pikul, appeared not to be heavy to the Company, but may have been significant to hungry people.[6]

In general the indigenous peoples remained a very minor source of revenue to the Company, which continued to look beyond them, to novel economic development, for its profits. Again, however, it is possible only to speculate about the indirect effect of the Company's increasing taxes and charges. These were not deliberately aimed at the indigenous peoples, and any explanation of the Mat Salleh revolts as protests against heavy taxation would be misleading. Mat Salleh himself taxed the peoples who fell under his influence more heavily than the Company. Nevertheless the increases in Company taxes and charges must have found their way into the general level of prices in the territory, and, trivial as they may have appeared to the Company, rising prices may have disturbed a population existing at subsistence level.

In London the Company's balance sheet was of more consequence than native unrest, and rising revenues were not to be reflected in improvements in administration until 1898. In that year Cowie visited Sabah, and was shocked by the bitterness of the men on the spot, who feared that Mat Salleh's challenges to the Company might swell out of control. Publicly Cowie always minimized the significance of Mat Salleh, dismissing him as a minor aberration in Sabah's progress, but after his visit to Sabah he began to expand the Company's staff. By 1900 there were forty-six Europeans on the staff in Sabah, by 1902

sixty, more than twice the number Beaufort could deploy in 1895.[7]

The increase in staff came too late, however, to help Beaufort, and since it consisted mostly of untrained cadets, direct from school, it did not have any profound effect on the degree or nature of Company administration until several years after 1898. Before 1898 the staffing situation had indeed become desperate. This came about because of the need to employ officers to supervise work on the telegraph, on roads and bridle-paths, and on the railway, the laying of which began in 1896. Whatever the potential benefits of these public works, they absorbed the handful of officers who might have patrolled the country. When expeditions commanded by several European officers became necessary against Mat Salleh the staffing situation became all but impossible. Company government reached its most superficial level at precisely the time when it was facing its most serious challenge.

Mat Salleh aside, the diversion of officers to public works, and the abandonment of most of Sabah to its own devices, was a deplorable policy after fifteen years of direct or indirect interference in the territory. The most glaring illustration of this came from the upper Kinabatangan, when Hewett arrived there in 1895 to supervise the erection of a section of the telegraph. Hewett had lived in the area in the early 1880s and he was shocked to discover the state of the communities he had known of old.[8]

He found the people reduced to a state of 'utter apathetic indifference', having given up all hope of escaping from the debts which Malay and Sulu traders, acting as middlemen for the Chinese traders of Sandakan, had imposed upon them. The debts had been incurred initially by the persuasions of the traders to take goods on credit, compounded by unjustly low prices for collected jungle produce and high prices for trade goods, deepened by exorbitant interest rates, and confirmed by the authority the traders derived from distant Sandakan and the local, but alien, chiefs and police. The occasional expeditions under Europeans had put down open conflict, but had not

revealed the extent of the problem. The Company, in removing domineering chiefs such as Pengiran Samah, killed in 1884, had chosen to believe that it was freeing the river peoples of tyranny, and helping both them and itself by insisting upon the free flow of trade. In fact, as Hewett now revealed, the Company had allowed a worse tyranny, and he was appalled at the activities of the traders under the aegis of the Company. 'In effect', he wrote 'the Courts, [i.e. the indigenous courts] and the distant reign of law only assisted and were subservient to their villainies.'

Hewett attempted to set right the worst abuses, checking false weights, unravelling debt cases and setting up strictly controlled *tamu*. His activities were opposed however by Cook, the treasurer, who soon responded to the complaints of the Sandakan towkays, who felt the pinch when Hewett began to restrict the traders' activities. The directors in London wrote to disapprove of what was reported to them as Hewett's wholesale stoppage of trade on the major river of the territory.[9] Hewett then fell ill, and was replaced by another officer, R. V. K. Applin. He would not in any case have been able to stay at Pinangah long, for the main reason for his presence there was to get the telegraph through. As Applin moved on, following the telegraph, the upper Kinabatangan was again left without supervision.

Elsewhere the public works also distracted the attention of the few officers available for administration from the most pressing problems of the territory. A station was built at Ambong in 1895, from which it was intended the north-west coast, known as North Keppel province, would be supervised. Much attention was paid to the building of bridle-paths, from Ambong to the Tempasuk and Kiau, and another to the Tuaran. The interior of the district was not visited at all between 1895 and 1897.[10] A road was pushed through from the Putatan to Papar, and subsequently scarcely used since robbers preyed on the unprotected travellers.[11] Perhaps the best comment on the craze for bridle-path and road-building came from a Kwijau headman in the Keningau plain, who asked his district officer, Applin: 'Why does the Government spend so

much money in making a road which will be all lalang again like the rest of the plains in three months?' Applin, ruefully surveying the tough grass eighteen inches high which already covered the road he had built, 'could not tell him'.[12]

The telegraph, too, proved to be of little worth after all the effort involved in carrying it across the country. Beaufort described it in 1898 as 'practically useless'.[13] The patrol staff required to mend breaks in the line did not bother to keep clear the cuttings through which the line ran, with the result that the line rapidly disappeared into jungle overgrowth. Applin reported that he was in rags after trying to follow the line from Keningau to the head of the Padas gorge. The section between Keningau and Pinangah hardly ever worked. The *Herald*, in the light of the Company's experience with the telegraph, noted with some interest in 1897 an invention of a young Italian electrician, a Mr Marconi, and, in the same passage, looked hopefully to the day when 'the promised air-ship' would ease communications.[14]

The telegraph did, however, have a significant impact on two districts. Permanent stations, each staffed by a European, came into being at Sapong, at the head of the Padas gorge, and at Keningau. For the first time since the earliest years of the Company, stations were established away from the coast with European officers constantly present. The Sapong station was established principally as an experimental plantation, for tobacco and cotton, and the first officer to take charge, J. M. Patteson, arrived there early in 1895. A road being built up the Padas gorge to Tenom reached there at the end of the year. Since the troubles amongst the Muruts in the years 1890–1 another officer, J. E. G. Wheatley, had occasionally visited the area, and he instructed Patteson about local conditions. Patteson began to construct the telegraph north to Keningau and to lay out the first fields of a plantation. He was empowered to hear cases, to report on local affairs, and to collect poll-tax, although he was strictly instructed by Beaufort to collect the tax only when it was freely offered, and only from groups within easy reach of the station. He also distributed tobacco

and cotton seed, in the hope that the tax might soon be collected in kind.

Patteson's preoccupation with the telegraph and plantation left him little time for administrative affairs, but he did report on the disruption which visiting traders were still causing. He described the methods of Bisaya traders, who married local women, took the profits from produce collected by the families, and generally used their influence amongst their new 'relatives' for their own ends. Iban traders did not even bother with such stratagems but simply traded at extortionate rates and seized the property of debtors. Patteson had a further preoccupation, however; after less than a year at Sapong he was removed, suffering from cirrhosis and an 'unhinged mind'.[15]

His successor, J. S. Kennedy, was asked to resign after four months, having been found guilty of assault upon a servant.[16] Sapong station then settled down under another manager, C. H. Keasberry, who in the next few years proved the worth of the area for planters. The first tobacco was shipped out in 1898. Keasberry also had some success in winning the goodwill of the local people, although he could not persuade them to work regularly for wages. This was a problem found by all the officers in charge of public works. The engineer in charge of the telegraph in 1896 resigned over the 'unrealistic ideas' of the London office of the Company about utilizing indigenous labour. Hewett, who could be perceptive about indigenous affairs, simply lost his temper with the Court of Directors and with the local peoples, protesting against the policy of requiring district officers to supervise public works, and describing his predicament:[17]

> There is no lack of population in any district to keep the line clear . . . but the labour is good for nothing, difficult to obtain and positively will not engage for more than a day or two at a time, and therefore cannot be relied on. It is utterly hopeless to get work out of the native unless I am personally to go and turn him out to work, and stand over him until it is properly and satisfactorily done.

In many areas, as Hewett had found at Pinangah, the indebt-

edness of the local people made them reluctant to work for the government; such work was merely yet another imposition on people who had found they could never work fast enough to clear their debts. In other areas, however, it became clear that the people had no desire to become wage-labourers, even if free to do so. The work cut across their normal occupations, and in any case if they sought wealth in cash there were better ways of making it. Beaufort, not keen to employ local labour, asked Brooke of Sarawak for a community of Ibans to 'colonise' the telegraph line and see to its maintenance; Brooke, in refusing assistance, pointed out that one month of collecting rattan brought in more than a year on Company wages.[18]

Under Keasberry's influence Tenom became a significant centre for trade. By 1899 four shops had opened and a regular *tamu* had begun. Beyond the Sapong–Tenom area, however, Keasberry's influence was small, and it was to be from the new station further north, at Keningau, that efforts were made to supervise the Murut country. The Keningau plain received regular European oversight when E. H. Barraut was placed there in 1896, primarily to get the telegraph built. He had the support of some communities, whom he termed 'Murut', but had to face the hostility of others, whom he termed 'Kwijau'. In May 1896 he was attacked by the Kwijaus of the Pampang river, who had arrived at the station claiming they were looking for work but who apparently intended to kill him. They were driven off, with some casualties, and later a police expedition rounded up the ringleaders. At their trial no clear motive for the attack emerged, except that there had been a long-laid plan to kill a European. The ringleaders were sentenced to terms in Sandakan gaol, the people required to tender their allegiance to the Company and to move their kampongs closer to the station. Two years later another officer, still trying to persuade these people to resettle, shed some light on the affair:[19]

> The women strongly objected to [resettlement], but going on the principle of "Cherchez la femme" I told them that as they persuaded the men to attack the Government originally they must now suffer. At

this the men laughed and acknowledged that the women had persuaded them in the '96 attack, and promised to do as ordered.

These people never did resettle, but the writer of the extract, Applin, seems to have developed excellent relations with them, in part because from their number emerged a headman of considerable ability, Kunsanat, who rapidly became a figure of influence in the area, and one of the most significant of the Company's chiefs.

Nevertheless Barraut's, and later Applin's, time was given over primarily to erecting and maintaining the telegraph and to path-building. Applin reported vividly and at length on the vast area under his command, passing on constant tales of violence, of raids, murders, woundings, and robberies, and regretting his frustrated inability to deal with them. His reports are confusing in their lack of background detail, and reveal how superficially he was able to understand his area. He did, however, initiate a strictly supervised *tamu* at Keningau, the first being held in January 1898 and later ones at three-monthly intervals. Forty-seven headmen and over one thousand people attended the first, and were entertained with a demonstration of the telegraph, sporting events, fireworks, and, of course, a lavish supply of *tapai*. The traders were required to have their weights checked, after which visitors from outlying districts expressed astonishment at how much their gutta proved to be worth. Applin now forbade traders to travel beyond Keningau, and Chinese traders to give credit—fanciful decrees which indicated the administration's awareness of the problems of the interior but which could not be enforced.[20]

On the other hand Beaufort steadfastly resisted Applin's pleas for police expeditions to deal with the reports of violence. Since the early 1890s, and in particular since the Flint massacre, Beaufort had been wary of the possible consequences of punitive expeditions. Beaufort was quite aware of the poverty of Company oversight in the territory, but unlike his predecessor Creagh, refused to pursue the makeshift policy of government by expedition.[21] Only in the extreme circumstances

of direct armed challenge to the Company, supremely in the Mat Salleh revolts, did he relent in this regard and sanction expeditions.

Applin left the Company's service in 1898. His replacement at Keningau, F. W. Fraser, was certainly the most remarkable of the Company's acquisitions to its staff in these years. With no experience in colonial administration before his arrival in Sabah in 1896 (he was the product of an English public school and a German university) he rapidly developed a taste for travel in the interior and an interest in the societies he encountered. He was to be the first officer to reveal any real sensitivity towards the Murut peoples, and also the first to begin collecting and writing down the custom and law of non-Muslim groups, in the hope of giving adequate effect to the Company's vague commitment to respect for indigenous custom. In the circumstances Beaufort could not have made a better choice of officer for Keningau.

Fraser began making regular journeys southwards into Murut country, which were, at this time, little more than exploratory, although he held peace-making ceremonies where possible to settle feuds, and tried to control the activities of Iban traders.[22] In 1899, once Mat Salleh had settled in Tambunan, Fraser's attention was to be diverted northwards, as he tried to settle the disruption which the rebel's arrival there had produced, but the posting of Fraser to Keningau may be seen as the beginning of a proper administration by the Company of the interior. With him, the first signs of a new pattern of administration began to emerge, after the years of oversight by occasional tour and expedition. He was an officer involved with the communities he lived amongst, and, however inadequately, he was seeking solutions of a permanent nature to the problems of these communities.

It was, however, the telegraph which brought the first Company station to Keningau, and brought Fraser there. And it was the tyrant telegraph which continued to take much of his time, distracting him from his vast domain and its countless problems. Beaufort expressed himself pleased with Fraser—

because he was a hard worker who had got the telegraph working, right through, 'on several days'.[23]

The Mat Salleh Revolts

The Company had never heard of Mat Salleh until he began to harass traders on the north-east rivers in 1894, during the last months of Creagh's governorship. Pryer, whose aid as mediator Mat Salleh would seek, knew nothing of the new trouble-maker, and his wife described him in a letter (quite inaccurately) as a 'little portly native up-river chief' of the 'Dumpas' people of the central Labuk.[24] Mat Salleh was in fact tall and slender, with a commanding manner which impressed Europeans as well as Sabahans. Cowie was to describe him as 'a very gentlemanly sort of personage, in fact, a man of superior attainments', and to consider taking him to London, an honour not conferred on the most loyal of the Company's chiefs.[25] The Europeans who had to fight him felt less benevolent than Cowie, but hatred was mixed with respect. The hatred was to fade with Mat Salleh's death and the respect grow, even if it was to develop into the patronizing regret that Mat Salleh had not used his talents in the Company's service.[26]

Amongst his following Mat Salleh commanded enormous influence. Cook saw him as a 'new Mahdi for Sulus',[27] writing 'The way the Sulus believe in this man is inaccountable'. It would be difficult now to assess his significance as a specifically Muslim leader (in his communications with the Company he raised no religious issues), but his influence on this score was mingled with other elements which brought him reverence. On one occasion the police captured the paraphernalia of his authority:[28] '. . . several flags and two large silk umbrellas, . . . insignia of royalty, many of them having inscriptions attributing invincibility to Mat Salleh, and claiming to raise the standard for the Mahomedan religion.'

His supposed powers of invincibility impressed not only his Muslim followers but also the non-Muslim peoples. The Company's offers of amnesty, and, on other occasions, its offers

of rewards for his capture, were generally interpreted to mean that it was powerless to overcome him.

Undoubtedly Mat Salleh had gained also in both social standing and supernatural influence by one of his marriages. His principal wife, Dayang Bandang, was connected with the ruling family in Sulu, and supposedly had magic powers. Mat Salleh's own family seems to have been quite obscure. His father, Haji Datu Butu, was a Bajau of the west coast river, the Inanam; he and his son however had moved to the Sugut some years before Mat Salleh came to the Company's attention. It was reported that he had been expelled from the Inanam by his own people. There an uncle of Mat Salleh's on his mother's side, O. K. Mahomed Serail, still lived, becoming a Company chief following the partial cession of the Inanam to the Company in 1896. When Mat Salleh returned to the Inanam in 1897, to plan the attack on Gaya Island, his uncle opposed him, but Mat Salleh easily captured the support of the fancy-free and wilful Bajaus of his ancestral river. The evidence suggests that Mat Salleh's source of authority was his personality, to a much greater extent than his rank. In this he illuminates perhaps the politics of the pre-European era, when a Muslim of quite obscure standing but with intelligence and personality could achieve power, prestige, and wealth. In Borneo the availability of the non-Muslim peoples for such adventurers to command played a part in the process; Mat Salleh was able to use some or all of the non-Muslim population wherever he went.

Since Mat Salleh's movements before 1894 are obscure,[29] it is difficult to assess the degree of his ambition or its date of formation. More can be said perhaps regarding the extent to which he was reacting against the Company's government. His home river, the Inanam, did not come under the Company's control until 1896, long after he had left it; the river on which he was living in 1894, the Sugut, was, like the whole of the north-east coast, rarely visited by Europeans after the abandonment of the tobacco estates there in 1891–2, and had been left largely to its own devices. Mat Salleh can hardly be said to have been

reacting against the heavy impositions of an alien regime, or the forceful westernization of Sabah. What he was reacting against was the placing of any limits upon his freedom, and in 1894 it may have seemed to him that the Company had encroached upon his adopted domain in a number of ways.

In 1894 Creagh established a customs station on Pulo Jambongan, staffed by a non-European clerk and a policeman, as the first step in establishing permanent authority over the north-east part of Sabah. It was then planned that a road should traverse the area, linking Kudat with Sandakan. In the same year a new police station was established on the Kinarom, near its junction with the Bongan, and two clerks placed there, one Malay and one Iban, with a detachment of Iban police. The Company believed that the district was a centre for trade between the north-west coast, the people of the southern section of Marudu Bay, and the east coast, via the Sugut.[30] In May 1894 the station was attacked, the weapons store looted, and the Malay clerk and two Iban policemen killed. The scapegoat for this affair became a man from Kiau, Si Gunting, who was to remain at large until 1905, an elusive 'rebel' whose name was frequently to be linked with the Mat Salleh revolt. The real instigators were, however, the chiefs of Marudu Bay, including the Company chief Datu Undok, who objected to the station and its new authority in what they deemed to be their territory. They persuaded some young Kadazan men who were in the area to attack the station after a heavy drinking bout, for it was harvest time and they were ready for adventure. Si Gunting was involved reluctantly, and subsequently blamed.

The incident brought a police expedition up into the area (including in its numbers one of the chiefs and his followers) which attacked the communities supposedly harbouring the culprits, and went on to attack another community on the Sugut accused of head-hunting.[31] Presumably Mat Salleh, lower down the Sugut, heard of these events; possibly he was even linked with them. Even if he was in no way involved, the police station and the avenging expedition impinged on the

area in which he was operating. Moreover, the station was promptly abandoned by the Company as a result of the attack, and, once the expedition had withdrawn, the area returned to its former state, with no government interest or oversight. One of the officers with the expedition described 'a general uneasiness and disquietude' in the area.[32] It was a fitting atmosphere for the emergence of Mat Salleh.

It was also significant perhaps that Mat Salleh first came to the Company's attention for killing two Iban traders on the Sugut. Ibans played a role in so many of the disturbances with which the Company was confronted. Upon receipt of the news Creagh despatched Barnett, the police commandant, with some police to find this new disrupter of trade. Barnett was called elsewhere before finding Mat Salleh, but he found Mat Salleh's father, and took $1,000 from him in bond money, to be returned when he brought his son in. In November Mat Salleh met another officer, Hastings, at Sisip and swore on the Koran to mend his ways. Creagh reported that trade had resumed, all alarm had subsided, and 'Mat Sali' had been permanently settled.[33] Within a few weeks the news came that Mat Salleh was inciting people to run *amok* at Sandakan, and Hastings decided to show him the town, in the belief perhaps that he would be awed by its size, as some unsophisticated troublemakers of the interior had been. He was given a lecture, and despatched back to the Sugut. Hastings visited him again in May 1895, again demanding good behaviour. He was reported to be gathering an armed following, including two who had attacked and nearly killed a Chinese trader on Pulo Jambongan, the Company's new station on the north-east coast.[34]

The next move was with Mat Salleh. In August 1895 he sailed into Sandakan bay, at the head of a fleet of twenty-six *perahu*, with between ten and thirty men in each, all armed, seeking the settlement of his grievances. He anchored at Buli Sim Sim, about two miles from the town, and sought a parley. Beaufort, Pryer, and Gueritz, the government secretary, were all absent from Sandakan, and Cook, the treasurer, was in command. The whole town was terrified and Cook did not have

the courage to go out and face Mat Salleh, using instead the Imam as a go-between. Stalemate developed as Mat Salleh refused Cook's conditions that he come to the town unarmed, leaving his followers at Buli Sim Sim. On the third day Mat Salleh sailed away.

When Beaufort returned a week later and discovered what had occurred he was irritated at Cook's failure to use the police against the rebel. Pryer, no friend of Cook's, criticized the treasurer's behaviour mercilessly; Mrs Pryer[35] called it 'abject cowardice', and considered that no Englishman could have acted in such a contemptible manner. (Cook was a Scot.) Beaufort did, however, see the broader issues involved in Mat Salleh's visit. The rebel's petition expressed resentment against the Company chiefs who collected poll-tax and supervised the issue of licences to traders. He complained with particular bitterness against Haji Salahudin, who acted in an overbearing way towards him, on one occasion entering his house without permission to seek for supposed hidden law-breakers. It was, as Beaufort saw, the familiar problem of absentee government through local agents who abused their powers:[36]

> The present attitude of natives on this coast is mainly, to my mind, the result of a too small European staff coupled with a desire to get the same revenue as when there was a larger staff. If the Government cannot afford an officer to look after a river, Government should inform the people of that river of the fact, and should cease to take rents and poll-tax and to charge for passes to enter it.

At the same time the affront to the government's dignity had to be answered, and a police expedition was sent after Mat Salleh up the coast. One of the Company's chiefs, Haji Durahim, boasted that he could annihilate the rebel, and left for the Labuk to raise a force. He managed to recruit only thirty men, which disappointed and alarmed Beaufort. Together with the police however they managed to destroy Mat Salleh's stockaded house on Pulo Jambongan, and Mat Salleh disappeared up the Sugut, where he was next reported to be building a fort at Linkabau, and demanding, with considerable success, the

loyalty of the local peoples. Another police expedition was launched to pursue him up the river, where the officer in charge, Barraut, was soon confounded by the variety of rumours about Mat Salleh's whereabouts and intentions. He sent off a letter promising negotiation, and in January 1896 Beaufort received Mat Salleh's terms. Mat Salleh wanted Pryer to act as mediator, he wanted to know why the government had attacked him, he asked that his wife's security be guaranteed, and he asked for the release without punishment of four of his followers whom the police had captured. Beaufort guaranteed his wife's safety, but otherwise demanded that he come to Sandakan and stand trial.[37]

Beaufort could take a strong verbal stand, but that was all, while Mat Salleh remained a shadowy figure in *ulu* Sugut. Finally, in April 1896, he appeared before Wheatley on the lower river and after some discussion promised to obey the Company's laws. It was decided then to take no further action against him. Meanwhile, one of Mat Salleh's followers, Panglima Ejal, had surrendered to Pryer and admitted involvement, with Mat Salleh, in an attack on some Chinese shops at Tetabuan in the previous year. He was put on trial at Sandakan and sentenced to thirty months in gaol. Pryer considered the trial a mistake, and would have preferred that Beaufort use Ejal as go-between to bring Mat Salleh in. Mat Salleh believed that the punishment of his supporter had been a breach of faith, although Beaufort claimed that he had never held out any promise of general pardon.[38]

Now, in mid-1896, Mat Salleh began a policy of full-scale defiance of the government. He crossed to the Labuk and demanded the loyalty of the peoples of that river, collecting poll-tax, attacking those who resisted him, and driving out traders whose sympathies lay with the Company. With the money raised from taxation or robbery he sent to Cagayan Sulu for rifles and ammunition. The government grew angry again, and in July issued an ultimatum that Mat Salleh should come to Sandakan. When the ultimatum expired he was declared an outlaw and another police expedition, under W. Raffles Flint,

was despatched to find him. The government now regarded Mat Salleh as guilty of duplicity, and, according to its lights, it was right. Mat Salleh had not behaved as an obedient subject, after promising on more than one occasion to do so. But equally Mat Salleh could regard the Company as untrustworthy, having both negotiated and used force against him.

