

# **Through A Time of Grace**

COMPILED BY  
**JUSTIN KIRIM**

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Dedicated to  
the Missionaries of the  
Roman Catholic Church of Sarawak  
and  
the European Officers serving  
in  
the Sarawak Civil Service  
of the  
British Colony of Sarawak  
who had laboured for the  
benefit of the people of  
Sarawak

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# CHAPTER I

## PRELUDE

*A man lives not only his personal life, as an individual, but also, consciously or unconsciously, the life of his epoch and his contemporaries.*

*Thomas Mann*

MY story is one that is told many times by so many who are of my generation. For it is told and seen in their lives as they have undergone the same stages of being children, boys, pupils, students, youths, men and citizens during a certain era. It is a story taken from the past that was my life. But I see that my past was lived during a certain passage of time that was also my country's past and history. It was a past that had been my world. Therefore to look at my life there, at whatever I saw, felt, perceived and thought as I lived it is to glimpse at something of that world. Thus while my story is taken from the past that was my life it is told in order to see how the story of my life reflects on something else, on that passage of time, that age or part of it, that I had gone through and how it had worked in my life.

What I attempt to tell is about an era that I had lived in. Having lived in the era that followed I began to see that in many ways an age in Sarawak had gone and another had begun. In the new age I slowly realise that I am living in the context of a new sovereign nation and which necessitates that I adjust my mind; though this does not mean that I must repudiate my thinking and idealism which the previous era had instilled and developed in me. Insofar as the thinking and idealism spring from what is noble and beautiful in the human spirit they are therefore worthy of honour and preservation. The change in thinking was prompted by the new challenges that the new era ushered in but, though they at times were, painful, they did not deprive me of what I had gained in areas pertaining to human development from the previous age. Indeed the new era impresses upon me and so, I should think, to each and everyone who truly loves this country the need to exercise one's rights and responsibilities as citizens and patriots so that the direction that this country takes reflects on our deepest aspiration which is to make this country free, strong and prosperous.

The era that had gone was one of light after the darkness of fear, roguery, savagery, lawlessness, ignorance and backwardness. It was a benign and providential age when the light of freedom, law and order and a good and just government burnt so brightly, a time when there were those in the

government who were so well-attuned to the reality of the country that they served the people correctly, wisely and well in terms of policies, administration and services. Thus when the people gave their loyalty to the government they did so for very good reasons. Then came a time in the history of Sarawak when the wisdom of the past seemed to be forgotten and it was the wisdom that became a factor that contributed to the making of a more humane society.

Others with a better mind and better academic standing would be capable to make a better portrayal of this age of grace but as for me I can only do a poor and imperfect sketch of it. Being neither gifted nor excellently equipped academically I can only speak of the time insofar as it had worked in and related to my life and in whatever I saw and had happened to me as I lived through it. I am not competent to write it in any other way much as I would like to.

Amidst the oftentimes harsh utterances against the government and nation that once ruled Sarawak I remain proud and grateful to have had my life and being under the rule of a great, good and caring people. They were fit to rule. On the one hand it was the rule of the White Rajahs, followed by the rule of the government of the British Crown, but on the other hand both represented the rule of great and good men and persons of conscience. The foundation of their rule was as epitomised by the motto which says "Dum Spiro Spero" or "Where there is life there is hope". And long after their reign had come to an end the people who had lived under their rule still speak about them in high esteem and with great affection. This was the glory of their indomitable, brave and noble spirit for they had won the hearts and minds of the people they ruled. The heart that yearns for the things of truth and light could see that British rule was the best thing that could happen to Sarawak and cannot see it in any other way. They had shown through their administration, policies, services and practices how to administer to the affairs of man for through these and by these they endeavoured to bring whatever was good for the country and people.

A glimpse of the history of Sarawak shows that the White Rajahs, and later the British Crown, had ruled this far eastern country. This rule by an English family and a people from a far away country at the other side of the world lasted for more than a century. It was interrupted by an interval of a few years by the Japanese Occupation. With the founding of the Sarawak Raj and the accession of James Brooke to the throne of Sarawak an Age had begun — an age of the stewardship of a great people over a largely backward subject. It was a beautiful stewardship that was in the form of a benign autocracy and later the gentle rule of a great power and altogether both brought much good to the people and country and nothing was taken away

since the people were not hurt or harmed in any way. The steward, being so faithful to his role by being trustworthy and caring did not take for himself what belonged to his people. On the contrary some of the Rajah's officers met brutal death in the course of serving His Majesty's government and country. The Brooke dynasty was eventually to come to an end and it was succeeded by the government of the British Crown which, as history was to attest, quickened the pace of Sarawak's march to the twentieth century.