From the Labuk Flint sent back alarming reports of the size of the rising. All trade and local agriculture had ceased, and the peoples of the river had either disappeared into the jungle or joined Mat Salleh. He could not trust anyone. He fell ill, and contented himself with building a substantial fort on the lower river for himself and his seventy policemen. On one occasion Mat Salleh sailed past it unharmed. Wheatley and a small party ventured up river and were fired upon; a party of Iban scouts likewise was attacked.

Beaufort arrived and angrily turned Flint out of his fort, called up all available European officers and evolved a strategy of 'flying columns', expeditions to seek out the rebels. One moved toward the Labuk from the Kinabatangan, another explored the Sugut-Paitan area, while another moved in southwards from Kudat. He was pessimistic about the chances of success, and planned to withdraw to the coast, hoping to bottle up Mat Salleh in the interior 'where he can do but little damage', but at this stage Mat Salleh made the strategic mistake of taking a stand in his fort on the Sugut.[39] The fort was besieged and he managed narrowly to escape under cover of darkness. He disappeared (as the Company was later to discover) up into the Ranau district, but the Company had recovered control of the Labuk-Sugut district. It was believed that Mat Salleh's power was broken, and the affair all over.[40]

In adopting the traditional strategy of fort-building (a strategy he would continue) Mat Salleh made a serious error. Beaufort showed more awareness of the defensive potentialities of the jungle than did his opponent, when he feared that the Company might never locate Mat Salleh. The building of forts symbolized, however, the traditional nature of Mat Salleh's

aims, as well as constituting a traditional method of warfare. The fort was a visible token of power and prestige. Here one gathered one's wives, one's followers, and one's wealth. From the fort one ruled, and if necessary terrorized, the surrounding peoples. The tougher and mightier the fort (and the Company was to be deeply impressed by the thorough construction and near-impregnability of Mat Salleh's forts) the more it reflected the power and authority of the chief who commanded it. Mat Salleh had little in common with modern revolutionaries, who live unostentatiously among the people and utilize difficult terrain in pursuit of their aims. For Mat Salleh to have lived simply among the people, and constantly on the run, would have been to contradict what he stood for.

After the destruction of the fort Flint sent out Ibans to harass the rebels. Fearing that they were harassing the entire population Beaufort ordered their withdrawal, but they apparently achieved considerable success in capturing some of Mat Salleh's following, and in persuading the peoples of the area to surrender. By November 1896 it was reported that 'hordes' of refugees were coming in, bringing tales of extortionate taxation, outright robbery, and ill-treatment under Mat Salleh. In the wake of the disruption came famine and epidemic illness. The leading captives were tried and sentenced to varying periods of imprisonment, and one executed. Many others—Dumpas people—were exiled to Tawau. The non-Muslim communities who came in were settled on the lower Labuk, and fed until they could support themselves again from their own planting.[41] The process of resettlement is obscure—the area was again only to be visited by European officers from time to time—but it saw the emergence of a significant new Company chief. Haji Pati (later O. K. K. Pengiran) was a Tidong trader who had settled at Klagan. Following the disruption he was entrusted with much of the resettlement, bringing down several headmen who had not until now acknowledged the Company's government. Somehow he won the respect of the area, and he was duly appointed a Company chief, although he was to remain unique amongst government chiefs in that he never accepted a salary.

The authority Mat Salleh had sought and lost on the north-east coast Haji Pati now gained by different methods.[42]

The early months of 1897 were quiet, as Mat Salleh, unknown to the Company, built his next fort at Ranau and planned an attack on Gaya from his home river, the Inanam. Flint took a party of Iban police to London to represent the Company at Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrations. At Buckingham Palace they were inspected by the Prince of Wales, who fingered with fascination the human hair decorating their *parang*.[43] Meanwhile a party of Iban police under Nakoda Tinggi sat and waited in *ulu* Sugut. They were supposed to be searching for Mat Salleh, but they found it easier to earn their $10 a month each by doing nothing, and no one checked on them. In Sandakan, on 9 July, there was much merrymaking to celebrate the Jubilee, including a gathering of officers and chiefs from other areas. A parade designed to celebrate the town's polyglot population fell into some disorder when the Japanese prostitutes insisted on representing their country.[44]

Mat Salleh attacked Gaya Island on the same day and enjoyed occupation until 12 July. Every structure on the island, except those of the Bajau kampong, was reduced to ashes. No European was present, but the Eurasian customs clerk and some Chinese traders were captured, and all wealth and arms on the island were seized.

The Bajaus of all the central west-coast rivers not yet ceded to the Company were implicated, but Mat Salleh's main force seems to have been composed of the Bajaus and the Kadazans of the Inanam. The Kadazans may have been forcibly conscripted, but they shared in the spoils from the sacked town. The Inanam had come under the Company's partial jurisdiction in August 1896, when the Pengiran Bendahara, possessor of *tulin* rights, had permitted the Company, in return for $300 a year, to collect customs duties and poll-tax on the river. The Company was also permitted to prohibit the import of undesirable articles (the concern was arms and ammunition) and to arrest disturbers of the peace. In the administration of justice the Sultan of Brunei and the British consul at Labuan were to

constitute the ultimate court of appeal. In October 1896 Beaufort and several other officers had visited the river[45] and met the chiefs and headmen, in particular O. K. Mahomed Serail who was Mat Salleh's uncle and the Pengiran Bendahara's agent. After that, the government took little notice of its new acquisition. One district officer, Ormsby, was in charge of the whole of Province Keppel (from Papar-Kimanis to the Kudat peninsula) and he was entirely ignorant of developments on the river. The same page of the *Herald* which bore the news of the attack on Gaya also carried Ormsby's mid-year report. 'Province Keppel', he wrote, 'has been exceptionally quiet for the past five months.'[46] During this time Mat Salleh and his newly-found allies had been building four forts on the Inanam, including one at his uncle's kampong, a string of forts in the Tempasuk area, and a particularly strong one at Ranau, beyond the Crocker Range.

Hurrying to Gaya the outraged Europeans gathered all available police from the west coast and augmented the force with every Iban that could be mustered. Kadazans from the Putatan willingly volunteered as baggage carriers. Beaufort arrived by launch from Sandakan with Reddie, the commandant, and additional police. The force spent a week destroying the forts on the Inanam (one of which flew a Brunei flag) and every house except for one or two whose inhabitants surrendered. There was some minor sniping but most of the population of the river fled. As well as burning the houses their rice stocks were destroyed; buffaloes and other loot were distributed among the police, auxiliaries, and carriers. Beaufort, in a thoroughly vengeful mood, decided to hand the river over to Ibans, offering them exclusive land rights and a settlement allowance of $8 a month for three months, on condition that they turn out for military service whenever called upon.

The fury vented on the Inanam, however, did not solve the problem of Mat Salleh. On the Sugut Hastings heard news of the fort at Ranau, and T. M. Reddie and his police crossed the ranges into the enemy's valley. The fort occupied a central position in the plain, built on firm ground but surrounded by

flooded padi-fields. An irrigation ditch from the Liwagu supplied water. The ground immediately around the fort was planted with sharpened bamboo stakes. The outer defences consisted of a high palisade, enclosing an area of 360 by 200 feet. Inside, a thick earth wall gave protection to an entire kampong. At one end of the enclosed area rose the stronghold, with walls of stone and earth 8 feet thick, and a single entrance through which anyone seeking entry had to crawl.

Reddie shelled the fort without making any impression. The Ibans, unhappy in open country, refused to fight, and he was forced to withdraw, returning to the coast with grim demands for vastly increased numbers of police.[47] Beaufort decided to postpone another attack, and Reddie was despatched to Singapore to recruit additional Sikhs and to obtain, if possible, the loan of British troops. No Sikhs were available, and the Straits Settlements authorities refused to become involved. To add to Beaufort's troubles the directors in London scolded him for failing to catch Mat Salleh, and interpreted the application to Singapore as a blow to the Company's prestige.[48] Mat Salleh delivered another blow in November when some of his Sulu followers raised the Bajaus of Kota Belud and attacked the Company's station at Ambong, burning down the residency.

'The whole country', wrote Beaufort,[49] 'is frightened and upset', recording rumours from Darvel Bay, Keningau, and Papar. He was beset by complaints from the European and Chinese planters and traders of Kudat, Sandakan, and the east-coast rivers that they had been left virtually without protection. He pleaded with the London office to approach the Admiralty and the Colonial Office for assistance, and it did approach the former, with the result that by February the following year three gunboats were patrolling the coast. But its chief contribution towards a settlement of the crisis was to despatch Cowie, the managing director, to Sabah, to see for himself the state of the territory. In fact the Company's meagre administration was on the point of collapse. Normal government, what there was of it, had virtually disappeared. If in any sense the Mat Salleh revolt had become at this point a

'national' uprising the Company would almost certainly have lost all control of the territory, although no doubt in such a circumstance the British government would have stepped in. As it was, though rumour flew, there was no general revolt and in most areas the peoples waited to see who would emerge the victor in the contest, busying themselves in the new padi-planting season.

It was finally the irritation, and courage, of the officers gathered seemingly impotent on the west coast which turned the tide. Hewett insisted that 'an expedition of some sort should go up country. Nothing else will allay the alarms'.[50] Accordingly all available police were rounded up and, travelling via the Sugut, they reached Ranau on 12 December and laid siege to Mat Salleh's fort. Subsequently more Ibans were contacted and despatched to swell the attacking force, until its numbers totalled about 400. At Ranau they were told by the local people that Mat Salleh was in the fort with about fifty followers. Local loyalties were uncertain. Some were caught trying to carry rice to the fort at night. The Kiau people came in to report that they had stopped the Bundu Tuhan people from joining Mat Salleh.

The besiegers cut off the water supply to the fort, and shelled it for a day. On the following day it was unsuccessfully stormed. The attackers breached the outer palisade and fired the houses within, but the stronghold proved impregnable. Hewett left for Sandakan to bring up a heavier gun. For almost a month nothing happened, except for occasional sniping, while within the fort, no doubt, conditions slowly grew intolerable. The night of 9 January was one of torrential rain. On the following day the fort was bombarded with over 200 shells from the new gun and in the afternoon it was rushed. It was discovered to be empty. Mat Salleh and his followers had slipped away during the night through that section of the lines maintained by the Ibans, who heartily detested the discipline of sentry duty in pouring rain.

Mat Salleh, it was reported, had made off southward, towards Tambunan. The torrential rain continued for four days, making pursuit useless. The Ibans were sent out to scout, with strict instructions not to harass the local peoples but:[51]

They found all the Dusun villages deserted and burned and looted them all, and the reports of heavy firing that had meanwhile reached us was only their shooting buffaloes. They returned loaded with loot and apparently well pleased with their abominable behaviour, but no news of Mat Salleh.

Nevertheless the symbol of Mat Salleh's power, the fort, was destroyed (Hewett made the local people dismantle it when they came in to tender their submission), and Mat Salleh was once again on the run. The crisis had passed. It was at this juncture that Cowie arrived in Sabah, hoping to set right all the affairs which had been so badly handled, he felt, by the men on the spot.

The Negotiations of 1898

Cowie, the man who in the last few years had repaired the morale of the Company's shareholders, arrived in Borneo on 31 December 1897 and stayed for four months. He did not repair the morale of the Company's officers. Instead he managed to blaze a trail of misunderstanding and bungle, of recrimination and bitterness, which might be considered farcical were it not for the fact that he was dealing in tragic events.

In London it had been announced that he was visiting Borneo to settle many matters, the railway route, the failures of the telegraph, the exploration for minerals, the estates. These things were his primary interest, but inevitably once in Borneo he was preoccupied with the Mat Salleh business; the seriousness of the situation, and his own swashbuckling temperament and love of precipitate problem-solving, saw to that. He founded a new town, Beaufort, where the railway under construction crossed the Padas, and selected a site for the northern terminal at Gantian (later abandoned in favour of the site dubbed Jesselton), but otherwise gave most of his attention to indigenous affairs. In this realm one of the few blessings he conferred, from the government's point of view, was his recognition of the need for an increase in staff.

Though he was to have little success with Mat Salleh, he did settle the question of further cessions of territory which had arisen following the attack on Gaya. In August 1897 the government's anger over the attack had been vented not only upon the Inanam but also upon the Sultan of Brunei. Beaufort demanded compensation for the damage to Gaya and threatened that if it were not paid, the Company would seize the rivers opposite Gaya, from which Mat Salleh had drawn support. Hewett was despatched to Brunei to press the Company's case.

The Sultan prevaricated. He questioned his liability, holding the pengirans of the respective rivers responsible, but his own sense of the prestige of his office forced him to accept Hewett's argument that the Company should deal with him, for he held the ultimate authority over the rivers, even if he could not enforce it. He was on stronger ground when he denied that Mat Salleh was a Brunei subject, since he had not lived on the Inanam for several years, and when he questioned the Company's right to punish its inhabitants.[52] Here the Company had exceeded the authority given to it in the agreements of 1896.

The Company held the trump cards, however. The Court of Directors ordered Beaufort to do 'nothing rash', but to deduct the damages demanded from the payments of cession money. The impoverished Sultan could do little to offset this tactic, but bravely he hired a European lawyer and by the end of the year he had laid out counter-claims against the Company. He sought $100,000 in compensation for the loss of his prestige through the Company's invasion of the Inanam, and for the destruction to lives and property it had caused. Hughes, his lawyer, asserted that Mat Salleh was a subject of the Company and that his followers all came from Company territory. Pertinently, he accused the Company of 'flagrant negligence' in failing to patrol the Inanam and to keep a European officer at Gaya. He estimated that in the avenging raid twenty-seven villages (570 houses) had been burnt down, padi worth $20,000 destroyed, and other property worth $10,000 looted. It had been, he claimed, an invasion of the Sultan's territory by 'British North Borneo thieves and vagabonds'.[53]

After his arrival Cowie took up the negotiations. His hand was strengthened by the readiness of the impotent and impoverished pengirans to cede their rights. The British consul for Borneo, Trevenen, urged the Sultan to yield to the Company. Playing on the Sultan's bitter memories of Brooke's seizure of the Limbang, Trevenen invited him to recall how in the case of that river he had lost everything by prevarication. Accordingly all the rivers of the central west coast were ceded, and also the Kuala Lama, for $1,200 per year. The claims for damages were dropped by both sides. Pengiran Jallaludin, the son of Pengiran Abdul Rauf and now head of the Bajaus on the central west coast, ceded his rights in the Mengkabong, Menggatal, Sembulan, and other streams for $2,500 per year. Settlements were made with other owners of rights on the Mengkabong and at Menggatal. Now that the Company possessed the coastline facing Gaya Island the station on the island was not rebuilt and was soon to be replaced by the town of Jesselton. The Pengiran in the last few years had exercised virtually no authority over his rivers and divided his time between Brunei and some land on the Karambunai peninsula, isolated from most Bajau communities.[54] He had already, in 1897, ceded the Kinarut to the Company, after the Kadazan people of that river had thrown out his agent.

Further south the owner of *tulin* rights in the Membakut, Pengiran Pemanca, was perhaps shrewder. In the 1898 cessions the Sultan included his rights in the Membakut, but the Pengiran grasped the worth of his holdings to a Company now intending to construct a railway across them. He was to hold out for four years, ceding finally in 1902 for $2,400.[55]

Thus Mat Salleh was indirectly responsible for a further erosion of the old order, precipitating the subjection of many more of his Bajau kin to the Company. His home river, the Inanam, passed completely under Company control in these cessions. The resettlement of the river began soon afterwards, the Company permitting all but Mat Salleh's closest followers to return. Fortunately for the river's inhabitants Beaufort's plan to settle Ibans there had proved a complete flop, for the peaceful

cultivation of padi was not the reason why young Ibans came to Sabah, and few had accepted the Company's offer.

Meanwhile Cowie had also been giving his attention to Mat Salleh himself, who, after his escape from the fort at Ranau, was now hiding out in the country between Ranau and Tambunan. There, a police expedition was hunting him, with no success. Village after village swore loyalty to the government but gave no assistance, and in bewildering terrain the police could not find their enemy. They struggled for three months along the tortuous native paths, while their every movement could be observed from the high villages and the dense growth covering the precipitous slopes. A partially-constructed fort at Patau was destroyed, a rumour was received that Mat Salleh had been welcomed by the Tagaas people at Tambunan, and then, in April, with great relief the expedition received a recall to Sandakan.[36]

Cowie was determined to negotiate with Mat Salleh. In this most of the staff disagreed with him, insisting on unconditional surrender,[37] but Cowie had on his arrival scored over them all by striking up a friendship with the Sultan of Sulu, who was visiting Sandakan at the start of a pilgrimage to Mecca. Cowie, when he had traded between Labuan and Sulu in the 1870s, had known the Sultan as a child, and he obtained from him now a letter for Mat Salleh's wife urging her, and her husband, to trust Cowie. With the letter went a promise from Cowie that if Mat Salleh submitted to the government he and his followers would be pardoned.[38]

Hewett and other officers angrily denounced Cowie's policy but Cowie met Mat Salleh on 19 April 1898, going alone and unarmed to *ulu* Menggatal, where the chief, Pengiran Kahar, had arranged a truce. On the following day, and on the 22nd, they met again, in the company of Beaufort and two other Europeans.

The circumstances of the meetings are clear, but it will probably never be known now what any of the principals involved made of the discussions. The official record, in the *Herald*,[39] claims that on the first day Cowie refused Mat Salleh's

proposals that he be allowed to live in the Inanam, and that those of his followers who had been captured and gaoled be freed. Mat Salleh blamed his troubles on his followers, and in the evening sent in his kris and spear as token of submission. The following day he appeared with 200 armed men. He was told that he would be allowed to live in the interior, and 'take charge of the Tambunans'. Mat Salleh's proposals of the previous day were again refused, except in that two elderly prisoners would be released, and that his Inanam followers would be allowed to resettle. Two further requests, that only his own followers should live on the Inanam, and that no police should be stationed there, were refused. Mat Salleh then claimed that *ulu* Sugut and *ulu* Inanam both belonged to him since they had been made over by the Sultans of Sulu and Brunei. These claims he would press against the Sultans, however, and not the Company.

In the evening, Cowie sent a letter asking for a final settlement on the following day. Alternatively, Mat Salleh would be given ten days in which to return up-country, and the *status quo* would then be resumed. Mat Salleh replied by letter, seeking time to consult with his friends in the Tempasuk and other areas. Cowie then insisted that he should appear the following day, an offer that was extended a further day when Mat Salleh did not arrive.

On the 22nd a flag-hoisting ceremony was begun, to mark the Company's acquisition of the Menggatal. There were present, in addition to Cowie, Beaufort and two officers, a small body of police and a detachment of men from a British gunboat. Mat Salleh appeared, bearing a white flag. He said that he wished to submit absolutely to the government, and then he told the local people present that he was on the side of the government and that if anyone made a disturbance they would know it was not he. He swore an oath of allegiance on the Koran and hauled up the Company flag himself. Having been presented with a letter of safe conduct he departed, later sending presents of rifles and *parang* to Cowie and Beaufort.

Here, no doubt, the fatal mistake was made, in failing to

establish the terms of agreement while Mat Salleh was present. On the day after Mat Salleh's departure a document was sent off to him for his approval and signature. It stipulated that he and his followers would be pardoned, but not some who had escaped from gaol and subsequently committed offences. The two elderly prisoners would be released. Inanam people would be allowed to resettle, with the approval of the Company chief and a Company officer. Mat Salleh could live at Tambunan or elsewhere in the interior, except on the Sugut or Labuk. He would be required to assist the government in arresting wrongdoers, supplying information about his own activities, and reporting to the Company if he visited the coast.

Mat Salleh signed the agreement, and issued a proclamation to the people of the west coast making it known that the governor had pardoned him, that he had asked pardon for all who were guilty, that he was keeping his promise to the governor, that in future he would help the government against bad men, and that the governor had said to all good men to take care not to thieve or kill or cheat or defraud people of their goods. But he also let it be known that he had entered into a verbal agreement with the government as well as the written one, and that the government had not observed the verbal agreement.[60]

With this a storm broke amongst the Europeans. Most officers were bitterly opposed to the pardon that had been granted, a feeling which grew when word came in from everywhere that the people believed the government had submitted to Mat Salleh.[61] Without waiting to discover what Mat Salleh's reservations were, Cowie bowed to the pressure from his officers, and telegraphed the directors asking if hostilities might be resumed. They, in ignorance, wired back that there appeared to be no alternative, and sought the despatch of another gunboat through the British authorities. The storm continued around Cowie, however, as the officers considered with rage the bungled results of his belief that he could settle matters peacefully where they had failed, and faced with dismay the prospect of another long, tough campaign. Hewett and Cowie had

a blazing row, and Hewett tendered his resignation. Three or four others did likewise, Cowie and Beaufort also fell out, and Cowie decided that Beaufort was deliberately fomenting trouble. Quite unrepentant, he left Sabah on 16 May to give his view of affairs to the Straits Settlements authorities and, later, to the directors in London, leaving Beaufort to sort out all the confusion.[62]

In Singapore Cowie met Sir Alexander Swettenham, the acting High Commissioner for Borneo, Sir Frank Swettenham, the Resident-General, W. H. Treacher, the Company's former governor, now Resident of Perak, and two high naval officers. Before them he managed to confuse the issue further, claiming that he had promised Mat Salleh that he should be allowed to return to the Inanam after one year. He claimed that he could not be sure on all points conceded verbally to Mat Salleh, that he realized he had made one or two minor errors in drawing up the written agreement, and that he had asked for a gunboat 'to show the flag', rather than for active hostilities. He told them that he had pursued a pacific policy because the Company could not afford to fight a man of such influence, who might be made a valuable friend. Beaufort was then advised by the Straits Settlements authorities that it would be 'extremely dishonourable' to renew hostilities.[63]

Beaufort managed to keep his head. He replied that he had no intention of renewing hostilities, and that he was still making efforts to find out what precisely Mat Salleh's views were. Rumour was running riot.[64] Mat Salleh advised, after some delay, that the government had not fulfilled its promise to release all his captured followers (two were still in gaol, on the grounds that they had escaped, committed other crimes, and then been recaptured and sentenced for these latter crimes), and that a captured cannon had not been returned to him as promised.[65]

Beaufort was sceptical, and inclined to the view that Mat Salleh was enlarging on his demands, now that he was aware of the government's confusion. He was alarmed too at the news that Mat Salleh was building a large fort at Tambunan, and

that troublemakers from the whole west coast were flocking to join him. He asked the Straits Settlements authorities again if they would provide assistance should fighting break out, but was sternly refused, and the directors wrote censuring him for his belligerent attitudes, Cowie having arrived in London with his version of events.[66]

In November, Beaufort summed up the entire farce.[67] The directors, in May, had ordered him to recommence hostilities, in response to Cowie, who nevertheless insisted upon keeping unspecified agreements with Mat Salleh. The Straits Settlements authorities forbade hostilities, which he, Beaufort, had no intention of resuming anyway. The Court had then insisted once more on maintaining the agreements, its understanding of which Beaufort had only discovered in August, when Cowie had given his latest version to the directors. Cowie now ordered the pardon of all Mat Salleh's followers, and the promise of a return to the Inanam by Mat Salleh, after one year. Patiently, Beaufort sent off letters to Mat Salleh seeking another meeting. At the year's end he was quite heartened to hear that there was dissension amongst Mat Salleh's followers, and that Mat Salleh was willing to meet him. With the message Mrs Beaufort received the gift of a silver ring from Mat Salleh's wife.

Was Mat Salleh wronged? Clearly, none of the Europeans knew, except perhaps Cowie, and he rapidly reached a stage where he could not remember, or chose not to remember, what promises he had made. That Mat Salleh made his principal issue his quarrel with the Sultans of Brunei and Sulu is perhaps significant. It marks the gulf which existed between him and the European negotiators, to whom it was irrelevant. Beaufort wrote to Mat Salleh that he might consult with Brunei and Sulu at any time, but that the territory was now the Company's. To what extent Mat Salleh took this issue seriously will never be known. Either he was a supremely cunning negotiator, laying red herrings to prolong discussions with an apparently irresolute opponent, or he lived in a mental world beyond access to the European negotiators, in which, as in the old days, an

ambitious man might gamble for territory, by playing off rival rulers.

Probably, the negotiations were doomed from the start. Mat Salleh was certainly shrewd in his assessment of the Company, spotting all its weakness and equivocation, but he failed to sense its determination to assert its ultimate supremacy throughout Sabah, and failed to understand the strictly limited role it was prepared to offer him. In his view of politics, determined by the traditions of the Archipelago rather than by Western concepts, there was room for endless, devious negotiation, prudently mixed from time to time with shows of force. Eventually, he imagined, he might be conceded virtual autonomy in whatever territory he could hold. The Company, on the other hand, was equally trapped in its Western political preconceptions. It found Mat Salleh baffling and infuriating in his refusal to be the obedient subject of a government holding, as it appeared to Western eyes, unnegotiable sovereign rights. Up till now incompetence, and some moral scruple on the Company's part, had permitted ongoing negotiation, but to the Company the options were never as wide as Mat Salleh appears to have thought. Either Mat Salleh became a well-behaved subject, or he would have to be punished—or, more probably, he would have to be killed.

Mat Salleh at Tambunan and the Aftermath

There is a quality of tragedy about Mat Salleh's last stand, in the Tambunan valley. Once there, he was trapped, although this was apparent neither to him nor to the Europeans when he moved there in 1898. The setting was appropriate in a symbolic way—a valley 12 miles long and perhaps 5 miles wide at its broadest point, cradled in rugged hill country and difficult of access. At its northern end Mat Salleh built his fort, the most elaborate yet, consisting of three fortresses one within the other, with walls 10 feet thick and the whole inner area ingeniously honeycombed with trenches, tunnels, and underground rooms

offering security from shell fire. The fort was surrounded by a palisade, and yards of ground planted thickly with bamboo stakes. Three other forts and ten fortified villages also stood guard. All this in a valley which had been penetrated only once or twice by European visitors and which had so far not tendered its allegiance, even nominally, to the Company. The Tambunan country was the last area of Sabah (other than the Murut areas in the south) to submit to European government.

Mat Salleh was trapped here, though not in a physical sense. He could, and did, break out to visit other parts. Rather he was trapped by what the valley represented in its lingering freedom from Company intervention. Where else could one who defied the Company's authority go, except right out of the country? He was also trapped by circumstance and event. The circumstances of the valley and of its peoples, and the mode of life of Mat Salleh and his followers, were such that a clash was inevitable, and that the Company would be drawn up into the valley to seek a settlement. The Company, for its part, remained hesitant almost to the last to take drastic action, yet it too had to play its role, insisting in the end on its supreme authority, and using force to achieve it.

The charge was to be levelled at the Company later that it had deliberately used Mat Salleh to gain control of Tambunan. In the course of a bitter attack on the Company's handling of the whole affair Sir Alexander Swettenham, the acting High Commissioner for Borneo, wrote to the Company's new governor, Hugh Clifford:[68]

> How do you characterise, excuse or justify Mr. Cowie's agreement with Mat Salleh which made it the fate of the Tambunans to pass under Mat Salleh's authority? . . . . Was it not intended that Mat Salleh should act as the Company's scourge towards the Tambunans? . . . . If not this what was the object of agreeing to give Mat Salleh authority over people who had never submitted to the Company? How was he ever to obtain that authority over a hostile body without committing oppression and outrages? What steps did the Company take to establish Mat Salleh's authority peaceably and ensure its being respected by the Tambunan people thereafter?

These were pertinent questions. There is no evidence that Cowie, or the Company's officers, deliberately intended Mat Salleh to be the 'scourge of Tambunan' at the time of the negotiations in 1898, and it was only afterward that the consequences of Mat Salleh's presence there became apparent—in the requests by the disgruntled people of the area for Company intervention. However, the Company had no satisfactory answers to Swettenham's other charges. Cowie had been entirely careless of the people of Tambunan in trying to dispose of Mat Salleh peacefully. It was actually Mat Salleh who had selected Tambunan as his next scene of operations, after his flight from the Ranau fort, and Cowie, in the agreement of April 1898, had merely stipulated that Mat Salleh should live 'at Tambunan, or elsewhere in the interior, except on the rivers Sugut and Labuk'. But the permission had been given, and without weighing the consequences.

The deal reflects on the Company's administration in general. Beaufort and his officers were opposed to Cowie, but their opposition was based not on solicitude for the people of Tambunan, of whom they too were ignorant, but on their dislike of Mat Salleh. They were angry that he had not been punished for past misdeeds, rather than fearful for his future mistreatment of the Tambunan people. The attitudes of all of them reflect the failure of the Company as yet to come to grips in any serious way with the question of administering the interior, in particular as it involved the establishment of 'chiefs' there. By sending Mat Salleh into the interior Cowie was doing no more than what the Company had been doing since its inception.

The issues which Swettenham's questions raised had been acknowledged officially by the Company; Creagh's proclamation of 1891 to establish a system of village administration acknowledged them. But the provisions of that proclamation, given the tiny European staff, had been impossible to implement. One factor perhaps makes the Mat Salleh appointment a more glaring example of the Company's casual dealings with its peoples than the others. The Company, although it was

ignorant about Tambunan, and about the political situation there, had been clearly informed that the area wanted nothing to do with the Company or with Mat Salleh.[69] Cowie, in his determination to play the role of rapid problem-solver, had chosen to ignore this news. Swettenham was crediting the Company with too much cleverness in accusing it of deliberately planning the subjection of Tambunan; the real trouble was the Company's vague and cavalier attitude, epitomized by Cowie's action, towards 'the interior'.

Two Kadazan groups lived at Tambunan, referred to by the Company as the Tagaas and the Tuhauans.[70] The Tagaas were late-comers to the valley, and occupied seven kampongs at the northern end. They constituted about one-fifth of the total population, estimated at 6,000. There had been a long history of feuding between the two groups, and peace had been sworn many times, but probably until the advent of Mat Salleh the quarrel had not been pursued with any real ardour. Both groups were industrious and prosperous, employing sophisticated methods of land demarcation and padi cultivation, raising plentiful numbers of livestock—buffaloes, pigs, and fowls—and growing fruit, vegetables, and tobacco.

Neither group welcomed Mat Salleh enthusiastically when he sent to inquire (before his meeting with Cowie) if they would receive him. The Tuhauans refused to have anything to do with him; the Tagaas said that they would join him if he would build his fort in the hills, not amongst their kampongs.[71] Perhaps it was the meeting with Cowie which gave Mat Salleh confidence to move fully into the valley and begin building his fort, but in any case he met no initial resistance. He was credited with terrifying powers, his mouth producing flames, his *parang* lightning, and rice scattered by him turning into wasps. With such powers, together with garbled stories of what had happened at the coast (Cowie, the raja of the west coast, had placed Mat Salleh over Beaufort, who was merely raja of Sandakan) he had no difficulty in taking up residence amongst the Tagaas and organizing them to build the fort.[72] In turn, the Tagaas had gained a powerful ally in their feuds with the Tuhauans, who

were raided and robbed with increasing severity during 1898. By the year's end the Tuhauans had had enough, and were prepared to seek the assistance of the Company, thus ending their long-cherished independence.

In December Beaufort received Mat Salleh's letter and gift expressing willingness to meet. With overtures from both the Tuhauans and Mat Salleh, therefore, he decided to visit Tambunan personally. Kunsanat, the Kwijau chief at Keningau, was sent ahead to gather news. He reported dissension amongst Mat Salleh's immediate following, as well as the feud between the Tagaas and Tuhauans, factors which were perhaps unnerving Mat Salleh. Kunsanat himself seems to have remained quite unawed by the great man, reporting that Mat Salleh was very much feared by his followers, shooting them if they dared to run away, but commenting that Mat Salleh did not hesitate to run away himself when it seemed wise to do so. His bravery, Kunsanat remarked, lay more in his understanding than in his actions.[73]

On 17 January 1899 the Tuhauans swore an oath of loyalty to the Company, in the presence of Beaufort. No plans were as yet drawn up, however, for a station, or for the collection of poll-tax. On the following day Beaufort set out up the valley to look for Mat Salleh, accompanied by one Tuhauan headman. The land, Beaufort wrote, was flecked with outposts, sentries, and Mat Salleh's half-naked but well-armed retainers. Mat Salleh appeared, and welcomed his visitor profusely, showing him over all but the inner stronghold of his fort. He now had no quarrel, he claimed, with the Tuhauans but only with the people of Sinsurun, a large community who commanded the north-west heights above the valley, and the track to the *ulu* of the Papar, Putatan, and Tuaran. They had welcomed some of Mat Salleh's followers, Labuk men, who had deserted him. It was now Beaufort's turn to play clumsy peacemaker. He sent off messages to all headmen ordering that differences be settled peacefully (the Sinsurun people were required to negotiate, on pain of being attacked by the government and Mat Salleh together), promised Mat Salleh $1,000 for a trip to Mecca if he

acted peacefully for a year, and left Tambunan without really settling anything. The Tuhauans felt suspiciously that they had been betrayed.

These were to be Beaufort's last actions in connection with Mat Salleh. In April 1899 he left Sabah on leave after four gruelling years; in September he finally decided to resign.[74] The administration was placed in the hands of a triumvirate, constructed optimistically by Beaufort before his departure as a solution to the jealousies of its members (Cook the treasurer, Gueritz the government secretary, and Little the resident at Labuan) regarding their respective rank. The process of decision-making was now thoroughly fragmented, not only between Borneo and London but on the spot.

The main problem, however, in regard to Mat Salleh, was ignorance. No one knew what he intended, and policy regarding the Tambunan valley was constructed from a distance, by guesswork. The European nearest to the situation was F. W. Fraser, the officer at Keningau, who visited Tambunan in April and again in July in response to news of trouble. He was able to communicate with the Tuhauans through Kunsanat, the Kwijau chief, but could talk to the Tagaas only through Mat Salleh or one of his followers. He admitted frankly that he was uncertain what to believe—he certainly refused to be swept away by the overtures of the Tuhauans who had built a rest-house for him—but he was inclined to favour the building of a government station amongst the Tuhauans, a proposition which they had put up and which the government was considering. The proposition was passed to London.[75] In September news was received that Mat Salleh was in *ulu* Labuk and *ulu* Kinabatangan, where he had clashed with some of his former followers. One of these, a Dumpas chief, Pengiran Shahbandar, had supposedly offered a reward for Mat Salleh. The Company hurriedly sent off a letter to Mat Salleh denying that it had anything to do with the reward, but the directors at the same time ordered the construction of a station in Tambunan, amongst the Tuhauans.

Fraser arrived in Tambunan on 18 October 1899 and began

building the station, within sight of Mat Salleh's fort and with the assistance of the Tuhauans.[76] Mat Salleh's response was instantaneous. He sent a letter to Fraser saying that he knew the government wished to deceive him, that they had taken Sandakan and the Labuk from him and that now they wanted to take Tambunan. Fraser replied that the government wished to help him, and that it only wished to stop the Tagaas raids. But the damage was done. From the moment that the station was begun, Mat Salleh took up a challenging posture.

The raids by his followers and the Tagaas on the Tuhauans grew in number and the degree of violence. Throughout November Fraser restrained his allies from seeking reprisals, but by early December he acknowledged that the situation was out of hand, and that a full-scale expedition would be necessary.[77] More worrying to the government was the growing unrest throughout the west coast, which demonstrated the extent of Mat Salleh's influence when he chose to exercise it. In October Mat Salleh himself visited the Lawas, a still independent river between the Company's territories and Brunei, seeking arms, and perhaps, a place of sanctuary in the event of defeat.[78] A mood of lawlessness swept along the west coast bringing rumours of attacks on the government stations at Papar and Gantian. Bajau followers of Mat Salleh were involved in a series of incidents on the coast, and then reported to be making for Tambunan.[79]

At Tambunan Fraser had been ordered by the directors to continue negotiating, at one stage offering Mat Salleh $30 per month to act as government chief of the Tagaas people. Mat Salleh, perhaps despising that measly sum, was defiant.[80]

Concerning the matter that the Government intends to take the Tambunan country Muhamed Saleh expresses his thanks, or if the Government wishes to take the whole of the interior I also express my thanks. It is enough that I know the cleverness of the Government in wishing to cheat me, but that is nothing, but I wish to take the towns of Sandakan and Labuan, and the Government must not bear me any ill will for the Government has caused me trouble . . . if the Government wishes to act badly towards me never mind, I give them many

thanks. I do not understand your letter, and if the Government wishes evil, trouble me no further with letters. Even if the Government loves me, I do not love the Government always sending me letters.

He followed up a further plea from Fraser for negotiation with the demand that the government's respresentatives retire from the valley. Fraser, unwilling to abandon the Tuhauans, interpreted the demand as an ultimatum. This, together with the reports of violence on the coast, finally persuaded the directors to sanction an expedition. 'You must finally suppress him', Cowie telegraphed.[81]

By 1 January 1900, a new commandant, C. H. Harington, had gathered a motley expeditionary force at Tambunan of 140 Sikh and Iban police and 500 auxiliaries, including free-lance Ibans easily available on the west coast, plus practically the entire male Kadazan population of the Tuaran. They were opposed by the Tagaas, ensconced in their fortified kampongs, and by Mat Salleh and his followers, estimated at 300, in their four forts. Harington, viewing with dismay the defence works, and considering it 'disgraceful' that the enemy was well armed with the best rifles, thought that the campaign would take months.[82]

After a week of reconnaissance and constant sniping the first major attack was launched against the Tagaas, who were supported by a small force of Bajaus. In two days of fierce fighting the two smaller forts built by Mat Salleh were captured, and two of the Tagaas kampongs. Sixty Tagaas were believed killed. The Tagaas continued fighting for two more days and then, kampong by kampong, surrendered. One of the Tagaas kampongs, Kalansatan, provided a superb position from which to bombard the two remaining forts, the main one commanded by Mat Salleh, and the other by a young relative, Mat Satur. In a first important stroke of luck for the Company the wood and *atap* superstructure of Mat Satur's fort caught fire as soon as shelling began. When a strong wind fanned the blaze into an inferno, the occupants were forced to evacuate. A few escaped through the Company's lines, including Mat Satur.

On 27 January a full-scale bombardment of Mat Salleh's fort began, a rain of shells which continued for four days and nights. The stream supplying water to the fort was dammed up, and the occupants of the fort, though safe from the bombardment, existed in the underground chambers in an atmosphere of growing suffering and horror. Then the Company had its second important stroke of luck. On the 31st Mat Salleh was shot in the head and killed by a Maxim gun bullet. That night the survivors began to evacuate the fort, some escaping but most being killed or captured. Early on the following morning the Ibans penetrated the stronghold, meeting resistance to the last. Mat Salleh's corpse was eventually discovered, after several graves had been opened up. The Company wanted to be quite sure that their great opponent was truly dead.

Meanwhile a new governor, Clifford, was toiling up to Tambunan through Keningau, having arrived in the territory late in January. His disillusionment with his new command, which was to turn soon into towering rage, was already beginning. He found little to admire in the state of the country or the Company. However he brightened a little when he arrived at Tambunan, and was pleased with the Company's administration as represented in the final campaign against Mat Salleh. He praised the 'zeal, energy, pluck and good sense' of all the officers; in one matter alone, the summary trial and shooting of three prisoners who had attacked the doctor, did he express criticism. He was particularly impressed with Fraser, who, in his opinion ranked equally with any officer in the Malay States 'which is rich in officers trained to the management of natives'.[83] Fraser was established as district officer in charge of Tambunan and Keningau, with another young officer, Douglas, permanently stationed in the Tambunan valley.

The valley, after its baptism of fire, now became quiescent under the structures of Company government imposed upon it.[84] In addition to the Europeans, a party of Sikh policemen was stationed there, and a party of free-lance Ibans, under Nakoda Nayambong, who was made government chief. Kunsanat, the Keningau chief, was asked to spend half his time at

Tambunan. No Tagaas or Tuhauan headmen were appointed chiefs. The Tagaas, whose numbers had been ravaged in the campaign, were fined one-quarter of their forthcoming padi crop, twenty-five head of cattle and $250 in jars. All arms, from both sides, were required to be surrendered. Any future disputes between the two groups were to be settled by the headmen in the presence of the European officer. The payment of poll-tax was to be encouraged, but not demanded. No outsiders were to be permitted into the district without government approval, but trade from Tambunan with coastal *tamu* was to be encouraged. Thus a kind of peace came to Tambunan, and the setting laid for the quieter changes of the colonial era, after Mat Salleh's belated but dramatic introduction into the valley of an older style of Borneo regime.

Though peace came to Tambunan with the destruction of Mat Salleh's fort, the diffusion of those of his followers who escaped soon spread fear and violence along the west coast. In February the government station in the Tempasuk was attacked, in April the town of Kudat, where the rebels, after a night of fighting, were beaten back from the government station but looted and pillaged their way through the Chinese shops and gardens. The succeeding months saw numerous attacks on minor Company stations and employees, and on Chinese shops and Kadazan kampongs. The 'terror' lasted for well over a year.[85]

The men responsible were truly guerrillas, building no forts and lingering over none of their victories. They were a very assorted bunch, linked perhaps only by hatred and fear of the Company, and love of the bandit life. Only one, Mat Satur, a relative of Mat Salleh's, had any of the stature of the famed rebel. Mat Satur planned the raid on Kudat with the assistance of the Illanun communities on the north-west coast. Accompanying him were three of Mat Salleh's young sons.[86] Mat Satur was killed at Kudat, and with him 2 Illanuns, 2 Bajaus, 2 Kadazans, and 2 Ibans. There were virtually no Sulus involved in Mat Salleh's last stand at Tambunan or in the aftermath.[87]

The most celebrated rebels after Mat Satur were Kamunta, an Illanun, Mat Daud, a subject of Sarawak, and Langkap, a Tagaas. Kamunta finally surrendered in May 1902, alone and hungry. He was tried, and executed at Kota Belud as an object lesson to the Bajaus of that district. Mat Daud, who had assisted Mat Satur in the attack on Kudat, escaped with his life when he and others voluntarily surrendered in September 1900. Langkap, the Tagaas, came in at the close of 1902. He explained that he had not been with Mat Salleh, but had been swept into the Kudat attack by Mat Satur and Kamunta. He petitioned to be spared his life but was shot, also at Kota Belud. The reply of the governor (Birch) to his plea illuminates these years of guerrilla activity and governmental 'mopping up':[88]

> Tell Si Langkap that . . . . I greatly pity him for the state into which he has brought himself. But that the blood of many innocent people who never did him harm calls to me. The blood of Chinese vegetable gardeners who were killed for no reason, the blood of policemen who were wantonly killed while doing their duty, and the blood of many Dusuns whom the government killed in endeavouring to capture him. Therefore he must be killed to show that the Government is mighty and that those who break its laws must suffer.

The main significance of these turbulent years was that they revealed, if Mat Salleh had not already done it, the negligible hold of the Company on its territory. The state of the administration soon had Clifford in a frenzy of criticism. The Illanuns whom Mat Satur conscripted to attack Kudat had not been visited by a European for ten years. 'It is . . . impossible', Clifford wrote, 'to look for loyalty from a people who hardly ever see the men by whom they are nominally ruled'.[89] The one solitary officer who supervised the north-west coast was murdered by a drunken Iban policeman in June 1900, after which no officer, other than the rebel-hunting police officers, could be stationed there for some months. Clifford also recorded that no officer had any acquaintance with the Bajau or any of the Kadazan languages. He looked with alarm at the total alienation of the whole west coast, made worse by the rough tactics of the police parties who were seeking the rebels:[90] 'At present our

interference with the natives is sufficient to cause irritation, and intense dislike of the Government, but our action is neither strong enough, nor sufficiently consistent to inspire either respect or gratitude.' It was a comment not only appropriate in 1900, but at any time during the foregoing twenty years of Company rule.

With a curious symmetry, the years of widespread revolt closed in 1905, with the submission of Si Gunting and the revelation of the misconduct by the chiefs of Marudu Bay, already mentioned in discussing the origins of the Mat Salleh revolt in 1894. By that time, an era was truly coming to an end, and some words in the *Herald*, optimistically printed in 1900, were at last becoming appropriate:[91]

> Now at long last peace reigns supreme, and the voice of the railway engine is heard in the land; the electric wire connects Sandakan with London; and civilisation, but recently confined to the Coast, and to such a distance as a rifle would carry, is gradually eating its way into new districts. . . .

The peoples of Sabah were now beginning to be confronted with innovations other than the latest weapons, whether carried by those for or against the government.

The revolts led or inspired by Mat Salleh have been examined with some closeness to seek the motives behind them. But the records of the Company offer only the views of hostile outsiders, and cannot therefore yield complete portraits of Mat Salleh and his followers. The Company did try, however, to assess the rebel's grievances, to a much greater extent than when dealing with earlier disruption in the territory, and the correspondence and reports intended to be read only by the Company's higher administrators are relatively frank. Accordingly, at least the broad issues underlying the revolts can be extrapolated from the records.

It is clear that the revolts were not 'nationalist' revolts, in the strict sense of that term. Mat Salleh was not seeking national independence for the peoples of Sabah. Only the Europeans at this time saw Sabah clearly as a political unit, and even they,

although they were trying to concentrate loyalties in a new geopolitical pattern, recognized that the diverse peoples of the territory were not one people. It was indeed this fact—the multitudinous divisions in the population—which defeated Mat Salleh, and which enabled the Company to maintain with so few resources its grasp on the country. Despite his rippling impact throughout the territory Mat Salleh was able to raise in active revolt only one district at a time, and at no time could he have called the whole country to arms. As he moved from the east coast rivers to Ranau, to the west coast, to Tambunan, Mat Salleh was basically concerned with establishing his authority over the communities of each successive region. Mentally, as well as literally, he continually shifted his ground.

One constant factor perhaps was his winning of Muslim support, yet here there seems to have been little sense of crusade. The religious issue scarcely figures at all in his communications. It was important only as a feature of, or perhaps as the context for, the old political order within which he still moved. It is fascinating, if futile, to speculate on what he might have accomplished had he lived fifty years earlier, before the coming of the Europeans. With both Brunei and Sulu connections, and with his personality and courage, he might have produced a political situation strikingly different from that which in fact existed, carving out a domain only nominally, if at all, under the suzerainty of the two sultanates. This is, apparently, what he tried to do under the Company—seeking power for himself as earlier adventurers had sometimes done under the old political order, forcing at least tacit acceptance from existing rulers, and perhaps in the end full legitimacy. Unfortunately for Mat Salleh the old political order was passing.

The old order was not, of course, quite as dead as the Company wished to pretend. It lived on while the Company failed to administer its territories any more than nominally. Neither Mat Salleh nor most of the territory's peoples could possibly have grasped what the aims, intentions, or even claims, of the Company were, or what it envisaged good government to be. To

most of them the Company must have seemed a continuation of the old order at its worst, of absentee lords insisting on taxes and customs dues via indifferent agents and offering nothing in return except occasional punitive expeditions.

In this regard the Mat Salleh revolts deserve to be put into the wider context of revolt in Sabah, the continuously bubbling revolt which began in the late 1880s and culminated in the Mat Salleh revolts. Fragmented and spasmodic as this rebel movement was, and in no way consciously unified, it too should no doubt be denied the name of 'nationalist' revolt. Yet in all its constituent parts, in varied ways, it was a very widespread Sabahan rejection of the Company. The Company seemed, to both non-Muslim and Muslim peoples, to be a particularly pernicious variant of the older order. To the non-Muslims it had to be kept at bay with especial vigour, even if could not be entirely repulsed. To the Muslims it was alien, infidel, but, in the last analysis, no more than the latest rival for authority in Sabah, to be challenged when they found a leader who dared to do so. Ironically, these revolts were neither modern anti-colonial movements, nor even responses to novel changes introduced by the Europeans. Rather, they were time-honoured types of resistance to what appeared to be a quite traditional type of intrusion.