In my own life, my infancy, childhood, boyhood, youth and part of my manhood were lived in that age. But I see also that this age prevailed after Independence for although the British had gone they had left a precious legacy that could best be seen in the administrative machinery, the economic foundation, the goodwill and racial harmony that existed among the various peoples and in the government that preserved them. This spirit lived on in this sense but also in other ways.

It lived on in the first two governments of independent Sarawak, for these administrations still bore the characteristics of a stewardship. True, there were intrigues in high places resulting in the dismissal of one chief minister and the appointment of another but power was still in the hands of one who, be it by design or accident, had used power in the spirit of humble stewardship and therefore a time that was providential as it had long been in many ways but particularly because the government kept itself to the civil order and allowing works in the spiritual order to continue undisturbed. It was therefore a time of grace in Sarawak but not merely in this way for grace too permeated into the secular arena. It was the grace that came from the same source which flowed into the spiritual order which is concerned with human dignity, his rights, liberties and destiny. To an extent the character of the past governments echoed the saying of a great man in which he declared "A government governs best when it governs least".

Looking back and insofar as my own life was concerned I had lived through the reality of an age but did not realise its significance while living through it. That age in which I had my being was to pass away and another was to come and it was looking from this latter age that something of the wonderful, if not profound, reality of the bygone age began to dawn on me. It seems to me that it came for a purpose and that purpose was apparent and to an extent or wholly had been fulfilled. The coming of James Brooke brought a change that was an ascent and one which worked for the good of the people and country and this was amply attested by history. A century and more of Brooke rule and to be followed by more than a decade and a half of British rule had given Sarawak what it needed so that when self-rule came it did so after an array of things had been done and established. The age that was started by the coming of James Brooke had a spiritual dimension and in its

beginning was seen in history as the feat of a man. For a man so noble and brave, so anxious to protect the weak and so intent on fighting the enemies of the weak is seen from that perspective as an instrument of the Spirit to bring light and civilization to a benighted land.

In the decades that followed that same Spirit was seen at work, in particular, in the labours of the Europeans in the government and the Christian missionaries. James Brooke began the work and the rule that put Sarawak into a sphere where what was good for the country and people was not denied them and so the country grew and prospered. But perhaps most of all he began the rule that was to make Sarawak into a land and a society where the people could live together and think, work and express themselves as free persons in a civilised and free country. If it was accidental it was also providential but either way history was made.

History shows that the Sultan of Brunei and his governor in the Province of Sarawak simply could not do what James Brooke did, and the latter could do so because of what he was or what he did or the decision he made was motivated by the spirit in him. He founded a kingdom which he passed on to his nephew, Charles Brooke, and who in turn passed on to his son, Charles Vyner Brooke. Having founded his kingdom Rajah James Brooke began the vital task of bringing law and order to a dark, lawless and savage land. For some or certain tribes his government was a salvation for them. His kingdom also prepared, provided and paved the way for more and other good works to be done and for many good things to come. They were the various works and among which were those concerned with raising man to a new height of dignity from the depth of ignorance, backwardness and fear and ultimately to raise him to his true status as the crown of creation. The age started by him allowed streams of good works, be they governmental, evangelical or voluntary, to flow across the decades and everywhere and so it flowed into innumerable lives including mine.



## CHAPTER II

# THE BISAPUG DAYAKS AND THEIR STORIES, LEGENDS AND GLIMPSES OF THEIR HISTORY

*I feel, as it were, the trumpet-call of Providence leading me on as an instrument.*

*James Brooke*

I belong to a Bidayuh Dayak tribe called the Bisapug. Today the Bisapugs or Bisapug Dayaks number about two thousand souls and they live at three villages or *kampung*s called Simpok (also called Pruman), Mundai, along the Padawan Road in the Kuching district, and Sarig which lies at a distance of over a mile north of Simpok. A group of them once lived at a place called Simanong, which is within the proximity of Sarig, but it was abandoned more than three decades ago. In the past the Bisapug Dayaks lived on a mountain called Bung Brunggu or Mount Brunggu. The height is regarded as their ancestral home. But their ancestors had also lived elsewhere at various places in various times in the past before they settled at Mount Brunggu.

According to oral tradition they had once settled in the vicinity of Tanjong Datu and at that time this tribe called itself the Bipesa-Bidawai. They were so called after the name of a man named Pesa and his wife Dawai. "Bi" in the Bisapug dialect means "of". They bore a son named Si Manyung and a daughter named Si Kaba. Si Kaba was married to a being named Papak whom she first saw when she took her bath in the river. Papak, so named after a species of snakeheads, first appeared to her as a fish but later transformed itself before her very eyes into a man. After a time a group decided to move away in search of a new place to settle in. The group that left Tanjong Datu was headed by Si Manyung and this group formed a new settlement at a place called Rabak Mikabuh. At Rabak Mikabuh a daughter was born to Si Kaba and Papak and she was called Timah and later known as Tayung Aring.

On attaining womanhood Timah decided to visit the original home of her tribe at Tanjong Datu but in so doing she had to pass Santubong. She never reached her destination. Somehow her boat got stuck at Santubong. A mysterious being named Jamaldin appearing at first like a giant but later reducing itself to a man's size stopped her progress. He halted the boat because he wanted to propose to Timah who gave him a favourable reply.

Jamaldin belonged to a mysterious race that inhabited the Santubong Mountain. Eventually Timah and Jamaldin were married.

The group at Tanjong Datu and part of the group from Santubong eventually left these places, the former joined the first group that had gone to Rabak Mikabuh and the latter, whom we may call the tribe of Tayung Aring, went in a different direction to the vicinity of Muara Tebas, where it settled at a place called Tanjong Merah. But after living there for a certain time the tribe left the place and ascended the Samarahan River and settled at a place called Nangoh Marang. From this place they ascended further and settled at a place called Nangoh Sira which is roughly where Panchor is today. Of all the places along the Samarahan River where the tribe made its settlement, Nangoh Sira was where the tribe lived for the longest period. But somehow it was no longer safe to remain longer at Nangoh Sira. The tribe then abandoned the place and went further still into the interior. But there was also another reason which made it to leave the place. They were in quest of the mountain. After living there probably for a period of several generations the tribe left Nangoh Sira breaking up into tribes one of which ascended the river taking the branch called the Serin and settled at a place called Nangoh Tangid. But of all the places that the people of the tribe had lived in thus far, Nangoh Tangid was where they resided for the briefest period. There they built a stockade for defence. However, it was soon destroyed. Its destruction was attributed to a spirit called the *muat dunuk* or the spirit that dwells on the *dunuk* or fig tree. This site was abandoned which, if I may remark, was what the disturbed and irritated spirit apparently wanted them to do.

The next place of settlement was Sungai Tubug, further up the river. Sungai Tubug was the name of a stream. When the tribe arrived there the first creature that one of them saw on land was the *tubug*, a kind of lizard, after which the stream and the place were named. They came to talk of themselves as coming from Sungai Tubug, and called themselves "Bisapug". Another version to the origin of the name of the tribe states that it was derived from a certain hill called Sapug and hence Bisapug. But from this place they again ascended the river and settled at Nangoh Pruman, after the stream of that name, which is where the present Kampung Simpok is. Mount Brunggu, the object of their quest, is only more than a mile away. It was only a matter of time when they would live among the heights. The first persons to leave Nangoh Pruman and make their homes on the mountain were the sons of Tayung Aring and their names were Si Madis and Si Kaban. Later the entire tribe followed suit.

The main reason for the Bidayuh Dayaks to live among the heights was because the mountain afforded them protection from their enemies. However in the case of the Bisapug Dayaks there were other reasons. These seem

trifling, vain and bizarre but which nevertheless strongly influenced their decision. One of them is related to the Bidayuh Dayak's habit of chewing a quid of condiments which principally consist of betel nut and *sirih* leaf. This plant grows well at a higher altitude and for this reason also they lived up at Mount Brunggu. They had at last found the mountain that they were in quest of since the Nangoh Sira days. The other reason was the height afforded them with a sense of grandeur and triumph over their enemies or other hostile tribes whom they had attacked for when they held a festival or *gawai* the sound of their gongs would be heard over a wide area, and when they beat their drum called *sabang* they intended its sound to be heard by the tribe from whom they had procured a head or more. When the people of the unfortunate tribe heard the *sabang* beating triumphantly they would be reminded of their loss, belittlement and defeat and grieved silently, and their sorrow was the jubilation of those who became the owners of the ghastly trophies.