The rebel movements were put down with more efficiency than had been known before, even if in contemporary European terms the Company was alarmingly inefficient. But this was virtually the sum total of twenty years of the Company's administration of the peoples of Sabah. As the twentieth century dawned it was time, in some European minds, for a new appraisal of the Company's government.

1. C.O. 874/262, p. 499.
2. C.O. 874/256, 16/7/95, p. 593.
3. C.O. 874/187, Beaufort to Pryer, 18/9/95.
4. C.O. 874/264, 30/9/99, p. 1424.

5. *Herald*, 1/10/01, pp. 307–8.

6. C.O. 874/259, 4/9/96, p. 95; 12/10/96, p. 341; 15/1/97, p. 663. *Herald*, 1/11/96, p. 306; 1/7/97, p. 165; 1/4/99, p. 104; 1/9/99, p. 273; C.O. 874/258, 5/5/96, p. 227; C.O. 874/268, 27/8/01, pp. 264, 281.

7. C.O. 874/265, 31/12/99, p. 171; C.O. 874/271, p. 824.

8. C.O. 874/256, 3/8/95, p. 962; 16/9/95, p. 923; C.O. 874/258, 6/4/96, p. 466; *Herald*, 16/9/95, pp. 234, 240.

9. C.O. 874/258, 14/4/96, p. 197; C.O. 874/259, 4/9/96, p. 97.

10. C.O. 874/256, 3/7/95, p. 509; C.O. 874/258, 23/4/96, p. 169; *Gazette*, 1/4/97, p. 34.

11. There was another reason why Company-built roads were not used by the local people; the spirits disturbed during construction were never placated. On an occasion when fowls and rice were left as offerings on a road linking Menumbok and Kuala Penyu the Sikh policemen ate them (C.O. 874/254, 6/7/93, p. 303). For the Papar-Putatan road see C.O. 874/258, 23/4/96, p. 169.

12. C.O. 874/261, 1/12/97, p. 519.

13. C.O. 874/262, p. 499.

14. C.O. 874/261, 1/3/98, p. 839; C.O. 874/260, 1/6/97, p. 513; *Herald*, 16/4/97, p. 100; 1/5/97, p. 112.

15. C.O. 874/256, 23/4/95, p. 383; 1/6/95, p. 641; 16/9/95, p. 1043; 24/7/97, p. 631; *Herald*, 1/11/95, p. 290; C.O. 874/257, 27/11/95, p. 187.

16. C.O. 874/258, 7/4/96, p. 126.

17. C.O. 874/259, 19/11/96, p. 463; C.O. 874/258, 1/5/96, p. 314; p. 561; C.O. 874/259, 19/8/96, p. 55; 19/11/96, p. 468.

18. C.O. 874/259, 11/11/96, p. 514.

19. *Herald*, 16/6/98, p. 183; C.O. 874/258, 12/5/96, p. 280; 13/5/96, p. 300; 4/5/96, p. 434; 28/5/96, p. 459.

20. C.O. 874/261, 16/1/98, p. 730.

21. C.O. 874/261, 4/10/97, p. 334; 16/11/97, p. 449; C.O. 874/262, 19/10/98, p. 757.

22. C.O. 874/262, 31/10/98, p. 993; C.O. 874/263, 30/4/99, p. 611.

23. C.O. 874/262, 25/10/98, p. 823.

24. C.O. 874/187, Mrs Pryer to 'Isabel', 20/9/95.

25. *Herald*, 16/1/99, p. 25; 1/2/99, p. 41. See also C.O. 874/261, 24/12/97, p. 652, and the comment on Mat Salleh's corpse, C.O. 874/265, 14/2/00, p. 382.

26. W. K. C. Wookey, 'The Mat Salleh Rebellion', *Sarawak Museum Journal*, VII, 8/23, 1956, pp. 405–50.

27. C.O. 874/256, 16–24/8/95, p. 815.

28. *Herald*, 16/9/95, p. 235; 16/9/97, p. 263.

29. C.O. 874/256, 12/9/95, p. 884; *Gazette*, 1/2/96, p. 18; C.O. 874/261, 17/2/98, p. 783; C.O. 874/262, 18/10/98, p. 745; *Herald*, 1/12/96, p. 336; 16/2/00, p. 51. The political upheavals in Sulu possibly induced Mat Salleh to

return to Sabah in 1894. Ironically, Creagh, the Governor, wrote in 1895 that he was encouraging the immigration of 'families and persons of moderate means and known good character' (C.O. 874/255, 1/2/95, p. 884).

30. C.O. 874/254, 27/7/93, p. 306; 31/1/94, p. 685; *Herald*, 1/7/92, p. 217.

31. C.O. 874/255, 6/4/94, p. 5; 24/5/94, p. 33; 11/5/94, p. 45; 2/6/94, p. 81; 27/6/94, p. 192; 15/8/94, p. 314; 20/7/94, p. 513; C.O. 874/276, 26/3/05, p. 268; 20/6/05, p. 271.

32. C.O. 874/255, 30/5/95, p. 94.

33. C.O. 874/255, 15/10/94, p. 453; 25/10/94, p. 478; 31/12/94, p. 591. *Herald*, 16/2/00, p. 51.

34. *Herald*, 1/1/96, p. 5; 16/2/00, p. 51; C.O. 874/261, 17/2/98, p. 783.

35. C.O. 874/187, Mrs Pryer to 'Isabel', 20/9/95.

36. C.O. 874/256, 12/9/95, p. 884.

37. C.O. 874/257, 29/1/96, p. 399; 27/1/96, p. 412; C.O. 874/187, Beaufort to Pryer, 21/1/96.

38. C.O. 874/261, 17/2/98, p. 783; *Herald*, 16/10/97, p. 289; 1/11/97, p. 307; C.O. 874/187 Pryer to Lucas, 19/9/97.

39. C.O. 874/259, 5/9/96, p. 101; 14/9/96, p. 143.

40. C.O. 874/259, 26/9/96, p. 294; *Herald*, 1/12/96, p. 336; 1/11/96, p. 306.

41. C.O. 874/259, 26/10/96, p. 349; 27/10/96, p. 426; 28/11/96, p. 500; C.O. 874/263, p. 579; *Herald*, 16/2/97, pp. 46, 51; 16/4/97, p. 106, 1/3/98, p. 73.

42. See O. Cook, *Borneo The Stealer of Hearts*, London, 1924, ch. VII.

43. *Herald*, 16/9/97, p. 187.

44. C.O. 874/260, 9/7/97, p. 612.

45. *Herald*, 16/10/96, p. 300.

46. *Herald*, 16/7/97, p. 192; C.O. 874/260, 20/7/97, p. 699; 25/7/97, p. 736.

47. C.O. 874/260, 9–29/8/97, p. 925; C.O. 874/261, 14/1/98, p. 714.

48. C.O. 874/261, 6/10/97, p. 143; 27/9/97, p. 60; 2/11/97, p. 276.

49. C.O. 874/261, 24/11/97, p. 408; 13/5/98, p. 1037.

50. C.O. 874/261, 18/11/97, p. 395.

51. C.O. 874/261, 28/2/98, p. 942; 27/11/97, p. 422; 24/12/97, p. 526; 30/12/97, p. 605; 7/1/98, p. 709; 3/3/98, p. 825; *Herald*, 1/1/98, p. 6; 1/3/98, p. 74; 16/3/98, p. 88.

52. C.O. 874/260, 2/8/97, p. 755; 13/8/97, p. 842.

53. C.O. 874/261, 31/12/97, p. 920; 24/3/98, p. 856; 5/4/98, p. 907.

54. C.O. 874/54 Agreements 1898. Spenser St. John, *Life in the Forests of the Far East*, London, 1863, vol. 1, pp. 301–4. Pengiran Jallaludin's daughter, Pengiran Siti Fatimah, was to dispute for many years the Company's right to govern the Karambunai peninsula; the Company claimed that the 1898 agreements had granted land here to the Pengiran, but not sovereignty (S.G.A. File 1287).

55. C.O. 874/269, 14/3/02, p. 287; 12/4/02, p. 396.

56. C.O. 874/262, 2/5/98, p. 30.

57. C.O. 874/261, 20/1/98, p. 644.

58. C.O. 874/261, 17/12/97, p. 917; *Herald*, 16/1/98, p. 25. Subsequently the Company obtained a letter purporting to be from the Sultan, advising Mat Salleh to ignore the Cowie letter. On his return from Mecca the Sultan denied any knowledge of the second letter, and the Company accepted the explanation that it had been forged by a member of his court. It did not carry the Sultan's seal. The Sultan was anxious to be on good terms with the Company, hoping still that the British might rescue his territories from the Spanish. In fact in the same year the United States laid claim to Spain's Philippine possessions (C.O. 874/262, 22/6/98, p. 262; 25/7/98, pp. 403, 418).

59. *Herald*, 2/5/98, p. 133.

60. C.O. 874/262, 28/4/98, p. 21; C.O. 874/261, 20/5/98, p. 1077.

61. C.O. 874/262, 25/5/98, p. 82.

62. C.O. 874/261, 6/5/98, p. 1019; 20/5/98, p. 1072; C.O. 874/262, 16/5/98, p. 73.

63. C.O. 874/262, 24/5/98, p. 45.

64. C.O. 874/262, 2/6/98, p. 61.

65. C.O. 874/262, 5/7/98, p. 300.

66. C.O. 874/262, 19/8/98, p. 565; 31/8/98, p. 666.

67. C.O. 874/262, 23/11/98, p. 948.

68. C.O. 874/266, 4/10/00, p. 704.

69. C.O. 874/261, 16/9/97, p. 168; 3/3/98, p. 825.

70. For descriptions of Tambunan at this time see C.O. 874/263, 29/1/99, p. 84; C.O. 874/265, 12/2/00, p. 355.

71. *Herald*, 16/5/98, p. 118.

72. C.O. 874/263, 29/1/99, p. 73.

73. C.O. 874/263, 18/1/99, p. 52.

74. C.O. 874/264, 12/9/99, p. 639.

75. C.O. 874/263, 17/4/99, pp. 592, 611; 26/4/99, p. 671; 15/5/99, 10/6/99, p. 862; C.O. 874/264, 23/7/99, p. 351; 31/7/99, p. 418.

76. C.O. 874/264, 30/9/99, p. 946; 5/10/99, p. 1136; 8/11/99, p. 1128; C.O. 874/265, 18/10/99, p. 539.

77. C.O. 874/264, 10/11/99, p. 1435; 4/12/99, p. 1437.

78. This news was passed to the Company by Pengiran Shahbandar, its former enemy in the Padas Damit (C.O. 874/264, 26/10/99, p. 1144). He should not be confused with the Labuk pengiran who supposedly offered the reward for Mat Salleh. See also C.O. 874/265, 29/12/99, p. 68.

79. C.O. 874/264, 13/11/99, p. 1225; 4/12/99, p. 1355.

80. C.O. 874/264, 10/11/99, p. 1435; 30/11/99, p. 1483.

81. C.O. 874/264, 9/12/99, p. 1459; 16/12/99, p. 1466. Preceeding the

expedition went a letter to Mat Salleh offering safe conduct if he surrendered (C.O. 874/265, 22/12/99, p. 74).

82. The following account of the expedition to Tambunan is drawn from C.O. 874/265, 1/1/00, p. 91; 16/1/00, p. 202; 10/1/00, p. 210; 17/2/00, p. 475; 14/2/00, p. 382.

83. C.O. 874/265, 12/2/00, p. 355; 14/2/00, p. 384; 15/2/00, p. 421. Clifford never showed sympathy for Mat Salleh. His novels *Sally, A Study* and *Salleh, A Sequel* are not based on Sabah's Mat Salleh, as claimed in K. G. Tregonning, *A History of Modern Sabah*, Singapore, 1965, p. 206.

84. C.O. 874/265, 5/2/00, p. 835.

85. C.O. 874/267, 29/6/01, p. 607.

86. Three of Mat Salleh's wives were captured at Tambunan, together with one son and two daughters. The three sons who escaped eventually surrendered, and were, like the rest of the family, deported to Sulu (C.O. 874/265, 13/3/00, p. 719; *Gazette*, 3/11/02, p. 400).

87. C.O. 874/266, 8/9/00, p. 442.

88. C.O. 874/271, 10/12/02, p. 294; 3/3/03, p. 298.

89. C.O. 874/265, 12/5/00, p. 950.

90. C.O. 874/267, 8/1/01, p. 61.

91. *Herald*, 1/11/00, p. 351.

5

NEW PERSPECTIVES, 1900–1910

The Company in Western Eyes

HUGH CLIFFORD arrived in Sabah to take up the governorship in January 1900, resigned in the following October, and left in March 1901. He stormed through these fifteen months in perpetual exasperation with the Company, and with Sabah itself. His strongly emotional personality, which elsewhere made him a remarkable colonial administrator,[1] found little in Sabah to which to respond, and his appraisal of the territory was to be almost entirely bleak. On his first journey into the interior, to see the end of the campaign against Mat Salleh, he jumped to dismal conclusions about the population. The non-Muslims he derided as idle, diseased, and drunken, and he took an equally jaundiced view of the Muslim peoples, seeing them, in the aftermath of the Mat Salleh troubles, as surly rebels, pursuing unreformed the evils of the pre-colonial regimes. With such a population he thought the Company could make little economic progress.[2]

Dismayed as he was with the country Clifford reserved most of his contempt for the Company's administration. When asked by the Court of Directors to investigate further cessions of Brunei territory he replied with one of his most withering despatches:[3]

> The fact that after twenty years of nominal rule by the Company the majority of the natives of the Territory have absolutely no acquaintance with the European officers who are supposed to govern them, that villages within a score of miles from some of our principal stations

have not been visited for a decade, that the exactions and oppressions of petty chiefs are, in the majority of cases, hardly more checked now than they were in the days of Brunei rule and that practically nothing has been done to ameliorate the condition of the natives, and further that nothing can be done unless the executive staff be largely increased, all tends to show that my contention that, since we cannot satisfactorily cope with what we already have, it would be imprudent to increase the extent of our existing responsibilities, is only logical.

Clifford went on to delineate the problems of staff. At Sandakan every department was undermanned, with one surveyor for the whole territory, a postmaster-general who was also a magistrate, the protector of labour, and the superintendent of immigration, and an auditor who had to be assisted by the treasurer whose accounts he supervised. At Kudat:

To all intents and purposes the only act of Government which the Company has performed . . . has been the collection of taxes and the upkeep and policing of the town and its immediate vicinity. . . . I have been used to a system under which an officer in charge of a district was required to know every part of that district and its inhabitants intimately, that being the only means by which they can be efficiently ruled, the state of things I have described absolutely shocks me.

He was also shocked to find that the estates were rarely visited, and that there was no officer on the whole length of the Kinabatangan. The condition of the west coast was 'more deplorable still', with no officer, other than those hunting rebels, between Gaya Bay and Kudat. 'Only by a stretch of the imagination' could the Bajaus be described as being under Company rule. Finally, Clifford noted the low morale of the Company's staff.

The solution he demanded was a rapid increase in European officers able, and encouraged, to administer the population closely.[4] The staff was in fact slowly increasing, following Cowie's reluctant acknowledgement in 1898 that a staff of thirty might not be able to hold the territory, much less administer it properly. But Clifford's view of 'close' administration encompassed areas of governmental responsibility barely yet dreamed of by the Company. He urged, for example, that the govern-

ment assist the Bajaus of the west coast to develop their livestock breeding. When it was discovered that for four years the padi harvest had failed on the Tuaran (a state of affairs which had gone unnoticed by the administration) he urged government supervision of padi cultivation.[5] In the Murut areas he wanted to see liquor banned to children and adolescents—a suggestion dampened by Fraser's report from the Tenom area that the headmen had considered the proposal and agreed that five years be the age from which a person might drink.[6] But such an active view of colonial government appealed to some of the younger officers, and particularly to the cadets now beginning to arrive in Sabah, fired with public school visions of imperial responsibility. Clifford thus influenced the long-term tone of the administration, although Cowie and other old hands were to resist the influence for the next decade. To them the Company remained primarily a business venture, and schemes for the improvement of indigenous society an unwelcome expense.

However it was Clifford's pessimism over Sabah's economic potential, and his mockery of the Company's public works, which set him most at odds with Cowie and the directors. To Clifford the sparseness and poverty of the population ruled out rapid economic development, and the public works were a joke. The railway under construction up the Padas gorge led only to country where lived 'the most degraded savages in our territory'.[7] It also began nowhere; Clifford was opposed to the establishment of Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu), the proposed new port and railhead on the west coast, where the people of four small Bajau kampongs fished, grazed cattle, and grew nothing except coconuts. In deriding Jesselton he was joined by the Company's senior officers, whose investments were in Sandakan, and by Sandakan's commercial community who had no wish to see Company investment directed elsewhere.[8] The final tilt at Cowie's policies came with Clifford's recommendation that the telegraph so laboriously constructed to link east and west coasts be closed down along its central section.[9] Clifford wished to negate all that Cowie had tried to do since becoming managing director. It particularly incensed Cowie that Clifford

blithely refused to consider his argument for the public works—that they would generate development and hence the kind of income which Clifford's style of government would necessitate.

Within a few years developments on the west coast were to prove Cowie right and Clifford wrong about the worth of the public works, but Clifford had long since fled. He was replaced by E. W. Birch, whose career with the Company would also be brief and end in bitter resignation, though for reasons completely opposite to those of Clifford. The very model of a modern colonial administrator, Birch had enjoyed a swift rise through the Straits Settlements and Malay States services to the position of Resident in Negeri Sembilan.[10] He was boundlessly energetic and enthusiastic, and upon his arrival in 1901 he at once fell in love with Sabah. Where Clifford had found only gloom Birch revelled in the country's potentialities, and he communicated a new enthusiasm to a staff whose morale, through the Mat Salleh troubles and the Clifford débâcle, had fallen low.

In Birch there were combined all aspects of the optimistic imperial vision of the period. He displayed even more enthusiasm for economic development than did Cowie and was also concerned to improve the indigenous peoples. A stream of ideas and legislation began to flow which, within a few months, was bothering a bewildered Court of Directors. In January 1902 Cowie decreed that proclamations of importance be sent to the Court for approval before being published in Sabah.[11] Birch's expansion and reform of the administration will be discussed later in this chapter. He really infuriated Cowie, however, by assuming authority in Cowie's own province, that of economic development. Without approval he took charge of the railway and spent unsanctioned money on this and other projects. He was ordered to fall into line with the Court, but in his frustration at the shortage of capital, and what seemed to him the timid policies of the Company, he wrote confidentially to the Colonial Office to seek a British government take-over of Sabah.[12] The directors heard nothing of the letter until late 1903. By that time

Birch had also compiled and published a report upon the territory without the directors' approval. For the most part it was panegyric such as the scrupulously censored *Herald* would have been proud to print,[13] but it criticized the state of the railway, urged improvements in pay and conditions for the staff, sought better medical arrangements, and the introduction of education for the children of Sabah.[14] Cowie's response on the last of these issues, in the course of an outraged letter to Birch, illustrates the complacently old-fashioned view of colonial administration which had baffled Clifford:[15]

> . . . in saying that we are doing nothing . . . you have, in view of the enormous amount of money it has cost us to bring [the native people] within the pale of the Company's protection and civilising influence, which is an education in itself, most unwarrantably maligned our administration.

He would be satisfied with nothing less than Birch's resignation.

Birch left in December 1903, showered with emotional testimonials from the Chinese and Muslim communities of Sandakan as well as from the Europeans.[16] A young cadet, like many devoted to Birch, noted in his diary:[17] 'Everyone is very sick at H.E.'s recall', and expressed a common opinion: 'If only the result is that we get taken over by the Imperial Government it will be all right. This is about an extreme exhibition of the Court's folly and ignorance, to recall the man who has done more for the country than anyone else.'

But the Imperial Government showed no desire to take over, despite a furore within the Court of Directors itself over Birch's resignation and the departure of the Company's chairman, R. B. Martin.[18] As governor the Company now acquired one of its own, E. P. Gueritz, who had been with the Company since 1882, apart from a spell between 1885 and 1890 as collector and magistrate in the Malay States. Sober, conservative, and more deferential to the Court of Directors than any previous governor, he left the initiative to the Court completely. Birch had liked him, but Gueritz wasted no time in proclaiming where

his loyalties lay, agreeing to curtail expenditure and curb:[19] '. . . a staff . . . imbued during the past two years with tastes which are warranted in a country with the revenue of the Malay States but are too far advanced for this Country at present'. In 1905 he was to suffer a breakdown from overwork, and write a bitter threat of resignation,[20] but for most of his governorship he made few criticisms, and initiated no major changes of policy or legislation. He would leave Sabah in 1910, two months after the death of Cowie. Together these two men consistently dampened the reformist approach to administration introduced by Clifford and Birch.

In this decade the staff also reflected the battle between conservative and progressive attitudes to colonial rule. The senior positions remained largely in the hands of long-serving officials. Cook (who had betrayed to Cowie Birch's secret plea to the Colonial Office)[21] remained as treasurer until 1908; Walker remained as commissioner for lands. Another who had been with the Company from the beginning, W. Raffles Flint, was second in command of the police force and retired in 1909 only after Gueritz, in a rare outspoken moment, asked that he not return from leave. The commandant, C. H. Harington, had reported that the police under Flint were slovenly and that Flint used the police finances for his own purposes. Gueritz wrote:[22] 'The rotten part of the administration in the Service must now be eliminated.'

Harington represented the new tone in the administration. He had become commandant in 1899 at the age of 25 after a public school education and service with the Cape Mounted Rifles and the British South Africa Company's police. In his youthfulness and public school background he typified the majority of the European staff after 1900. In 1903, of fifty-five officers only ten were over 40 and thirty-one were under 30. The staff lists, in describing backgrounds, now called the roll of schools—Rugby, Wellington, Haileybury, Merchant Taylors, Marlborough—which were manning the outposts of Empire. Some cadets had also had a university education. J. Maxwell Hall and G. C. Woolley, both of whom were to spend

their entire careers in Sabah, arrived, from Cambridge and Oxford respectively. A. C. Pearson, who would marry Gueritz's daughter and assume the governorship himself, came from Trinity College, Dublin. Lengthy service was by no means the rule, however. The young officers frequently became disillusioned with the parsimonious and conservative Company, and many fulfilled only their initial five-year contracts, being replaced with further cadets.[23]

In 1910, with Cowie dying and his own departure imminent, Gueritz plucked up courage to criticize the inadequacies of staffing, which had remained constant at the figure of sixty European officers achieved in Birch's day. The old cry reechoed that there were not enough men to govern properly.[24] Gueritz's plea had, however, different connotations from those of earlier governors; he was afraid he would have to close stations rather than be anxious to open new ones. For, despite the conservatism and hostility to innovation of the men who commanded the Company, the administration had been much improved during the decade. The chief agent of transformation had been Birch, but Cowie and Gueritz had in fact dismantled little of his work after his departure. Gueritz's plea for more staff reflected, on the other hand, their failure to take Birch's work further, and by the end of the decade it was becoming plain that a further reassessment of the Company's government was essential. Two factors were converging to force change after 1910—the ever-mounting pressures to make colonial government an instrument of social reform, and the economic development which was taking place in Sabah. The territory, indeed, seemed by 1910 to be on the brink of a boom.

The decade 1900–10 was one of almost consistent improvement in the Company's finances, as eastern trade prospered in general, and Cowie's development policies bore modestly pleasing fruit. The revenue in 1910—£221,284—contrasted strikingly with that of the year 1895—£37,075—when Cowie had first become involved with the Company's management. Expenditure also increased, but at a much slower rate than income. In 1895 it had been £33,266 and in 1910 it was £95,107.

Thus the Company had become at last, it seemed, a gamble that was paying off. The meagre dividends paid to shareholders reached 5 per cent in 1909.[25]

The burgeoning revenues of the Company came from a variety of sources, though principally from economic development. The railway, poorly built and managed, gave endless trouble, but nevertheless it opened up new possibilities of communication and transport along the west coast, and by 1905 it had pushed laboriously up the Padas to Tenom. In that year the ability of rubber to flourish in Borneo was demonstrated, and in the latter part of the decade Sabah experienced another boom in sales of land, for the planting of the new wonder material. An estate manager wrote in 1910 (with exuberance rather than accuracy):[26] 'The West Coast is now a series of Estates, the train is always full of Europeans. . . . Every steamer that comes in brings a shipload of coolies.' The rubber boom was not yet, however, the reason for the Company's prosperity. Gains from land sales and from the increased activity associated with estate development were offset by the concessions the Company had granted to rubber companies to woo them to Borneo. These included a guarantee of dividends to shareholders while the trees matured and exemptions from export duties on rubber; in some cases the Company took up shares in rubber estates.

For the time being tobacco continued to be Sabah's main export and it was followed by products on which the territory had long depended—timber, sago, and varieties of jungle produce. The unglamorous dried fish industry also figured prominently in the exports list. Another significantly growing source of revenue was that from the population of the country, though principally from the immigrant Chinese. The revenue from the indigenous peoples increased, chiefly because of the extension of closer administration under Birch's governorship, but remained as before a minute proportion of overall Company revenue.[27] The Chinese increased in numbers from 12,000 in 1901 to 26,000 in 1911 and were the principal patrons of the opium, gambling, pawn, and other excise farms which yielded

the Company about £42,000 per year by the end of the decade.[28]

Rubber, however, was the obsession of the era, and was the principal reason for the buoyant mood of the Company around 1910. After Cowie's death the apparently limitless promise of rubber would propel the directors into a new era of administrative reform in Sabah. Meanwhile, Cowie, in regard to administration, had been as interested in creating favourable public images as in practical development. A master of shrewd publicity, Cowie more than any other single person was responsible for the image of sober but benevolent colonial rule which the Company enjoyed in Western eyes in the later years of its history. At a series of annual dinners in London he gathered significant names from the world of empire-building to publicize in ill-informed but enthusiastic terms the Company's virtues.[29] In 1907 W. P. Reeves proposed the toast, praising the Company's 'businesslike sobriety of administration', and comparing its record favourably with those of Brooke in Sarawak, the Dutch in Sumatra, and the Americans in the Philippines, in all of which areas there had occurred formidable native hostility.[30] Nobody challenged his picture of a sensible Company and a placid people. The rebellions of the 1880s and 1890s in Sabah, little understood at the time, had now been virtually expunged from the Company's version of its history.

The Coming of the District Officer

Birch reformed several aspects of the administration, but his most significant accomplishment was to scatter European district officers across Sabah so that few areas were left without governmental oversight for long periods. It was the simplest possible of reforms, once the Company was prepared to provide the staff, but it brought peace, if not contentment, to Sabah. The travelling district officers and their detachments of police—now also controlled more tightly—were frequent reminders of the Company's power, and awareness of their presence led to rapid pacification. Even the nomadic peoples of Darvel Bay began to find their activities restricted in this era.[31]

Only the southern Murut areas, difficult to penetrate and of negligible economic interest, escaped attention.

The arrival of the district officers at last gave more than nominal worth to the long-standing administrative divisions of the territory, some named for luminaries of the Company. The West Coast residency, now supervised from Jesselton (which, by 1908, would become significant enough for the governor to make it his headquarters during half the year), included stations at Papar, Tuaran, and Kota Belud, in the area known as Province Keppel. Jesselton also supervised the stations at Beaufort and Mempakul (Province Dent) and at Sipitang (Province Clarke). The Kudat residency (Province Alcock) received an extra station, at Tanjong Batu, from which the estate areas at the southern end of Marudu Bay and the rivers flowing into the bay were supervised. The Sandakan residency supervised stations on the Labuk and Sugut, and at Tangkulap on the Kinabatangan. The Darvel Bay residency (sometimes combined with Sandakan as the East Coast residency) had its headquarters at Lahad Datu and subsidiary stations at Semporna and Tawau. The Interior residency was governed from Tenom, with stations also at Keningau and Tambunan. In 1908 the first serious efforts to penetrate the southern Murut areas were made by posting an officer at Tomani; the station was moved in the following year to Rundum.

Until 1906 the Company also administered Labuan. Since 1889, when the Colonial Office had passed the administration of the colony to the Company, there had been a history of friction with the European residents. The island had not prospered, and the separation was a relief to the Company, for it removed the thorn in the flesh of the Labuan European community and allowed the deployment elsewhere of seven officials. The station on the Sipitang, on the other hand, came into being as the result of a search for further cessions of territory between 1901 and 1905. Until 1900 the Sipitang marked the boundary of the Company's territory but it was considered desirable to push the border southwards to include the Mengalong, Merapok, and Lawas, which provided access to interior

territory the Company considered it held. Rapid progress was made in buying many of the *tulin* rights involved, but the Sultan resisted further cessions, as did Pengiran Abubakar, ruler of the Lawas and *de facto* ruler of the Merapok. Charles Brooke, still hoping to absorb the remnants of Brunei territory, also schemed to prevent further Company advances. Despite the capitulation of the Sultan, who ceded his rights over all the rivers down to and including the Lawas, and the death in 1904 of Pengiran Abubakar, the Company decided to retreat from the complex politicking, setting its boundary at the Mengalong and reselling the rights it had obtained further south.[32]

With the advent of district officers the system of communications begun in the previous decade acquired meaning. On the east coast the rivers remained the chief mode of travel for Europeans and local people, but on the west coast and in the interior Company staff were increasingly able to use a network of bridle-paths linking stations.[33] By 1910 Jesselton was linked with Kota Belud and 19 miles of bridle-path were constructed beyond Kota Belud towards Kudat. Southwards from Jesselton, and into the interior at Tenom, the railway served for communication. The interior stations of Keningau and Tambunan, and also Ranau, could be reached by bridle-path from Tenom or Kota Belud. From Tenom another bridle-path ran southwards to Tomani, thence to Rundum. The telegraph also linked all the west coast and interior stations, frequently following the bridle-paths. When cutting these tracks, which were built by local labour levies under district officer direction, in return for food, drink, and tobacco, a compromise was adopted between following the straightest line and finding the easiest gradient for horseback riding. For this reason they remained in many cases a European means of communication. The local peoples preferred their own tracks, which were time-saving though strenuous. The bridle-paths were also sometimes seen by the local people as disturbing the spirits which it was believed inhabited the landscape; their own time-honoured paths either avoided dangerous spirits or enjoyed a long tradition of safety through placatory offerings.

Detachments of police were not, of course, an unfamiliar sight in Sabah, but under Birch's regime they began, like the district officers, to increase in numbers. By 1910 the force had reached about 700, under seven European officers. The ratio of police to population compared with that of the Federated Malay States (1 to 226 in Sabah and 1 to 239 in the latter), and far outstripped that of Sarawak (1 to 1,052), although Brooke had huge reserves of fighting auxiliaries to deal with major disturbances.[34] Birch also began a reorganization of the police, dividing it into three sections, military, civil, and district. The military force, composed primarily of men of Indian origin, Sikh, Punjabi, and Pathan, was intended for use in expeditions and was stationed in detachments only in the major towns. Two reasons underlay this action—the cultural apartness of the Indians, which tended to lead to friction with the locals, and their amenability to rigorous discipline. The military police now began to look like a small modern army. Cook wrote in 1905:[35] '. . . there is little doubt that the present peaceful condition of the interior natives is to no small extent due to the knowledge that any serious misconduct on their part would be immediately followed by a visit from [the] Indian police. . . .'

The civil police, composed of various nationalities, performed routine police work in the major towns. The district police were composed of 'natives of Borneo' and were stationed throughout the territory, either with a district officer or in outstations where they could be regularly visited. The term 'natives of Borneo' covered men of many origins. The police detachment at Tambunan in 1910, for example, included 5 Ibans, 3 Tuaran Kadazans, 3 Keningau Muruts, 2 local men, 1 Putatan Kadazan, 1 Tomani Murut, 1 Orang Sungei and 1 Bajau.[36] It might have included any others of the complex indigenous ethnic composition of Sabah and surrounding areas. The backbone of the district police remained, however, the Ibans. Though many recruits were now of Sabahan origin, as the above example illustrates, the Sarawak warriors still comprised about one-third of the district police, and a high

proportion of its non-commissioned officers. Their abilities were much appreciated in the aftermath of the Mat Salleh revolt, and it was chiefly the Ibans who imposed peace along the north-west coast and its interior. In 1901 a series of well-fortified block houses were built in the north-west, the principal one at Kota Belud, from which issued 'flying columns' of Ibans when news of any rebel activity or other disturbance was received. The strategy sometimes had unintended results:[37]

> Tanuhan, which for two years has paid poll-tax to Tambunan, seems to have been burnt owing to a misunderstanding. The chief of Pahu went to Tanuhan and told the people there that the police were marching through the country killing and burning, so they deserted their houses. Tinggi then came and, seeing a lot of empty houses, naturally thought they belonged to friends of rebels and so set them on fire.

But generally, once peace was established, and oversight by district officer became regular, the Iban police seem to have conformed to European concepts of decent police behaviour, and accepted that the days of mayhem were over. The more terrifying aspects of their culture having been restrained, they seem, unlike the Indian police, to have got along well with the indigenous communities. Some Ibans, however, rejected the dull life which followed pacification in favour of the freedom and adventure still available in the southern Murut areas, and their activities will be noticed later.

In 1903 Birch rewrote Creagh's Village Administration Proclamation, in an attempt to achieve some order in the still haphazard system of paid indigenous authorities.[38] It was intended at last that a clear distinction should be drawn between chiefs and headmen, headmen being no longer paid, except for 10 per cent commission on poll-tax. In some cases there was a weeding out of those 'chiefs' who acted purely as headmen of their particular communities, but sometimes a district officer might consider payment worthwhile, and a large number of '$5 chiefs' remained on the books; in 1916 there were

still sixty, out of a total of one hundred and fifty paid chiefs.[39] Essentially the system remained informal and dependent upon local circumstances, the judgements of district officers, and the personalities of those who emerged, from whatever origins, as men who could command authority. In this era, however, the more intense degree of European supervision, and the dawning European understanding of indigenous society, meant that the abuses once committed in the government's name were checked.

The chiefs best liked by the Company continued in most cases to be of exotic origin. There were, for example, a number of Iban chiefs, although by the end of the decade their number was in decline. Nakoda Bali was powerful in the Murut areas southwards from Tenom. Nakoda Tinggi, whose following of free Ibans was much used in the Mat Salleh campaign and after, finally settled on the Labuk, dying there in 1906. The Iban chief at Tambunan, Nakoda Nayambong, appointed after Mat Salleh's defeat, left there in 1908 to return to Sarawak. Ranau also had an Iban chief, Salau.[40] Other notable chiefs were the Brunei Malays Pengiran Haji Omar, at Sipitang and later the whole of 'South Keppel' (Putatan–Papar), and Pengiran Abbas, who ruled in 'Province Dent' (the Padas-Klias peninsula) from its cession until the second decade of this century.[41] At Kota Belud a Banjar (Malay), Haji O. K. Mohamed Arsat, ruled both Muslim and Kadazan communities. Formerly a government clerk, he had distinguished himself during the Mat Salleh troubles, made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and married the sister of the principal Illanun chief. On the Labuk the Tidong trader Haji Pati now wielded great power.[42]

These were, however, virtually the sum of the government's thoroughly trusted chiefs. Few chiefs who emerged from their own communities to be dignified with Company rank seem to have been appreciated. Complaints about the inadequacies of these chiefs constitute an endless refrain in the reports of the period, from all areas. Gueritz commented in 1904 '. . . the only chiefs of any assistance in the whole territory could be counted

on the fingers of one hand'.[43] In 1910 an officer in the north-west used adjectives such as 'dilatory', 'stupid', and 'indifferent' to describe his chiefs and headmen, apart from the 'invaluable' Haji Arsat. The report for the interior listed, out of eleven chiefs, two as satisfactory, three as less so, and the remainder as 'without prejudice . . . quite useless'. The young cadet at Keningau criticized Kunsanat, the chief of long standing, and regarded the others as dilatory, lazy, and irregular in their court attendance. The officer at Tambunan praised one chief as reliable and sound but described most of the others in terms such as 'nonentity'. In 1906 a number of young local men were given rank in the district, in the hope that they would be adaptable to government ideas, although the records offer no indication of the selection process.[44] Elsewhere, the Company experienced similar frustration. A report from Marudu Bay in 1911 bewailed the district officer's difficulties:[45]

> . . . It is, I am sorry to say true, that this district does not possess one really good chief. That is to say a man who is not only of good character and behaviour (several are that) but who has some initiative of his own, who can wake up sleepy kampongs and help in collecting revenue and administering justice.

As it is improbable that Sabah was devoid of administrative talent, the lack of co-operation from indigenous authorities must be explained in other ways. To begin with, the Company could not really expect the old suspicions about Company aims and intentions to evaporate overnight, after twenty-five years of misrule. To the new generation of European officers the past was little more than legend, the subject of hair-raising but amusing reminiscence by the old hands. For most Sabahans the past remained a vivid and bitter experience. It is more than probable that the 'dilatoriness' and 'laziness' which the district officers remarked upon was a mask for continuing reluctance to collaborate with an unloved government. As well, the people remained sceptical about the future good intentions of the Company. Uneducated in the more benevolent theories of imperial rule (and indeed for the time being unschooled at all)

they saw few benefits flowing from their taxes or obedience to the Company.

The Birch era saw a flurry of legislative reform, ranging from a complete overhaul of the judicial system to the licensing of dogs in towns, but little of the administrative activity yet produced any unequivocal advantages for the indigenous population. The judicial system created by Birch was an attempt to give legal precision, or at least a degree of respectability, to the frequently *ad hoc* practices of earlier years. It created a High Court (the highest court of appeal), Sessions Courts, and three grades of magistrates' courts. The Sessions judges now had to have legal training, and the magistrates had to have passed appropriate examinations in the Indian Penal Code and Codes of Criminal and Civil Procedure, and the Company's laws and regulations. Below the magistrates' courts, the Mahomedan Customs Proclamation of 1902 and the Village Administration Proclamation of 1903 established chiefs' courts empowered to try offences under any statutory law or under the law or customs ('religious or sexual') of the complainant's 'race'. In practice the chiefs' courts seem to have been regarded as having jurisdiction over virtually anyone who was not European, including Chinese, although as yet there were no Chinese government chiefs. At grassroots level the reformed judicial system still dealt out rough justice when administered by district officers or chiefs unfamiliar with local custom, and frequently it, and its alien punishments such as imprisonment, were avoided in favour of communal systems for the settling of disputes.[46]

The problem of indigenous indebtedness as revealed in *ulu* Kinabatangan concerned Birch, and he attempted to deal with it in a variety of ways. Along the Kinabatangan he placed government clerks to supervise trading at *tamu*, and control the giving of credit. Generally he attempted to control traders by issuing licences and requiring registration of all transactions. Money-lenders were also registered, and their accounts had to be examined regularly by district officers.[47] Indebtedness remained, however, impossible to wipe out. The European

officers could not conceivably check thoroughly all the paperwork involved, or know intimately the tangled economic interrelationships of their districts.[48]

Other reforms intended for indigenous welfare also proved misplaced. A system of cattle-branding, introduced to prevent cattle stealing in the north-west Bajau areas, was only mildly successful. A ban on the export of rice, to reduce imports and provide for areas suffering shortages, merely brought about reduced production in exporting areas, for such legislation required formal mechanisms for the survey of agriculture and the redirection of surpluses. An officer specifically interested in padi production was finally appointed by Gueritz in 1909, but by then the ban on exports had long been forgotten. A scheme for the licensing of boats, designed principally to control the peoples of Darvel Bay, became elsewhere in the territory merely another tax, as did the licensing of guns. The gun licences were intended to prevent a repetition of rebellion such as Mat Salleh's, when the government had been confronted with the latest in modern rifles. On the Sipitang the Kadayans now protested about the cost of acquiring weapons to scare away the pigs which ravaged their crops.[49]

Birch's most cherished piece of legislation in the sphere of indigenous administration was that intended gradually to abolish poll-tax and introduce a land settlement.[50] His proclamation exempted from poll-tax any person paying more than $3 per year to the government in rents and taxes, and instituted a system for the demarcation of indigenously held land (at a fee of $2) upon which a rent of 50¢ per acre per year would subsequently be paid. The titles would be 'permanent, heritable, and transferable' if rent were paid regularly, but also if the land were continuously cultivated and if the occupier gave his labour as required for public works, in such matters as the building of irrigation systems, the clearing of rivers and paths, and the upkeep of fences, burial grounds, or mosques.

The legislation was not popular, either with the administration or population. The lands department was at full stretch demarcating town lots, as Jesselton, Beaufort, Tenom and other

new towns expanded, and laying out new estates. In 1908 A. C. Pearson took charge and produced a highly critical report. He found strong resistance to the taking-up of indigenous titles (under the legislation demarcation was not compulsory) and even stronger resistance to the paying of rent:[51]

> In no uncertain terms the Resident warned me that strict adherence to [the collection of rents] would result in trouble and probably loss of life, and that it was necessary to work slowly and with great tact. . . . In other words the Government have laid down a policy of land administration which at present they dare not enforce.

The resistance to taking up titles and paying rent was based on a variety of considerations. The indigenous peoples had their own land-ownership systems, and often these, involving ownership by more than one member of a family, were incompatible with the government's system. There appeared to be no benefits in the new titles, a view enhanced by the fact that, generally speaking, indigenous land holdings had, since Creagh's governorship, been protected when estate lands and Chinese allotments had been laid out. The taking up of titles was irksome, for it involved payment of the $2 demarcation fee, and a good deal more for those who owned several plots, plus the annual rental. Neither did it mean (as Birch had intended) freedom from poll-tax, for Gueritz, when governor, abolished this provision. Thus Birch's legislation lost any rationale in indigenous eyes. The only areas where significant demarcation and titling took place were Putatan, Tuaran, and Papar,[52] where there were real fears of encroachment by Europeans and Chinese upon very fertile holdings.

Meanwhile, poll-tax continued to be gathered. In 1910 Pearson, now acting governor, made the astonishing discovery that no legislation existed to govern its collection, a belated reminder of the casual early years under Treacher. Accordingly, a proclamation was issued in 1911 requiring $1 a year of every indigenous male adult, except the aged, those incapable of working, in government service or in gaol, and those living in Jesselton, Sandakan, and Darvel Bay. The

exemption of Darvel Bay was allowed for diplomatic reasons, for the area was still only lightly under Company control. The exemptions in the towns were allowed because it was felt that indigenes who had settled there contributed to revenue in other and more sophisticated ways, like the Chinese who were never poll-taxed. Poll-tax was viewed as a primitive tax for primitive people, and unsuitable 'for the more civilised areas'.[53]

Thus Birch's reforms, as they worked themselves out during Gueritz's governorship, conferred few if any blessings on the Sabahan population. To the Europeans they appeared progressive, tokens of an administration now bent on combining efficient rule with interest in the popular welfare. This understanding was lost on the population. For the chiefs and headmen the 'reforms' were an embarrassment, involving the justification of unpopular novelty to their peoples. The headmen in non-Muslim communities particularly had always depended upon the respect and support of their communities, and now the reconciliation of district officer demands with custom and communal opinion created tensions difficult of solution. In Muslim societies likewise, although hierarchical social structures made the Company's native chief system seem appropriate, it must have been hard to enforce the government's wishes over obligations to kinfolk, or to persons of equal or higher status not honoured with government rank.

Accordingly, too much should not be made of the district officer's testy views of their chiefs and headmen. Despite the increased number of staff each officer still had to supervise large districts and many communities. They also were moved from station to station in a constant attempt to accommodate sickness, leave, and resignations. The raw cadet, after a few months under a resident or district officer to observe the routine and pick up his first smatterings of Malay, would find himself required to identify with a set of communities whose languages or dialects were quite unknown to him, and then, perhaps within further months, with another set. Nor surprisingly he would criticize his chiefs and headmen if they failed to behave like the school prefects to whom he was more used.

The ideal of district officer life in this era was best expressed by A. B. C. Francis, who joined the service in 1902. For him the decade under Birch and Gueritz was a golden age:[54]

> Although hardly out of his 'teens, the bounds to his sway—at any rate in remote districts—were mainly theoretical. Various codes of law were there to guide him in court it is true but their provisions were not too rigidly followed and custom tempered with common sense played a prominent part. . . . A monthly report was expected, but more as a pious hope than as a really serious obligation. It was usually submitted sooner or later but I am not prepared to state that it always conveyed the whole truth—the district officer was expected to use his initiative, administer his district, and not talk too much about what he had done. The red-tape fetters of centralisation had not then begun to bind him . . . no-one seemed to itch for returns of any sort, and all that was definitely asked of one was to run the district decently, to get in touch and keep in touch with the inhabitants, and to administer justice . . . the result was that one spent one's time travelling the district, and getting to know the natives, their customs, their wants and troubles and their languages in a way that the modern district officer, from lack of time, simply cannot. . . . One cannot help wondering whether the endeavour to inflict modern methods and systems of administration has not been too vehemently enforced. . . . After all, the tribes of North Borneo are still centuries behind the rest of the world and are really more fitted for a benevolent autocracy, a patriarchate with the district officer as, more or less, the local personification of Justice and Government, a friendly, understanding, sympathetic despot. . . .
> . . . For four years . . . I was alone [in the Tempasuk] and my only amusement was the study of the native. I could speak Bajau and Dusun, the native dialects, with fair fluency and could get at the real thought of the inhabitants. . . . It has often been my lot to sit until the grim grey hours of the dawn listening to old Kabong of Kiau spinning his endless yarns of olden days or his folk tales of the Dusun race, and at the last moment to pick up the information I wanted.

Francis was most unusual in having been so long in one area. He also sentimentalized his role, one suspects, and in his favour. Oscar Cook, another writer of reminiscences about district officer life, described the communities he supervised with more

genuine affection and sympathy than Francis, and also revealed the other side of the coin for the district officer:[55]

> It is not an easy task, and the moments of depression and disappointment are many. . . . To him frequently comes the thought that he is forgotten by the Authorities, or curtly treated as but a small and insignificant cog in the wheel of Administration. His pet schemes so often get turned down; money which to him and his district seems essential is not forthcoming; official communications are so soulless and disheartening; his latest protégé and chief is not fulfilling his early promise; the mail has brought no letters from home . . . the rice crop has been attacked by a plague of rats and sparrows; an epidemic has broken out. . . .

The least sentimental and most probing account of district officer life came from I. H. N. Evans, who, like Francis, served in the Tempasuk. Amongst many critical comments on the Company's government, two are relevant here. He was critical of the constant moving about of officers, since the people never got to know with whom they were dealing, and preferred the long stay of a disliked European rather than constant change. He pointed out that disturbances and calamities were blamed on spirits upset by the comings and goings. He also claimed that it was difficult for the district officer ever to find out the truth, or the whole truth, about local affairs. The Kadazan headman was not one to meddle in another's dealings, nor had he any special motivation for telling on friends (unless he had a grudge), and he might well be involved in the activities himself.[56] Evans' testimony bears out what might be suspected of many communities, even those close to stations and regularly under the district officer's eye. Beneath the imposed government customary social organization persisted, and what was considered to be ineffectiveness on the part of chiefs and headmen from the district officers' point of view was in fact the subtle reconciliation, conscious and unconscious, of traditional life with the new order. The difficulties of this task, and the benefits reaped by the administration in the seeming tranquility of life, went quite unappreciated.