The Bidayuh Dayaks suffered greatly from the pirates and the Arab and Sarawak chiefs. An account of such sufferings is told by Mr. Hugh Low in his book entitled "Sarawak: Its Inhabitants and Productions":

During the prevalence of the Arab power in Sadong under the Sereibs Sahib, Muller, and their relations, and the misrule of the chiefs of Sarawak during the ten or twelve years previous or Mr. Brooke's arrival, these unprincipled chieftains found the practice of head-taking amongst the Sakarrans might be made serviceable to their interests. The poor hill Dyaks, who had been previously protected from the ravages of the fierce Sakarrans only by the Malays residing between them and their foes, and having been robbed of every thing calculated to excite the rapacity of their rulers, made an effort to save their wives and daughters from the slavery which threatened them, by concealing in the jungle. The Sakarran Dyaks were then called in by the extortionate and foolish rulers, and, assisted by a party of Malays with firearms, generally found the hill Dyaks an easy prey. Thus an opportunity was presented to them of acquiring abundance of victims, whose heads the Malayan chieftains allowed them to retain, while they took all the plunder, and shared the slaves. In these expeditions, several of which occurred annually, the greater part of the Dyaks of Sarawak and Sadong were attacked, their men and women slain and decapitated under the most cruel circumstances, and the virgins and children were carried by their parents' destroyers into captivity. Those who, by concealment, had succeeded in escaping the sword of the oppressor, from their hiding-places beheld the flames consume their remnants of property and their villages (Low, 1946: 189, 190)

The Bisapug Dayaks at Mount Brunggu never suffered or did not suffer as much from these earlier raids probably because the tribe lived at the immediate border of the territory of Sarawak (Roth, 1968: 70). The decimation of the tribe happened at about the time when James Brooke was already in Sarawak as the result of the systematised campaign of slaughter and plunder of the Bidayuh Dayak tribes mounted by the *pangerans* (Keppel, 1968: 204). So ruthless was this campaign of plunder and carnage that out of a

tribe of 130 families, only 50 families survived after the attack, and another tribe consisting of 20 families all perished (Keppel, 1968: 205). The Bisapug Dayaks at Mount Brunggu were then at their most numerous, comprising about 1,300 souls. To describe such number it was said that the bamboo stems laid out for crossing at the throughfare and pathways in the evening would become all shredded up the next day and must need be replaced attesting to the frequency of human traffic during the night. But soon their number would be decimated. But perhaps such tribulation that was to befall them could have been avoided.

At the time of the infamous campaign the Bisapugs at Mount Brunggu were in a festive mood for they were about to celebrate the *Gawai*. But as the mood was setting in there came news and it was brought to Mount Brunggu by one Giyang. He had gone to a neighbouring Biatah Dayak village at Bung Siburan and there he heard of the campaign and he hurried home to warn his tribe. But Giyang was a person who was looked upon as of an inferior breed by the "upper class" of the Bisapugs. Added to his lowly state was his skin disease called *risung* (*kurap*) of which the treatment for curing it was still unknown, thus making him not only inferior but rendering him physically repulsive. He seemed fated to occupy a lowly state all his life. But lowly though he was and despised as he was by the "high born" Bisapugs he felt he should warn them of the coming peril. So he ventured to tell the "lords and ladies" of the "upper echelon" of his society of the impending raid. What Giyang tried to tell them was simply to flee but they only scoffed at him saying that he told them the news merely to imply that he had been away lately at Bung Siburan and there he had eaten so well and now he wanted to brag a little about his full belly. So they mocked and ridiculed him with words to that effect. Giyang had always been looked upon by them as somewhat of an idiot and why must anyone think that he had ceased to be one just because he brought this kind of news. The *Gawai* must go on and so it did. But the humbler people believed in him and they were mostly his relatives. That night Giyang and his small group fled in fear. They had not gone very far when the raiding parties made their way to Mount Brunggu. However they were not seen by the enemy and this was attributed to their ability to become unseen. Such ability was called *pirinyap*. They continued their flight and some of them fled to and hid themselves in a cave called Tang Sigon some distance away from Mount Brunggu.