Varieties of Change

The reluctance of the population to participate in the development of government was not based on unapprehending antagonism to change. In the decade 1900–10 local people worked in increasing numbers as wage labourers on the estates, in timber camps, and in the towns. This was a process which the Company did not intend, although for the time being it did not oppose, and it reflected therefore a conscious popular attempt to participate in the economic expansion taking place. The attempt, urged on by itinerant labour recruiters, may have been naïve, but the growth of indigenous involvement in wage labour suggests that on balance such employment was a profitable alternative, or addition, to traditional methods of livelihood.

The ethnic composition of the contracted labour force was never given with any precision, the categories being simplified to 'Chinese', 'Javanese', and 'Malay' (or 'Native'), and it is impossible therefore to determine what indigenous workers were employed under contract or from which areas they came. The core of the contracted labour force remained imported, from China and Java, but in 1910, 3,185 'Malays or Natives' were under contract out of a total of 17,594. By 1917, 25 per cent of a contracted labour force of 21,000 would be 'indigenous and Malay'.[57] These figures do not include, however, day and periodic labourers, of which some employers used substantial numbers. One estate, at Menggatal, employed *ulu* Tuaran people, without contract, exclusively; another employed lower Tuaran people periodically.[58] The estates at Sapong and Melalap made extensive use of casual labour, from Tambunan and Keningau and from the surrounding Murut areas, the latter at first under dubious arrangements:[59]

> In return for the ulu Muruts agreeing to work village by village twice a year, for fifteen days at a time, the Manager has given them permission to buy not more than 50 katties of rice per man per mensem at the estate price. This is naturally a great boon to them, with rice at 50¢ a gantang here, and their own rice crop a failure

through the continued drought. This I hope will ensure the Estate getting some free labour when they require it.

Sophistication about the value of their labour came rapidly, however, once workers from various areas were exposed to each other, and acquired information about competing rates of pay. At Sapong the locals had to be prohibited from working on the railway after the estate manager had protested that they were abandoning the estate in favour of the higher wages which the railway paid.[60] But competition between employers for labour was not normally regulated and was, indeed, intense in under-populated Sabah. In general the wages offered seem to have been attractive enough to entice a growing number of indigenous labourers, and certainly had to be attractive to guarantee a supply of non-contracted day labour, and the regular appearance of workers employed seasonally. These were mostly Kadazan and Murut peoples, who turned to wage labour during the quiet periods of the agricultural year. The Bajaus more readily took up long-term contracts on the estates, and therefore were more open to exploitation through manipulation of contracts.

Conditions for contract labour on the estates seem to have improved little in this decade. A searching report on estate labour compiled in 1909 brought to light conditions sometimes reminiscent of the evils on the first tobacco estates in the 1890s.[61] Gueritz, in one of the few legislative reforms he undertook, introduced in 1908 a new proclamation governing estate conditions, but the district officers, who were expected to make oversight of the estates a part of their duties, were either afraid to challenge the managements or were sympathetic to them. Inspection was regarded as spying, and in any case critical reports were received reluctantly by the Company, which had had to lure the estate companies to Sabah and was anxious to offset their difficulties, of isolation, transport, and labour recruitment. A critic of the estates was not far wrong when he called the Company, in its relations with the planters' lobby, 'a box of puppets'.[62]

A common lure into contract labour, as elsewhere in the colonial world, was the payment of an advance (up to $75) upon signing. It was easy then for a contracted labourer to remain in debt to the estate management, through further charges placed against his account for food, clothing, the recruiter's fee and other items, and, in the case of imported labour, transport costs. Even under the proclamation of 1908 the onus was upon the employee to seek a statement of account, and if at the end of his contract he was in debt he could be forcibly detained for up to two years. Voluntary continuation of the contract was, however, quite common, since freedom was not greatly attractive to labourers discharged penniless. Accordingly, many labourers spent years on the estates in a condition akin to the 'debt slavery' which, in its indigenous form, had been abolished by the Europeans.[63]

Day and periodic labourers do not, however, appear to have suffered gross manipulation by employers, and it is significant that when the Company began to question the increasing movement by indigenous people into paid labour it did not do so on the grounds that the labourers were being misused. Rather it questioned the trend on broad economic, social, and cultural grounds. The fear grew that the padi output was declining, and also the output of jungle produce. The pools of labour available to district officers for public works were also diminishing. It was stressed too that chiefs and headmen disliked the loss of authority occasioned by the departure of young men and women from under their jurisdiction:[64]

> Gedeh [a Tambunan chief] likewise wishes to know what is the use of being a Government chief of a kampong which contains only the old and sick and womenfolk. He points out that he cannot undertake with any effect to collect taxes. . . . Head Chief Romantai, so far as he allows himself to make any definite pronouncement on any given subject, disfavours this emigration to estates and considers that the cultivation and care of their fields is a higher scale of employement.

The Europeans also now began to regret disruption to what they regarded as traditional social organization and culture,

painting a sometimes lurid picture of the innovations attracting the labourers. One former district officer epitomized this ironic turn in Company philosophy in reminiscing about Kadazan labourers:[65]

> . . . they lost their sense of individuality and clever craftsmanship; they became one of a crowd, housed, fed and cared for. In the end they would succumb to cheap and gaudy clothes; to gambling and an easy prostitution—for women as well as men formed part of the labour force of an estate. . . . The old independence—a blend of communism and individualism—was obliterated, and, in its place, there flourished the lower instincts of modern civilisation.

The Company, claiming that it 'could not allow the interests of the natives to be sacrificed to those of the planters', would move in 1918 to curb the recruitment of indigenous wage labour, licensing recruiters and barring them from districts where it considered recruitment undesirable. The policy—designed essentially to conserve padi-growing communities—was arrived at without any investigation of the needs or wishes of the would-be labourers themselves.[66]

Later developments in this field lie outside the scope of this work, but it has been important to notice the relatively early, and selective, acceptance of socio-economic change by Sabahans, and the conflicting selectivity of the Company in its views of desirable and undesirable change. On the one hand the Company bewailed the inertia of communities reluctant to accept administrative modifications to indigenous society; on the other, it was prepared to limit indigenous economic and social initiatives. Soon, further administrative change would generate widespread popular antagonism, and, in the southern Murut areas, lead to the catastrophe of the 'Rundum Rebellion'. But the Company would persist in its belief that it was dealing with a population resistant to all change.

Meanwhile, to turn to the southern Murut areas in the early years of the century, the Company's administration here lagged far behind that in the rest of the territory. Even in 1910, to plunge into these areas was, in administrative terms, to step

back a decade or more, to that era when unsupervised agents, police, and traders exploited the interior with the Company's ignorant blessing. Change here still meant simply the reduction of indigenous societies to confusion.

Until 1908 the vast and difficult territory south and east of Tenom was merely explored occasionally by Europeans. In 1904 an officer travelled down the Sook, Bangawan, and Talankai rivers accompanied by two Ibans and five Tenom Muruts. The communities he encountered seemed surprised at the modest force, for rumour had spread that he was bringing 900 men with him. He, in turn, was surprised at Murut beliefs about the Company's taxation policies. A dollar was charged for every large fish caught, and for keeping a dog. Man and wife were required to live on opposite river-banks, and were charged $1 for every visit. Of every two children the government took one.[67] The officer presumed these ideas to be misinformed fantasy, but it is possible that such demands had been arbitrarily made by interlopers claiming Company authority. In view of the Murut population decline (not, of course, realized at this time) the myth that the Company took every second child also had a sad appropriateness.

In 1905 the whole of the Company's territory suffered a severe smallpox outbreak. The worst known number of casualties occurred on the west coast—at Papar 1,317 deaths were recorded, out of 4,676 cases—but heavy outbreaks of the disease were also reported through the Murut areas. In the same year the railway had reached Tenom, and brought an influx of traders and jungle-produce collectors who now took hours instead of days to reach the interior from the coast.[68] At the same time the customary method of resisting epidemic disease—shunning or forbidding access to travellers accompanied by 'evil spirits'—was no longer possible under a government which demanded open communications and punished those who blocked them.

The access to traders seems to have been arranged chiefly through Nakodi Bali, an Iban government chief since 1899, and O. K. Shahbandar Bukair, a Tenom Murut and government

chief since the 1880s. They guided visiting European officers through the area, and sponsored peace-making ceremonies, optimistically viewed by the Europeans as bringing to an end local feuds and inter-community warfare. The collection of poll-tax was encouraged through the headmen contacted at these ceremonies, and the Company's wish for trade was impressed upon them.[69] Nakoda Bali and his Iban followers appear to have exercised enormous influence on the Sook and Dalit rivers and their tributaries, and on the upper tributaries of the Sembakung (the Rundum, Talankai, and Nabawan). Since the disruption in Murut areas in the early 1890s unsponsored traders had been discouraged by the Company, and Nakoda Bali, having won the Company's favour, had consolidated what was virtually a trading monopoly.

The government was unaware of most of the Ibans' activities until 1906, the year of Nakoda Bali's death, when F. W. Fraser managed to gather evidence from Murut headmen now willing to talk. The Ibans were charged with:[70] '. . . taking and selling slaves, fining people at their own will, divorcing and fining their wives and relations without a proper enquiry according to Murut custom before the chiefs, and inciting others to raid, and at times accompanying raiders'.

Some Ibans whose misdeeds could be established were imprisoned. The remainder were ordered to erect their own village, at the junction of the Rundum and Samalong. Marriages and divorces between Ibans and Murut women were to be registered, and the new Iban chief, Junit, had to report regularly to Tenom. In 1907 a district officer found the Iban community 'very humble'.[71] At the same time regular police patrols through the area were instituted to check raiding, whether or not inspired by Ibans. These patrols had some success in checking Iban slaving and head-taking activities. On one occasion twenty-three Ibans were rounded up with assistance from Raja Brooke and sentenced to death.[72]

Nevertheless government control of the southern Murut areas remained fragile, and knowledge negligible. In 1908 the first district officer was posted, and by 1910 Rundum was linked

with Tenom by a bridle-path soon to be pushed on southwards towards Pensiangan. The telegraph would shortly follow. Most of the attention of the district officer was absorbed with establishing these communications through a baffling and exhausting terrain. Wherever he or police patrols went poll-tax was collected, and where the bridle-path and telegraph went local labour was conscripted to build them. This was virtually the sum of government contact, and the district officers' reports, although offering many comments about Murut life and society, read like the notes of transient explorers, remote and disjointed observations on an alien people.

One may only hazard guesses, therefore, regarding Murut views of the Company, or of the changes that were occurring as a result of the penetration of Murut communities by new authorities. There are occasional glimpses in the records, however, of the decline in status of once significant chiefs, and of the mounting social tension which would boil over in 1915. In 1907 a district officer came upon Antak, on the Saliu:[73]

> . . . an old man, and seems somewhat obstinate. He was not at all inclined to promise to give up his time-honoured feuds, but after I had distinctly given him to understand that raiding was one of the things Government was determined to put a stop to, he saw reason, and an amicable agreement was made between the various chiefs of the Siliu. Antak was formerly a chief of great power, levying taxes on those coming up the river from Belungan, and history says that at one time he was powerful enough to attack the Tidoengs of Lotang, some days down-stream. I was told that this Government many years ago found it necessary to send a small expedition from the Kinabatangan under Corporal Agan to deal with Antak. . . .

In 1910 Antak was again to be in trouble, in what the district officer called 'a scuffle with the police' for refusing to collect poll-tax.[74] In 1915 Antak would become, like most people of the area, a rebel.

1. Clifford, 'on loan' from the Colonial Office, had spent most of his service in the Malay States. Between 1896 and 1898 he was Resident in Pahang, to which post he returned after his service with the Company. See J. de V. Allen, 'Two Imperialists', *JMBRAS*, XXXVII, pt. 1, 1964, for a study of Clifford's character and attitudes to colonial rule.

2. C.O. 874/265, 12/2/00, p. 355; 14/2/00, p. 384; 15/2/00, p. 421; C.O. 874/266, 7/9/00, p. 267.

3. C.O. 874/266, 2/8/00, p. 171.

4. C.O. 874/266, 1/10/00, p. 413.

5. C.O. 874/266, 26/7/00, p. 224; 8/9/00, p. 442. The Tuaran harvest failures affected an area from the Mengkabong to the Sulaman. No simple link between this problem and Mat Salleh's support on the west coast can be established; the Tuaran Kadazans turned out *en masse* to assist the Company at Tambunan.

6. C.O. 874/266, 27/9/00, p. 373.

7. C.O. 874/266, 17/9/00, p. 280.

8. C.O. 874/265, 17/4/00, p. 778; C.O. 874/266, 29/9/00, p. 393.

9. C.O. 874/266, 21/7/00, p. 117.

10. Birch was the son of J. W. W. Birch, who was killed in Perak in 1875.

11. C.O. 874/317, Cowie to Birch 10/1/02, 18 and 26/9/02.

12. C.O. 874/215, Birch to Lucas, 26/10/02.

13. Although at this time the *Herald* reprinted many reports from departments and individuals, remarks which were viewed as reflecting badly on the Company were deleted (C.O. 874/274, 3/8/04, p. 204). Even Clifford engaged in censorship, on the grounds that the function of the paper was to advertise the Company and attract investment. (C.O. 874/266, 31/7/00, p. 163.)

14. F.O. 12/125, p. 250, *A Report Upon British North Borneo*, 1903.

15. ibid., p. 229, Cowie to Birch, 16/10/03. See also C.O. 874/272, 25/11/03, p. 506.

16. *Herald*, 2/1/04, p. 1.

17. G. C. Woolley, 13, 14/12/03.

18. C.O. 874/215, Martin to Jessel, 20/11/03, Martin to Cowie, 12/12/03. Martin was replaced as chairman by Sir Charles Jessel; in 1909 Cowie became chairman as well as managing director.

19. C.O. 874/273, 22/1/04, p. 159.

20. C.O. 874/276, 12/8/05, p. 104.

21. F.O. 12/125, Memorandum on Birch, p. 279.

22. C.O. 874/282, 29/9/08, p. 238; 5/12/08, p. 390.

23. C.O. 874/281, 17/3/08, p. 241.

24. C.O. 874/285, 17/4/10, p. 289; C.O. 874/286, 22/7/10, p. 38.

25. See C.O. 874/88, Reports of Annual General Meetings, 1895–1910.

26. *Herald*, 1/9/10, p. 154.

27. The revenue from poll-tax and inland passes (for collecting jungle produce) together amounted to £1409 in 1901, £3749 in 1910. (C.O. 874/88, Reports and Statements of Accounts, 1901–10.)

28. C.O. 874/280, 22/11/07, p. 539; C.O. 874/281, 16/6/08, p. 515. The figures on Chinese are derived from the census reports published in the *Herald*, 1/10/01, p. 307 and *Gazette*, 2/10/11, p. 259. Neither census was accurate, but may be accepted as fairly reliable regarding the easily accessible Chinese population.

29. Speakers at the Company's dinners included Charles Dilke, Hugh Low, Frank Swettenham, Spenser St. John, Andrew Clarke, and George Goldie.

30. *Herald*, 1/2/08, p. 21.

31. See J. F. Warren: *The North Borneo Chartered Company's Administration of the Bajau, 1878–1909: the Pacification of a Maritime, Nomadic People*, Papers in International Studies, Southeast Asia Series, Ohio University, 1971.

32. See N. Tarling, *Britain, the Brookes and Brunei*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1971, ch. 5.

33. S.G.A. File 834, Bridle Paths in the Interior.

34. C.O. 874/286, 25/8/10, p. 149.

35. C.O. 874/275, 22/3/05, p. 356.

36. *Gazette*, 22/4/11, p. 73.

37. *Herald*, 1/11/01, p. 348.

38. *Gazette*, 1/9/03.

39. S.G.A. File 141, Native Chiefs.

40. *Herald*, 2/1/07, p. 1; *Gazette*, 1/6/08, p. 97.

41. C.O. 874/270, 22/6/02, p. 187; C.O. 874/287, 30/11/11, p. 815; *Gazette*, 1/9/11, p. 218.

42. I. H. N. Evans, *Among Primitive Peoples in Borneo*, London, 1922, p. 219; O. Cook, op. cit., pp. 165–6, 209–13.

43. C.O. 874/273, 29/7/04, p. 55.

44. *Gazette*, 2/11/06, p. 211; 1/5/07, p. 93; 1/6/08, p. 97; 22/4/11, pp. 57, 68, 73; 1/6/11, p. 117.

45. ibid., 1/8/11, p. 173.

46. *Gazette*, 2/11/06, p. 211; 6/8/01, p. 126; 1/9/03, 3/10/03, Proclamation XIV; 27/11/03, Proclamation XVII; C.O. 874/273, 22/6/04, p. 852; C.O. 874/574, Acting Governor to Chairman, 13/5/11, 10/10/11; C.O. 874/154, Dane, ch. 3.

47. *Gazette*, 1/4/01, p. 60; 19/8/01, Proclamations XII, XIV; 3/11/02, p. 395.

48. See O. Cook, op. cit., p. 211.

49. C.O. 874/273, May 1904, p. 726.

50. *Gazette*, 4/6/02, Proclamation IX; 19/12/03, Proclamation XXIII.

51. C.O. 874/283, 11/5/09, p. 207.

52. Creagh's legislation to protect indigenous holdings against European and Chinese encroachment had generally been followed, but at Papar a celebrated case arose when Simon, a Papar headman, assisted by Catholic missionaries, petitioned the British High Commissioner for the restoration of land alienated to estates. His case was rejected in the courts, whereupon it was taken up by the Aborigines Protection Society. It sought rights to hilly land occasionally occupied in time of flood, where fruit trees were planted and bamboo and rattan collected. The land also contained some graves, some of which had been disturbed by estate workers. The Company redressed some claims, but rejected most. It was a case of two conflicting concepts of land tenure in collision (though some planters claimed the petition had arisen out of a new awareness of land values), and in the end the petitioners' case was not helped by being represented in Western terms ('cutting down native orchards', 'desecrating native cemeteries', 'seizures of native land'). The Company was able to refute such sensationalist charges, while ignoring the subtler issues at stake. C.O. 874/286, 20/7/10, p. 217; C.O. 874/475, Acting Governor to Chairman, 6/3/11, 24/6/11, 31/7/11, 19/8/11; C.O. 874/697 Complaints by Aborigines Protection Society.

53. C.O. 874/286, 31/12/10, p. 627; *Gazette*, 1/5/11, Proclamation 1.

54. C. Bruce (pseud.), *Twenty Years in Borneo*, London, 1924, pp. 46–50.

55. O. Cook, op. cit., p. 167.

56. I. H. N. Evans, op. cit., pp. 73–5, 83.

57. *Gazette*, 1/6/11, Annual Report 1910; S.G.A., President to Governor, No. 898, 5/12/18, p. 16 (in subsequent footnotes referred to as 'Memo. on Labour, 1918').

58. *Gazette*, 1/3/09, p. 33; 1/6/11, p. 117.

59. C.O. 874/276, 15/8/05, p. 183.

60. C.O. 874/274, 13/12/04, p. 888.

61. C.O. 874/283, 23/3/09, p. 115.

62. Memo. on Labour, 1918, p. 30.

63. *Gazette*, 25/7/08, Proclamation IV; C.O. 874/281, 23/4/08, p. 306; C.O. 874/286, 25/7/10, p. 60; *Gazette*, 1/4/11, Notification 69.

64. Memo. on Labour, 1918, p. 19.

65. O. Cook, op. cit., p. 107.

66. Memo. on Labour, 1918.

67. C.O. 874/274, 5/11/04, p. 736.

68. C.O. 874/276, 15/8/05, p. 183; C.O. 874/277, 7/5/06, pp. 383, 394.

69. See e.g. C.O. 874/270, 19/9/02, p. 487; C.O. 874/273, 4/3/04, p. 411.

70. C.O. 874/279, 22/1/07, p. 298; 1/4/07, p. 301.

71. C.O. 874/280, 31/7/07, p. 168; *Gazette*, 2/11/06, p. 211, 3/8/09, p. 216.

72. *Herald*, 1/4/08, p. 63; *Gazette*, 1/5/09, p. 107.

73. C.O. 874/280, 31/7/07, p. 168.

74. *Gazette*, 1/4/10, p. 35.

6

MIXED MOTIVES, 1910–1915

Serving God and Mammon

> We remember that we are not a trading company; We are a government. Administration is our chief duty—care for the welfare of the population and of the country committed to our charge. Do not let the shareholders be frightened. I do not pretend that pure and undiluted philanthropy is our only object. . . . But the shareholders . . . may be happy in the knowledge that they at least can faithfully serve both God and Mammon. The more generous the policy the richer they become. . . .[1]

THUS Sir West Ridgeway, Cowie's successor as chairman of the Company, initiating a programme of administrative reform in 1910. In that year the mood within the Company was overwhelmingly for change. Even the quiet Gueritz had written from Sabah that, because of the country's rapid economic development, it was time to overhaul 'the simple and amateur machinery' of government.[2] But Ridgeway believed that the administration could be reformed at the same time for the benefit of the indigenous population, and that the two purposes of reform were interchangeable. Events were to prove him wrong.

With the conservative Cowie gone, the Court of Directors now became the pacemaker in the development of administrative policy. In terms of day-to-day administration Ridgeway's inclination was to relax the hawklike oversight from London which Cowie had exercised and in which Gueritz had acquiesced. He had known the Company only in times of prosperity,

and was not as concerned as Cowie for the scrupulous nursing of every detail and every dollar. Between 1911 and 1913 London and Borneo were, however, brought closer together than they had ever been. Gueritz left Sabah late in 1910, his son-in-law A. C. Pearson acting as his deputy until Ridgeway installed an old colonial acquaintance, F. R. Ellis, as governor when Gueritz decided not to return. Ellis, a brusque and eccentric Irishman in his mid-sixties, upset his officers and was retired after six months when Ridgeway came out to Borneo to investigate.[3] F. W. Fraser, by now the Company's most experienced officer, then was left as deputy until the arrival of J. Scott Mason, formerly of the Malay States administration. Mason died within five weeks when his horse threw him in the drive of Government House, Jesselton; Ellis had constructed the drive through a former Muslim graveyard, and legend was to have it that the drive, and the house, were haunted.[4] Ridgeway was again forced to visit Sabah and assume charge himself. He then decided to have A. C. Pearson trained for the job, and sent him off on a two-year tour to observe the colonial administrations in Hong Kong, Malaya, and Ceylon. Pearson would become governor in 1915. In the interim the Colonial Office loaned the services of C. C. Parr, also of the Malay States administration. Parr entered briskly into the reformist spirit initiated by the Court in 1910.

During this period the Company's economic growth, apparently in such a healthy state in 1910, faltered on two occasions, but the Court was not deeply perturbed. In 1911 the revenue sank below the £200,000 mark achieved in 1909 and 1910 by the boom in sales of land for rubber-planting, but the fall was accepted calmly as a return to the steadier growth-rate of the years 1900–8. Dividends of 5 per cent were maintained. The revenue indeed resumed its climb, again passing the £200,000 mark in 1913. The outbreak of war in 1914, and the disruption of trade, produced another slight setback, and dividends were temporarily deferred, but thereafter revenue climbed again until the post-war depression produced the first of the crises the Company would have to face in the inter-war years. Mean-

while, between 1910 and 1915 the Company steadily increased the rate of expenditure. If the ghost of Cowie haunted the Company's Old Broad Street offices, it would have nodded approval however. The increasing expenditure seemed to be producing a more rapidly increasing income, for the new reformist Court was not blind to the balance sheet. Most of its reforms developed existing, or created new, sources of revenue.

The reformist movement was begun on three fronts. Sir Richard Dane, after forty years in various facets of the government of India, was invited to report on the Company's administration. Two railway experts from Malaya were called in to report on the troubles of the Company's railway. To solve another perennial source of trouble, the supply of imported labour, the former representative in China of the Transvaal mines, Young Riddell, was engaged to examine, with Dane, the labour traffic between China and Sabah and if possible to devise new methods of recruitment.

The last of these three aims alone bore no fruit. Riddell and Dane went to China in 1911 but found themselves thwarted by the British government, which refused to grant them introductions to its minister at Peking until the Company made clear its intention to reform its labour laws. The rubber boom had brought the Company's territory to public notice, and, at last, the British government had begun to put pressure upon the Company. The man immediately responsible was Sir John Anderson, then High Commissioner at Singapore and soon to be Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies. Anderson insisted that, as with the Federated Malay States, contracts might not exceed 300 days, and that the contract system be ended by 1914. The Company had no option but to accept these stipulations, and Riddell was given his introductions. Ridgeway, visiting Hong Kong in 1912, was forced by the authorities there to give similar undertakings before further recruitment could proceed.

During 1912 Riddell tried to establish his own recruiting scheme, but the political chaos in China and the hostility of the revolutionaries to the labour trade rendered his task hopeless.

The planters continued to draw their supplies of labour through the brokers of Singapore and Hong Kong, as yet unperturbed by the pressures upon the Company. In 1913 the Company proposed another elaborate scheme for the recruitment of labour to be financed by an assessment of labour-use by employers. The scheme became a topic of desultory debate for five years. In 1914, however, the contract system of recruitment was abolished. Henceforth all contracts were signed when the labourers arrived in Borneo, under legislation passed in 1911. To this the British authorities offered no objection. The signing of contracts in the territory removed some of the abuses associated with the broker system, for it meant the administration could exercise authority over payment and conditions from the beginning.[5]

On the estates conditions were slowly being improved. With the growth in the numbers of estates and of labourers the government found that its former policy of deference towards the planters caused more trouble than it was worth. The despatches of the years 1910–12 bulge with reports of estate disturbances to which the police had been called. Parr and his successors took a tougher line with the planters, enforcing the regulations and more readily prosecuting managers guilty of mistreatment of their labourers. Even the redoubtable Frank Lease, champion of the planters' lobby, was brought to trial in 1913 for assault.[6] After 1914 estate gaols were no longer permitted, and flogging had to be carried out in the presence of a government officer and a doctor. Slowly the planters began to accept the government's argument that well-cared-for labourers brought better returns than had the ruthlessly treated pioneer workers of earlier decades.

Dane visited the territory for nine weeks in 1911. Though his report frequently urged changes, it was basically favourable to the Company. Written very much from the point of view of a colonial administrator of the period, it was primarily concerned with administrative efficiency, but, within those terms, it demonstrated how far the Company had come in the previous decade. It had none of the scorn or outrage which had

marked Clifford's view of the administration in 1900. The report was favourably received by the Company, and its recommendations became the basis of the later reforms.[6]

Dane's report began with an examination of the European civil service, considering the numbers, then about sixty, adequate. In the next few years the numbers grew slightly, until the outbreak of war, when they returned to about sixty. About actual administration Dane had little to say, except in the matter of dispensing justice, where he was critical of anomalies in the judicial structures, and of the lack of strict attention to the law and to procedures, although he supposed that 'substantial justice' was done in the great majority of cases. Dane found no fault with the indigenous courts, praising the assistance rendered by the paid chiefs and commenting, with some *naïveté*, 'it is good policy to maintain the authority of the natural leaders'. Following his report no major changes in the judicial structures were introduced, but the anomalies were removed and the powers of the various grades of the administration were made more explicit. Hand in hand with this, members of the service were given positions and promoted strictly in accordance with their ability to pass examinations in the territory's laws.[8]

In the matter of the making of laws Dane recommended the introduction of a legislative council. In 1912 such a council was instituted, with 7 official members, including the governor, and 4 unofficial members, comprising 2 representatives of the planters, 1 of the remaining European community, and 1 of the Chinese community. Despite its name the council was purely an advisory body, and the Court retained the full right to legislate without its intervention.[9] In 1915 Parr introduced an 'advisory council for native affairs', composed of selected Company chiefs appointed by the governor.[10] Such chiefs were given the title *orang kaya kaya*. The first members of the chief's council were all of that small select band of chiefs who had proved energetic in doing the Company's business. Even so, Pearson, who inherited the institution from Parr, rather damned it with faint praise when he merely reported of its second meeting, in 1916, that it gave the chiefs confidence, and that they had made

useful suggestions.[11] For the present, all attempts to introduce quasi-democratic forms into the administration's decision-making and legislative processes were to be of negligible significance. An idea to form local councils of chiefs never developed at all. The significance and prestige of some of these chiefs was, however, enhanced by another of Parr's measures, which introduced the idea of non-European assistant officers (to be known after 1919 as deputy assistant district officers). The first of these appointments was Pengiran Haji Omar, the Brunei Malay who had distinguished himself at Sipitang and Papar. He was reported not to be popular with Kadazan peoples, but was stationed on the Putatan, primarily a Kadazan area. Haji O. K. Mohamed Arsat, the Banjar at Kota Belud, was also appointed, in recognition of the 'wholesome fear' he had induced in the people of the Tempasuk district. At Kudat, where there was now a sizeable Chinese community, Sia Qui Boon, since 1888 a government clerk, was given the new rank. These men were invested with the powers of a third-class magistrate (they could imprison for one month and fine up to $50) and were expected to perform duties similar to that of a European assistant district officer. The system was slowly to develop as a result of the war, the shortage of Europeans, and in the interests of economy, although its development was inhibited by the shortage of educated Sabahans.[12]

Education was something to which scarcely any attention was yet paid.[13] In 1911 Dane considered it doubtful if the Company could afford an education department, but he suggested the establishment of vernacular schools under the supervision of the district officers. At this time about 600 children were regularly at school, most of them Chinese, with a number of Kadazans at Papar and Putatan, all being taught by Christian missions, Anglican, Catholic, and Lutheran. The government assisted them with a small yearly grant, in 1910 totalling $1,140. In 1911 the Court revised the system of subsidies, offering a capitation grant depending upon the competence of the school and the language of instruction. Those schools teaching in Chinese or Kadazan dialect received $1.50

per year per head, while those teaching in English received from $2 upward, according to the level being taught. An inspector of schools was appointed in 1913 to assess standards. By 1915 the total of children at school had risen to 1,180, although 200 of these were at unsubsidized private schools, for the most part Chinese. At Jesselton four children were being taught Malay. In the subsidized schools, 565 were learning English, 259 were being instructed in Chinese, and 156 in Kadazan. The government's contribution amounted to $3,153. The Bishop of Labuan and Sarawak criticized this trivial amount, pointing out how educated children benefited the territory. Of 119 boys leaving school between 1913 and 1916, 33 joined the government service as clerks and 27 joined commercial firms, the estates, or set up as traders.

No new policy on education developed, however, except in one regard. In 1915 a government training school intended to educate the sons of Company chiefs was opened at Jesselton, teaching in Malay, with instruction in both Jawi and Roman scripts. The syllabus included simple account-keeping and instruction in government ordinances. The school was founded with the notion of developing the hereditary principle for Company chiefs, but the idea was not pursued vigorously. Fees were charged, although the government made a contribution, and the school rarely had more than five pupils at any one time. Most were the sons of the Company's more prominent Chinese employees. Even in this respect, the Company's education policy for the present tended to favour the Chinese, already the principal beneficiaries of mission education and the only people practising self-help in education to any extent.

The only other development in the structure of the administration following Dane's visit was an increase in the numbers of police, from 735 in 1911 to 824 in 1915. The increase was considered necessary because of the growth of the estate population. In 1915 the force consisted of 163 Sikhs, 313 Pathans and Punjabis, 334 'native' Malays, Filipinos, and Borneans, and 5 Chinese.[14] Dane had recommended that the police be concentrated at stations where Europeans were present, and in the

next few years this was gradually accomplished. The era of unsupervised free-wheeling detachments finally came to an end, except, significantly, in the southern Murut areas, where police patrols still spent long periods unvisited by district officers.

Dane's recommendation regarding health had, like those on education, only small results of an immediate nature. Ridgeway hired Sir Allen Perry, principal medical officer of Ceylon, to make a comprehensive study in 1912.[15] Perry criticized the four 'primitive' government hospitals and urged modernization, although he praised the estate hospitals. He pointed out that, 'except for the merest fringe', there was no medical aid for the territory's peoples, and that means were now available for the prevention of smallpox, malaria, beriberi, and hookworm. Beginning in 1914 the government expanded its medical services slightly, equipping its hospitals, integrating its own with the estates' services (meeting strenuous opposition, for the planters were wary of subsidizing the care of patients other than their own) and erecting one or two dispensaries intended for the indigenous peoples. The standard of health in the towns and the estates rose, as concerted attacks began to be made on the prevailing diseases of the territory, but only in the matter of smallpox was there a general impact upon the whole territory. Between 1914 and 1921 about 70,000 people were vaccinated, and smallpox lost its terrors. The 1920s would see the beginnings of serious concern for the treatment of other diseases of the indigenous population.[16]

Other of Dane's recommendations had more rapid results, particularly in regard to land registration, the farms on opium, gambling, and liquor, and the destruction of jungle through shifting cultivation. These recommendations looked like raising revenue, rather than spending it. Dane, commenting on the ineffective land settlement introduced by Birch, urged the survey and settlement of all indigenous holdings and the payment of rent upon them in lieu of poll-tax. He wished to see poll-tax retained only where the people were 'savages or semi savages'.[17] In 1913 the district officers were asked to comment

upon the possibilities of land settlement in their areas. The prospects on the west coast seemed good, but elsewhere the officers reported potential difficulties. On the east coast there was scarcely any wet padi grown in permanent settlements. Likewise the officer for the Marudu Bay area wrote that[18] 'any sub-division made this year will not be recognised next year'. The interior residency also was dubious about land settlement. Only the settlement of the wet-padi lands at Tambunan was recommended. The comments on the mood of the peoples from Keningau southwards were a warning, unheeded at the time, of the troubles that were to erupt in 1915:[19]

> The natives are fairly well loaded with the paying of Poll tax, the clearing of Bridle Paths, and the ever increasing demands of Transport, for which service they are in no wise overpaid and which is a considerable tax upon both their domestic routine and not over energetic natures. While the liability to be called out may be common to all natives of the country I believe the interior natives are called out more regularly and frequently than natives in other districts.

The Murut peoples, it was reported, grew both hill and wet padi, the latter also by shifting cultivation in at least three-year cycles, which would mean the demarcation, and taxing, of large amounts of land. Wet-padi cultivation would cease unless some means were also found of taxing hill-padi cultivation. There was also the problem that land ownership was not clear, much of the cultivated land being 'common land', or used by other than the customary owners. When the people of Keningau and Tenom were required to demarcate their holdings roughly in preparation for the surveyor they retreated into the jungle when he arrived. Kunsanat, the Keningau chief, and all the headmen were reported to be advising their people to adopt passive resistance.

Parr was willing to face the difficulties, and believed that, if the government acted with discretion, all settled cultivated lands in the territory could be demarcated and taxed. In 1913 he issued a new comprehensive set of land laws which required the registration of native titles, thus introducing the element of

compulsion omitted in Birch's scheme.[20] Parr's scheme followed Birch's closely with some minor differences; a fee of $1 would be charged for demarcation of lots under 1 acre, $2 for larger areas, and a rent of 50¢ per acre per year, charged as soon as rough demarcation had taken place. Parr's legislation also made provision for communal titles, covering 'land held for the common use and benefit of natives'. The headman would hold the title without power of sale, although the land might be subdivided and retitled. The collectors of land revenue would mediate in all disputes, transfers, and successions. Clauses protecting indigenous lands from intrusion by aliens, similar to those introduced by Creagh in 1891, were also included in the legislation.

In 1914 the demarcation of lands began in earnest, the district officers being required to supervise the demarcators closely and watch for resistance.[21] Exhorting their people to accept the titles became the primary work of the officers, and because of this close supervision the demarcation followed a generally peaceful course, although the degree of acceptance varied from area to area. Much as the virtues of secure land titles were stressed, to most of the people the process was an irritation and an irrelevance, an imposition of an alien system upon customary methods of land tenure and use, which meant simply the payment of a new tax.[22] The endless difficulties over indigenous titles were in fact to be referred to the chiefs' courts in 1921, relieving the government collectors of the difficulties of understanding indigenous systems and claims.[23]

By the end of 1915 most holdings on the west coast had been given titles. At Papar 'indifference' was reported and the work was completed without the attendance of the landowners; there was however a readiness to take up titles to waste land, a result of bitterness over sales to estates. At Tuaran the people were reported to be eager to take up their titles. At Tempasuk there was 'no trouble'. On the other hand, the demarcation at Pandasan contributed to an open revolt, to be noted later. South of Papar the demarcation took on more than a touch of absurdity, as the officer at Membakut, taking 'a generous view of native

claims' in order to avoid friction, sliced up padi land, sago swamp, and jungle in sometimes huge and always complex lots. The people on the rivers in the Padas-Klias peninsula, ceded in 1885, remembered that Treacher had promised that they should never pay rent, and the demarcators therefore found themselves employed in establishing who were occupants of more than three years' standing before 1912, their titles providing freedom from rent. By 1916 all 'permanent' areas of cultivation in this area had been demarcated but an infinite number of unclaimed fruit trees and sago clumps testified to the lack of enthusiasm shown by the Bisayas for demarcation or settled cultivation in one area. The chief result of the demarcation in this area was to make clear what land was free of indigenous claim and therefore potentially for sale to Chinese settlers and to planters. In the interior demarcation was carried out without incident at Tambunan, where 1,327 lots constituting 3,025 acres had been surveyed by the end of 1915, and at Keningau, where 410 lots totalling 1,136 acres were registered.

The registration rapidly began to produce the expected revenue. In 1914 the rent roll for indigenously held land produced about $6,000, by 1920 $32,605.[24] Poll-tax receipts fell slightly as a result of land demarcation, but continued to be significant since only those people with land registered in their names were exempted from it, and the administration was now becoming highly efficient at ensuring its thorough collection. In 1914 and in 1916, and thereafter, annual poll-tax receipts were approximately $30,000.

The land settlement went hand in hand with Parr's 'Ladang ordinance' of 1913, designed to bring shifting cultivation under government control.[25] The destruction of jungle by shifting cultivation had first been brought to attention in 1909. Dane, in his report, reiterated the alarm expressed by the commissioners for lands and called for a full inquiry. The inquiry was not forthcoming, nor, for the present, a forestry department able to interest itself in more than the east-coast timber industry. As a substitute, Parr initiated a tax on shifting cultivation, to be policed by the indigenous authorities and the district officers.

Parr's ordinance was copied directly from legislation introduced in Perak in 1890, and it was initiated in Sabah without the awareness or approval of the Court.[26] The felling of primary jungle and secondary jungle of more than five to six years' standing was prohibited, unless a fee of 50¢ per acre was paid. The headmen were responsible for collecting the fees, and stood to be fined $25 for every acre felled without permit.

The ordinance was enforced in the Marudu Bay area, in the Tempasuk area, and in the interior, and immediately provoked resentment. The officer at Marudu Bay wrote that it was fulfilling its object but had produced many grievances. Parr allowed him a 'certain discretion' in policing the ordinance. The officer at Kota Belud pleaded for its suspension, but by then the damage had been done; the government was confronted with overt hostility on the north-west coast in 1915. In the interior the tax was accepted at Tambunan and Keningau, but the Resident at Tenom reported that it was producing emigration from the *ulu* Padas into Sarawak territory. Whether or not the tax was imposed in the Murut areas which revolted in 1915 is not clear. Parr ordered that its collection should not be enforced around Rundum, but it is certain that the rebels had heard of the tax. Subsequently the tax was enforced throughout the territory, though, it would be claimed in 1931, without any appreciable result in inhibiting shifting cultivation. In most areas the *ladang* tax rapidly turned into a flat-rate charge on every shifting cultivator, gathered along with his poll-tax. In the 1930s the tax would yield approximately $9,000 per year.

The final area in which the reformist mood of the Company in this era impinged upon its peoples was in the 'vices', opium-taking, gambling, and drinking. As in other areas discussed, the reforms were compromised by the fact that they were harnessed to the raising of revenue. In the new liquor taxes particularly, which affected the non-Muslim indigenous peoples, the reforms engendered great hostility, being seen simply as yet another novel tax imposition.

Dane, pronouncing the existing arrangements prejudicial to

both government and consumer, urged in 1911 the breaking-up of the Chinese syndicate which under Birch and Gueritz had exclusively controlled opium, liquor, and gambling. His reasoning appealed to a Company which, in Ridgeway's words, felt it could faithfully serve both God and Mammon. The existing policy neither discouraged the vices nor raised as much revenue as it might. Subsequently the government divided the farms, exercised direct control of the licences, and, in 1914, assumed complete control of the opium trade. The Company's revenue from excise and licences climbed from £93,700 in 1915, to £194,000 in 1920. Dane included in his report some comments on spirits distilled by indigenous people, which, in theory at least, were taxed under the general liquor farm. He claimed, however, that revenue did not match production. At Putatan alone he saw eighty stills producing above-proof spirit selling at about 15¢ a bottle. He felt that the government could raise revenue on such spirits, and at the same time discourage consumption.

In 1912 Ellis mooted the idea of taxing drinking by indigenous people, including not only spirits but all fermented liquors.[27] The district officers generally expressed opposition to the taxing of *tapai*, but Ridgeway passed the matter on to Parr, and Parr rapidly introduced a taxation scheme with the same determination he had shown in the matter of land settlement. A fee of 25¢ per year would be charged for every coconut tree used in the production of spirits. A fee of 2¢ would be charged per *gantang* of padi used for *tapai*-making; prepared rice so used would be taxed at 6¢ per *gantang*, maize 2¢, and tapioca 1¢. The taxes would be collected by the headmen, who would receive 10 per cent commission.

The tax was badly received in every part of the territory, by the people, their headmen, and the officers. Requiring supervision every time *tapai* was brewed, impinging on every feast, ceremony, and junket, setting people and authorities at variance, and imposed at the same time as the new land and *ladang* taxes were making their appearance, it was the most disliked tax ever introduced. Ridgeway wrote to Parr asking

him to 'avoid any hasty or drastic steps which would raise a spirit of discontent', but Parr insisted on its collection, believing in the need to check drunkenness. Like most senior Company officials he had seen rural communities only at festivities organized to honour distinguished visitors, and had fallen for the conclusion that these communities existed in a permanent state of high intoxication. After reports of *orang tua* being ignored by their people, of two being sentenced to gaol terms at Tenom for refusing to collect the tax, and after a plea from a leading Company chief to relieve the tax, Parr did make a concession. Each Kadazan household would be allowed one untaxed feast annually. It was an absurd complication of an already complicated tax.

The tax weathered the storms of 1915, however, and was insisted upon by Parr's successor, Pearson. Most district officers regarded the tax as uncollectable, but various methods, including the issue of vouchers, were tried until by the end of the decade the tax would settle down as a flat-rate annual charge in most areas. In areas where hill padi was grown it was linked to the *ladang* tax, and collected by the government clerks. At Tenom and Tambunan the proceeds of the *tapai* tax would, after 1918, be devoted to the government dispensaries. A memorandum of 1916 on the tax, prepared for Pearson, was scathing about '*a priori* ideas on temperance' and 'legislating the natives into sobriety'. It also pointed out, as later reports on the tax were to do, that the amount collected was insignificant (in 1916 about $2,500, in later years never more than $4,500), that it did not check periodic drunkenness, and that its impact in reducing the use of padi for brewing was negligible. The tax merely alienated the indigenous authorities, and irritated the district officers responsible for supervising them.

Nevertheless the memorandum finally came out in favour of continuing the tax, and the reasons are significant:[28]

> . . . any retrogression . . . would have a very bad effect on the native estimation of the Government. The abolition of the tax would be regarded as a compliance with the agitation against it and would result in petitions for the abolition of other taxes, compromise the

success of the Land Settlement Scheme, and injuriously affect the prestige of the Government.

It was a pertinent comment upon relations between rulers and ruled at the time. The Company had come a long way since the years when it ruled by armed expedition. It now knew at least a little of what its people were thinking. Yet it was still hypersensitive about its authority and prestige, and it recognized that its will was opposed to theirs. There was a certain irony in this opposition now. The Company's administration had, since 1900, undergone something of a revolution. First, the administration had been refurbished and extended to most parts of the territory, bringing with it pacification and even some benevolent ideals. Second, since 1911, reforms had been introduced calculated, however modestly, to improve popular well-being. The Company was trying to be a benevolent despotism. The reforms had not, however, won any hearts, and for a number of reasons. They were unsought by the Company's peoples, conceived with only a superficial knowledge of the peoples' ways, and executed in haste. Only those reforms which could not promise to pay for themselves quickly, in the fields of health and education, were approached slowly. The major victims of the reforms were those people upon whom the Company relied, all too often unconsciously, to maintain good relations, the indigenous authorities, who suddenly found that area of tension they occupied between government and people vastly expanded. The district officers also found their task made more difficult; in the discussions about reform it was usually now the junior officers who preached conservatism, the senior officers who urged progress. The administration of the new reforms precluded the district officer from simply spending time learning about his people and gaining their trust.