The destroyers came at about midnight and it was the time when the chantresses were chanting the *barih nandang*, the name of a chant. Earlier on a man had gone out to the *tanju* or outer verandah to answer the call of nature. He happened to look in the direction of the part of the mountain called Pawoh. He saw lights moving up in the direction of the longhouses. He

rushed in to tell the odd sight to the others. But they answered back by saying that the lights that he just saw were only made by the fire-flies. How the *Gawai* seemed to have mesmerised them! Then it happened. There was a wild and fiendish yell such as to make one's blood turn cold. They were yells which spelt death. Then swarms of armed men appeared and swooped upon the celebrating or sleeping throng. The chantresses froze in terror and in place of the chanting was now shrieks of sheer fright. The warriors among the besieged and doomed company managed to get their weapons and fought valiantly but they were no match against such an overwhelming and superiorly-armed enemy. Perhaps a few, in the confusion, managed to escape to tell the tale but the rest of the men perished and many of them decapitated and their heads taken away to be hung as trophies in some far away longhouses. When this story is narrated it is always mentioned that the summit of Mount Brunggu was red with the blood of the slain Bisapugs speaking of the many hundreds of them who were slaughtered. The raiders spared the young women, girls and probably the boys as well and carried them away to become their wives or slaves.

The "Serang Rawot" or the "Scourge from the Sea" as the raid was referred to decimated the tribe. For the next one hundred years or so it was left more or less in peace. It can be said with some certainty that the Bisapug Dayaks of today are the descendents of Giyang, his kin and those other families and individuals who were saved as the result of heeding to his warning or who managed to escape or from the sprinklings that lived isolatedly elsewhere. It may be said that the better and finer specimens of the Bisapugs had mostly perished.

The generations after him would look out from the *tanju* but they would never again see the omnimous lights carried by the killers moving to destroy them. In their minds they saw another light. It was the light of a great, caring, noble and powerful rajah. Something so totally new had come to the land for it was the dawn of a new age and a new civilization. James Brooke had become the Rajah of Sarawak and already he had begun to break the power of the pirates and their patrons even before his accession and as the Rajah he continued relentlessly his campaign to stamp out piracy. The Age of the White Rajahs and good government had begun. Their liberator and protector had come. Under the three White Rajahs the tribe lived in the safety of the Brooke Peace and slowly increased in number but it would be a long time before it could attain its most numerous that it had once been. Frequent deaths from diseases and sicknesses and the smallpox epidemics also took their toll and slowed the population growth.

When the people of the tribe began to realise that death frequently struck them they deduced that perhaps the environment was the possible

cause or whatever that came to the mind of a superstitious people. Therefore they finally decided to leave Mount Brunggu. Added to these woes was the scarcity of water especially during the dry spells but at times fetching water from the brooks lower down the summit was a great misery. Life was made even more onerous when it meant ascending the mountain with heavy loads on their backs. The hardships of living among the heights far out-weighed the grandeur perceived and whatever else they afforded. Furthermore they now lived in a new age as they had never known before. Their mountain fastness had provided them no protection and served as no defence or deterrent as they had learnt so bitterly from the "Serang Rawot". It was really a good ruler and a good government which the great White Rajah brought and which provided them protection and brought about peace, law and order, liberation from piracy, misrule and injustice.

While at Mount Brunggu they did not live in a single longhouse but in three and these longhouses were given names. They were called Bitangan Sambu, Bintangan Biparon and Bitangan Birinieng. Thus on moving down they split more or less according to the longhouses they came from. Those of Bitangan Sambu moved down to the land lying on the southern side of the mountain to form what is known as the Pruman or Simpok group. A section from Bitangan Birinieng and Bitangan Biparon went in the opposite direction to the land lying on the northern side of the mountain to form the Sarig group. The rest which formed the tiniest group moved down to settle at the foot of the mountain at a spot called Simanong which is at close proximity to Sarig. The Simanong group eventually moved away to join the group at Simpok.

\* \* \* \*

Together with those who moved down to Sarig was a man named Taka, his wife named Gagon and their children, one of whom was to be my future father.