The other reason for the hostility to the reforms was, of course, that the reformer always came looking like a tax-collector. It would be fruitless to offer a ratio between altruism and the profit-motive in the Company in this period. At the high noon of imperial self-confidence the Company had con-

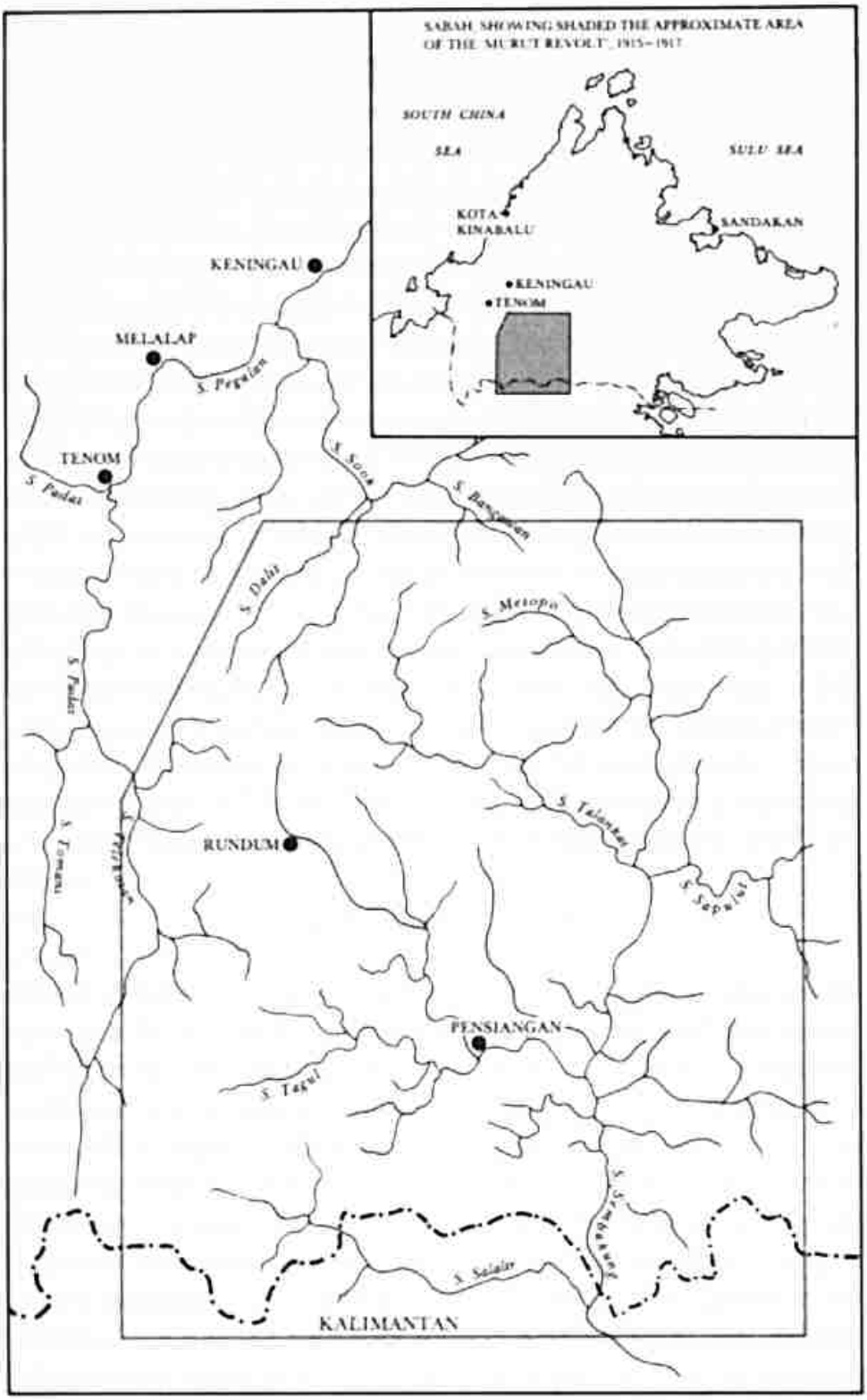
vinced itself that these things were interchangeable, and it did, at least, attempt to raise taxes in ways it considered would be beneficial to its subjects. Nevertheless its land settlement, and its attempts to check shifting cultivation and indigenous drinking could easily be seen, from the beginning, as mere taxation methods, and the latter two measures certainly became no more than that. It could be claimed that the land settlement enhanced the security of indigenously held lands, yet the vast bulk of them were not under threat, and the people saw no reason why they should have to pay for protection. Moreover, the land settlement foisted simple Western concepts of land demarcation and ownership on peoples whose methods of land-use and systems of ownership did not easily fit the new concepts. The new concepts were at worst a nuisance, at best an irrelevance.

It was not therefore simply the question of increased taxation which produced the simmering opposition to the Company in 1915, an opposition which in some areas expressed itself in violent revolt. In the same way as the Company's motives were mixed, the reasons for the opposition were complex. The tax-collector produced resentment, but also his tax-collection methods involved ignorant interference in customary ways.

The Last Great Revolt

The tragic revolt of the southern Murut peoples, known as the 'Rundum Revolt', was not the only expression of popular resentment in 1915, although it was by far the most spectacular. In most parts the resentment took the form of sullen if passive resistance, but on the north-west coast the Company also met with armed opposition. It is a matter for conjecture whether this revolt was prompted by the flying rumours of what was happening in the Murut areas. The Muruts rose in an area not yet thoroughly subdued. The north-west had, apparently, been tamed, like most of the territory, but perhaps the opportunity was seized there to challenge the government while its attention was distracted.

The north-west revolt involved about 100 men, Bajau and



2 THE 'MURUT REVOLT' OF 1915–1917
(area of revolt shown framed)

Kadazan, gathered from the area between Tuaran and Marudu Bay, and their intention was to attack the stations at Kota Belud and Tuaran. The leader was a Marudu Bay Bajau wrongfully summoned in the previous year for non-payment of poll-tax. He tried, unsuccessfully, to rouse his neighbours to revolt, but then moved to the north-west coast, taking with him a number of sympathizers, including Bongol the son of Si Gunting, the rebel of the years 1894–1905, who had ended his days as paid chief in the *ulu* Bongan.[29] At Pandasan they found general discontent about the land settlement. The area was also in a state of famine, although on this account the land rents for the year had been waived. Kadazan sympathies for the Bajau-led movement were perhaps engendered by the *tapai*-tax as well as the land settlement. On the Tuaran a large number of people had been prosecuted for not paying *tapai*-tax, suffering a $5 fine or several days in prison. The headmen had presented petitions appealing against the tax, and when these had been ignored the prestige of the headmen had suffered.

The confrontation between the rebels and the government took place at Pandasan. The Company chief of Kota Belud called upon the rebels to lay down their arms; instead they advanced upon the police detachment brought up by the Resident of the west coast, Barraut. The police opened fire, killing twenty-three, mostly Bajaus, before the rest fled. Barraut seized the property of all the known rebels, introduced extra police into the area, and the rebellion was broken.[30]

The Rundum revolt was not so easily dealt with. It occurred in territory where access and communication were still excessively difficult, and the rapid movement of police impossible. Its scale astonished the Company, and the tenacity of those involved precluded any quick end. Indeed it was not police action which quenched the revolt, bloody though the fighting was. Rather, the rebels brought on their own doom, for their revolt involved massive disruption of their normal modes of life, and the persistence of disruption brought, eventually, exhaustion. Only then could the Company take control, after witnessing with limited understanding a cultural convulsion

which almost destroyed a group of peoples and a way of life.[31]

In 1913 the officers of the interior had already expressed uneasiness about the number of demands upon their peoples for the building and maintenance of bridle-paths and the provision of carriers. In June 1914 a Murut headman, Belayong, built a fort on a tributary of the Tagul. His motive for defying the government was, reportedly, that he had been 'driven to desperation', by being required to cut his section of bridle-path through solid rock.[32] Opinions varied about the justice of his complaint, but the Resident at Tenom, H. W. L. Bunbury, refused to take it seriously. A district officer, N. P. Baboneau, was despatched with a small force of police. The fort was destroyed, Belayong escaped untraced, and the matter was considered at an end. Baboneau patrolled the area between Rundum and Pensiangan, where the bridle-path was being constructed, and visited almost all parts of the country drained by the Tagul-Talankai-Sapulut river systems. He met with apparent friendliness, and his confidence produced complacency. In November 1914 the *Herald* carried a report about the area so offhanded in its comments that Ridgeway queried it from London. The drought in the southern Murut areas had broken, it advised, but most of the people were without food; they were attributing their troubles to the bridle-path and its disturbance of the spirits. Some people were migrating into Dutch territory to avoid work on the bridle-path. Their 'rooted aversion to work of any kind' exceeded their own characteristics, of 'timidity and cowardice'.[33]

In February Baboneau received the first taste of what the 'timid and the cowardly' had been preparing. He and his party of police were attacked, and, around Pensiangan, he could find none of the usually friendly headmen. He struggled back to Rundum, continually under sniper attack. There he received reports that several police and Iban scouts in various parts of the district had been murdered. The telegraph line to Tenom was repeatedly being cut, the wire being used to make blowpipe darts, but Baboneau got it working and sent off frantic messages

of a widespread conspiracy. At Tenom his alarm was not taken seriously at first; the Muruts were fragmented in endlessly feuding groups, it was believed, and a universal uprising was out of the question. C. H. Pearson, a superintendent of police, was eventually despatched to Rundum, where he arrived in time to fight off, with Baboneau and twenty-four police, an attack on the station involving hundreds of Muruts. This news prompted the Resident, Bunbury, to send further police and to observe matters for himself.

By the end of March Iban scouts had brought in news of a fort on the Silangit, a tributary of the Tagul. Bunbury mounted an expedition, consisting of 100 police and Ibans with 300 carriers, led by himself and two other Europeans. The carriers were Muruts of the Tenom area, unaffected by the revolt. The expedition, armed with a 7-pounder, established itself on a hill above the fort on 13 April. Three days of bombardment had little apparent effect, until, on the 17th, white flags appeared and six hostages were released from the fort, including Junit, the Iban Company chief of the area.

The sequence of events then is not clear, but, as the record stands, it reflects little credit on Bunbury and the other government officers.[34] Bunbury, unable to bear the smell inside the fort, sent messengers to parley with the occupants. They numbered about 700. The fort was an elaborate construction, a labyrinth of underground chambers and tunnels roofed with bamboo, wood and earth, the whole surrounded by a palisade and earthworks strewn with pointed bamboo stakes. The messengers returned to Bunbury with $800 in cash and goods, and several old and modern rifles. They also brought out Antanum, the man chiefly responsible for unifying so many Murut groups, and for the design and building of the fort. Like the earlier prophet of 'Malingkote', Antanum had won disciples by promising them miracles, including the provision of needs and the bringing to life of dead relations, if they destroyed their houses, crops and livestock, and followed him. He had won followers, and tribute, from a vast area bounded approximately by the Dalit and Telekosan on the west and extending to the

Sapulut on the east. Unlike 'Malingkote' the cult had not spread further north along the Padas or Pegalan. Antanum had done his work without any news of it being revealed to the European officers or Company police. The 700 warriors in the fort represented, of course, only the tip of the iceberg. Beyond them lay the destroyed houses and crops, and the women, children, and those unable or unwilling to challenge the Company, taking shelter in the jungle.

After a brief inquiry Bunbury had Antanum and two close followers shot. That night, the occupants of the fort resumed fighting. Perhaps they were outraged at the treatment of their Messiah; presumably they now expected no mercy if they surrendered. On the following day some of the bamboo roofs of the fortifications were successfully fired by the besiegers and an exodus ensued. About 400 were slaughtered under the disciplined fire of the police; the Muruts had a few rifles but little idea how to use them. The Ibans closed in on those who were wounded or hiding. About 300 Muruts still held the fort. Bunbury appealed to them to come out and tender submission but, perhaps wisely, they stayed where they were. On the 20th Bunbury, realizing that his force was running short of supplies, abandoned the siege, and retreated to Rundum, thence to Tenom. There he found that A. C. Pearson, who had just replaced Parr as governor, had sent F. W. Fraser to investigate the curious events in Bunbury's unhappy Residency.[35] Baboneau was removed to Keningau, and later Tambunan.

The spirit of revolt was not quenched by the slaughter at Antanum's fort, and it would not be until the end of 1917 that the area could be described as 'all quiet'.[36] There were constant patrols by police but little of their activity is recorded. Much of the mopping-up was in the hands of two Company chiefs, O. K. K. Kunsanat and Haji Jamaludin. Regularly encountering hostility they gradually persuaded the people to begin rebuilding their houses. Some 'ringleaders' were captured, including Mukang, of the Talankai, who had destroyed a police station at Mesopo and plotted to attack Keningau, and Antak, long a 'trouble-maker'. Mukang died trying to escape from

custody at Rundum; Antak was banished to Kudat.

The terrible cost to the peoples of the area, whether directly involved in the revolt or not, was never assessed, although a report of 1921, commenting upon the decrease in Murut numbers which the census of that year revealed, was prepared to state that the revolt had had 'a most unsettling effect', and that its consequences had been 'considerable'.[37] Little could be said that was more specific, for the Company still remained ignorant of its Murut peoples, even if they had at last been subdued. It is difficult not to conclude, however, that the episode was a major tragedy for these people, of a scale not experienced by any other of the peoples who had defied the Company. Other rebel groups fought, were defeated, and then adjusted to their new masters. The Murut adjustment, if it is valid to link the decline in population to the upheavals of 1915–17, was to be painfully slow.

The population decline may be linked to the upheavals for perhaps three reasons. First, the number of casualties in the fighting alone must have been considerable. Apart from the hundreds killed at the fort many more died in other engagements, in all enough to deplete severely the adult male numbers in many communities. Few other rebel groups in the Company's history were so depleted. Second, many Muruts probably died as the result of the general disruption, from disease and lack of food. Foodstocks were neglected or destroyed by the followers of the cult, and for two years the population survived on edible jungle produce and *ad hoc* hill-padi plantings. Third, the psychological impact of the upheavals is worth consideration, as with the earlier cult of 'Malingkote'. In both cases Murut groups had responded to social disruption with extreme cultural disruptions of their own, as they sought solutions to novel problems in extravagant millenarian beliefs. Both cults ended in disillusionment, and even greater bewilderment, for the cults had been no more successful in providing answers to their problems than customary beliefs. In 1915, on the contrary, the cult brought a terrible retribution from the government. Alongside the revolt's physical toll, the extent of

the wreckage of Murut beliefs and value-systems is distressing to contemplate.

The cult had thrived on hostility to the Company so deep-seated that the revolt survived Antanum's death. Indeed the relative importance of Antanum was brought into question by the continued fighting at the fort and elsewhere. The 'causes' of the revolt were investigated by the Company, though not as thoroughly as its size and bitterness warranted. This was due in part to a desire for discretion about administrative mistakes, in part to shortage of staff, and in part to the fact that in 1915 the attention of Europeans was diverted elsewhere, to Europe's own convulsions. (In London one of the directors suggested that German agents had fomented the Murut revolt!)[38] Two officers now supervised the area, but they had little time to talk at length with their far-flung, frightened, and reticent charges. The precise causes of the revolt had to remain a subject for speculation, but even the speculation uncovered enough to make quite comprehensible the antagonism to the government.

The antagonism was based on both rational and what Europeans would have considered irrational grounds. Fraser, who produced the most comprehensive contemporary report, tended to stress the latter. He pointed out that in recent years harvests had been repeatedly poor because of drought, and that with the outbreak of war in 1914 there had been a slump in the market for jungle produce. These difficulties, he argued, had been put down to the government, which had prohibited head-taking and introduced telegraph-lines and bridle-paths, which phenomena upset the Murut spirit world: 'They are like children easily excited even to hysteria, and they are full of superstition.'[39] Fraser discounted more rational reasons for the hostility, that bridle-path construction was a burden, and that the new taxes on shifting cultivation and on *tapai*, were added impositions. Each man, he argued was required to construct one chain of bridle-path per year, and was paid; the new taxes had not been introduced in the Rundum district. Here, his conclusions were open to doubt. The construction of the bridle-path was a burden, both psychological and physical, meaning-

less to the Muruts who had their own tracks and wearisome where it involved levelling as well as clearing. There is also evidence that the new taxes had indeed been levied by the police, and possibly in excessive amounts because of the difficulties in understanding the rates.[40] Even where they had not, the people had certainly heard of them. Though, as Fraser argued, they were not excessive, they may have seemed so to a people in a time of famine, and rumour may have exaggerated them.

In sum, the picture is one of utter insensitivity to these people, and ineptness in introducing the Company's administration to them. The Muruts could see no benefit to be derived from the government's coming. On the contrary, that seemed to mean an onslaught on every aspect of their lives and values, on their spiritual beliefs, their land and jungle, their work and produce, their hunting, and their drinking. Little wonder that their warriors refused any further humiliation at the hands of European officers and intrusive police, and made common cause against the common enemy. If Antanum's cult was significant in uniting and exciting them, it had a fertile breeding ground.

Most of this missed the Company until after rebellion had broken out, and was not perhaps fully appreciated afterwards. This in itself reflects poorly on the nature of Company rule, in an era when the Company believed it had outgrown its early inadequacies and was now in touch with its peoples and benevolently concerned for them. The misfortune of the Muruts was, however, that because of the nature of the country they inhabited, they experienced at once both eras of the Company's administration so far. For the rest of the country's peoples the era when the government had little or no knowledge of them had ended in the early years of the century. It would have taken a multitude of district officers to know the Muruts, scattered and remote in their tangled terrain. At the same time the Muruts were confronted with a reforming government, the reforms of which were little enough liked by their pacified compatriots. They found the reforms intolerable, and believed,

unlike their compatriots, that they could be successfully rejected. The result was perhaps the unhappiest episode in the whole of the Company's administrative history.

On the other hand, the Company could claim, when the revolt collapsed, that it had the territory under full control at last. Forty years after its arrival, that aspect of its gamble in Sabah seemed no longer to be in doubt.

* * *

The Company's basic gamble, on making a fortune out of Sabah, was never to be realized. This meant that its administration would, in the next twenty-five years, develop only in minor ways beyond the level described in the later chapters of this work. The Company survived with much diminished optimism the slump which followed the First World War, and, in 1926, a painful re-assessment of its assets and liabilities. It appeared to be gaining ground again in the late 1920s, and then suffered in the Great Depression. For most of its later years it paid no dividend. It was in the first stages of yet another recovery when the Japanese invaded Borneo in January 1942 and effectively ended its career. After the war the British government assumed control of the territory and the Company was wound up.

In its final two decades of rule the Company precipitated no further domestic opposition of the sort analysed in this work, and in colonial circles it was characterized as a not unpopular government. The incompetence and savagery of the Japanese occupation, indeed, made many Sabahans wistful for the former regime. But, by 1946, in a world where many colonial territories were seeking independence, the Company was demonstrably an anachronism, even in its own eyes. It lacked the resources to return to a war-ravaged Sabah and provide the services, no more than embryonic before the war, which might lead to self-rule. (Several former Company officers did, however, return with the post-war colonial regime, some in a spirit of deep affection for the country.)

The limited economic potential of Sabah in the Company era was the basic determinant of administrative policy. The Company never enjoyed the intense demands from world markets or the advanced technologies of jungle exploitation and communications which in recent years have made Sabah boom, primarily through timber exports. The Company's poverty produced a government which could meet only in crude and limited ways the needs of its subjects, and which, through all phases of its existence, lagged behind the standards being set in more rapidly developing colonial areas. The story would, however, have been much the same had Sabah been a formal part of some Western empire, and not the anomaly it was under the Company. The empires of Britain and other Western powers certainly produced elaborate administrations when the economic returns seemed to justify them, but primitive administrations where they did not. To contrast the Company's government with that of the Federated Malay States, for example, as Clifford and others did, was rather unfair. The comparison ought to have been with administrations in other imperial possessions which had failed to pay.

But financial considerations were not the only determinants of policy. It has been noted how succeeding generations of Company administrators brought an increasingly idealistic sense of responsibility to their task. In this regard the Company's history is a microcosmic illustration of the elaboration of imperial theory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Equally important, however, were the pressures Sabahans put upon the Company to improve its government. The rebels examined in this work were all in the immediate sense unsuccessful, suffering suppression or death. They were also not aware, of course, of the criteria we would use today to assess humane and progressive government, and their aims and values should not be historically misrepresented or sentimentalized. They were not early 'nationalists', since no comprehension of a Sabahan state then existed, nor were they 'freedom fighters' except in narrow terms, for they were largely indifferent to the freedoms of communities other than their

own. But, slowly and painfully, their successive expressions of outrage at the nature of Company rule did remould Company attitudes, forcing a reluctant admission that the thoughtless methods and narrow objectives with which the Company had set out were intolerable.

Though quickly relegated to a minor place in the Company's consciousness it was they who in effect had most powerfully asserted that government in Sabah had to display some understanding of, and sympathy towards, the territory's diverse population, socio-economic structures, customs, and values. Immigrant and imported peoples could not be set against the indigenous population, Muslims could not be set against non-Muslims, the coastal dwellers could not be set against those living in the interior, the supposedly sophisticated communities could not be set against the supposedly primitive, alien assumptions could not be set against local wisdom. For these lessons in how Sabah might be a peaceful country the rebels—who came from all major indigenous ethnic groups of the territory—deserve a respected place in Sabahan, and Malaysian, history.

1. *Herald*, 1/2/11, p. 18. Ridgeway had had a military and administrative career in India before becoming under-secretary for Ireland and, in 1896, governor of Ceylon. In 1906 and 1910 he was the unsuccessful Liberal candidate for the parliamentary seat of London University.

2. C.O. 874/285, 17/4/10, p. 289.

3. See O. Cook, op. cit., pp. 15–17; C. Bruce, op. cit., pp. 216–19.

4. See M. Hall, *Makan Siap*, Labuan, undated, pp. 35–60 and 125–50. Pseudonyms used in these stories are:—Gorringe (Gueritz), Jocelyn (Ellis), Kitson (Mason), Leigh (Parr) and Molesworth (Pearson).

5. S.G.A. Memo on Labour, 1918, pp. 20–2, 25–33.

6. O. Cook, op. cit., pp. 20–1, 33–4; C.O. 874/697, Complaint by Aborigines Protection Society, 1919–20; S.G.A. File 1405, Administration 1921, ch. V.

7. C.O. 874/154, Dane, Administration of North Borneo, 1911.

8. C.O. 874/574, Judicial Administration, 1911–12.

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10. *Gazette*, 15/3/15.

11. C.O. 874/476, 21/6/16.

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13. C.O. 874/836, Education, 1914–21; S.G.A. File 800, Education, 1905–37.

14. C.O. 874/357, Constabulary, 1913–16.

15. S.G.A. File 37B, Medical Report: 1912.

16. S.G.A. File 1017, Estates Medical Schemes, 1914–25; S.G.A. File 1405, Administration 1921, ch. XIV.

17. op. cit., p. 88.

18. S.G.A. File 1356, Settlement of Native Lands, D.O. Timbang Batu to Resident, 14/9/12.

19. ibid., Cook to Resident 21/3/13; McCaskie to Resident, 18/5/13.

20. *Gazette*, 16/10/13, Proclamation VII.

21. C.O. 874/796, 797, Land Settlement, 1913, 1914–21.

22. A later attempt at demarcation of indigenously-held lands, in 1935, was to be dismissed in 1950 as 'extremely inaccurate', with barely 20 per cent of the boundaries demarcated still being acknowledged. (S.G.A. File 1356, Settlement of Native Lands, Memo on re-survey of native holdings, 1940–50).

23. S.G.A. File 1405, Administration, 1921, ch. VIII(a).

24. ibid.

25. S.G.A. File 284, Shifting Cultivation, 1913–35.

26. C.O. 874/834, Rebellions and Disturbances, 1914–15, Memo, 29/7/15.

27. S.G.A. File 1178, 1178A and B, Native Liquors Taxation, 1912–37.

28. ibid., Memo on Taxation of Native Liquors, 1916.

29. Si Gunting died in 1911. *Herald*, 1/3/11, p. 39.

30. C.O. 874/834, Governor to Chairman, 27/4/15, 5/5/15; Barraut, 29/4/15; Memo., 29/7/15; Fraser, 25/8/15, 22/9/15.

31. C.O. 874/834, 835, Rebellions and Disturbances, 1914–19.

32. ibid., Bunbury, 17/6/14.

33. *Herald*, 3/11/14, p. 174; C.O. 874/834, Chairman to Governor, 18/12/14.

34. C.O. 874/834, Bunbury, 24/4/15.

35. ibid., Governor to Chairman, 27/4/15.

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38. C.O. 874/834, Turner Memo., 1/8/15.

39. ibid., Fraser, 22/9/15.

40. ibid., Governor to Chairman 26/5/15; Memo., 29/7/15.

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The author first visited the Sabah Government Archives in 1966, when they were under the care of Mrs J. N. Gordon, whose assistance was invaluable in providing information about Company documents in Sabah. About 90 per cent of the Company's central government files (that is, excluding district records) survived the Second World War. In 1958, during the British colonial period, more than one-half of them were destroyed. Many of the original identifying titles and file numbers of the surviving material were also destroyed. The destruction, carried out on the principle of preserving only what then seemed relevant to the colonial government, was a tragic denial to the people of Sabah of access to aspects of their history: all countries deserve archives which carefully preserve the raw material of history, irrespective of content and apparent 'relevance'.

The surviving material was reorganized in a series of files numbered 1–1500. Those consulted by the author are listed below. Few records from the Company era formerly held at district office level seem to have survived, despite efforts made to uncover any still in existence. The few surviving examples of such records are listed below under 'Miscellaneous'.

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