## CHAPTER III

# RECOLLECTIONS FROM MY CHILDHOOD AND BOYHOOD DAYS AT SARIG AND KRAKI

**A**mong my most treasured possession is a photograph of my father and I, taken at a studio in Kuching on the day before my departure for Kanowit in January 1958. It represents the only picture of both of us ever taken. No other photographs of himself with any of my brothers or sisters were ever taken before or since. We have no family photographs. When I saw the photograph I did not like it because I looked pale, nervous and odd. But I disliked it because I was only looking at myself and took my father for granted. But how much I appreciate it now. The camera had captured my father as he looked when he was still the robust, active and hardworking man supporting a brood of young dependents. His features belonged to a man who was accustomed to much labour. Although they did not bear the smoothness and glow of one who leads a more comfortable life but he was a fine-looking man nevertheless. It shows a man of ordinary build but leaning somewhat on the small side. Perhaps his most distinctive physical characteristics were his face and a head with an enviable crop of hair that tended to curl. The face was lean and delicately formed and it looked its finest in repose. It showed intelligence, a mild disposition, patience and quiet determination. There was a look of melancholy and meekness in his eyes, perhaps so characteristic of his race, but they were also very observant.

He had married twice but both marriages were ephemeral and ended in divorces. The marriages ended one after another almost as simply as they had begun. Customs probably required them to observe certain simple divorce proceedings to grant an honourable settlement to both marriages. The two women got themselves married again to other men easily and to all intents and purposes all was well. He who was twice married would make trips to Simpok (Pruman). It must be in one of these visits that he saw a demure and modest-looking girl. She was of fair complexion and there always seemed to be a faint smile on her face even in repose. Her full-blown cheeks and the gentle prominence of her forehead gave her a serene countenance. She was about sixteen years of age. The man was much older. He loved her the very first time that he saw this pretty, shy and quiet girl. There is a story being told that the father of this girl was not the man that her mother was married to.

Indeed she appeared to be of a different mould from her brothers and sisters. The man courted her and eventually they were married. In due course a baby son was born to them. Thus was I brought into the world.

My immediate infancy was lived sometime during the final year of the Japanese Occupation. My eyes as a new-born babe were first opened to the world in a farmhouse at a place called Sungi Miti near a better-known locality called Kraki, where our home was to be, deep in the Kuching district. Then I was reared alternately at Kraki which had become a second home and at Sarig, the proper home. An incident happened when I was still a baby. It seemed that a party of Japanese soldiers advanced or chanced to come to Sarig. Living at Kraki and Sarig alternately was routine and evidently works at Kraki being completed the family had returned to Sarig. When the village folks heard the report of the coming of the Japanese they fled. My father was away at work somewhere at the time. My mother too was about to flee carrying me, her first baby, with her but it was a little too late. She was still at the outer verandah or *tanju* when the Japanese soldiers saw her. But great was her consternation when on looking at them she saw them looking friendly and with some amusement at her. The impression I had when she related the incident to me was that the Japanese really meant no harm to her or anyone for they were on the retreat. They spoke kindly to her in Malay and remarking how adorable her baby was. She told me that one or a few of them even cuddled me in their arms. They stayed awhile at the longhouse and cooked a meal at our house. Later they left. It would appear that in defeat the instrument of the Japanese Occupation force showed a human face.

With the surrender of the Japanese the Third Rajah had returned to Sarawak after being safely away first in Australia and then in England during the Japanese Occupation. Thus for the briefest of period my infancy was lived under the reign of Sarawak's last White Rajah. We read in history that Rajah Sir Charles Vyner Brooke decided to cede Sarawak to the British Crown sparking off a protest known as the Anti-cession. But the anti-cessionists could not stop the cession and so Sarawak was passed from the Brooke Raj to the government of His Majesty the King. Sarawak came under the rule and protection of a mightier monarch. The Third and last Rajah departed for England.

Therefore the world that first presented itself to me when I began to be conscious of my being was a Sarawak that was ruled by a great and benign power. I did not see the people who ruled but it was only a matter of time when I began to be aware that they were the Authority and that were to be found and seen usually in towns, in offices and important places. It seemed right and natural that they were around because they could do what we could not. We call them the *Biranda*. I believe our people regarded them with awe.



The kind of respect and subservience that they gave could only be given to a people who deserved them. These were given to them because they were good.

I believe my initial memory of my very first glimpse of a *Biranda* was when we were residing at Sarig. I cannot tell now whether or not it was a government party that had come to our *kampung* but I clearly remember that it included at least one European. They arrived late in the afternoon. After they had been received at the *awah* or inner verandah of the longhouse or *bitangan*, this European gentlemen later walked across the outer verandah. He had taken off his shirt and I seem to remember that he was only wearing short trousers. Obviously he was cooling himself and also looking around a little. His glowing white skin, a burly body so obviously bubbling with health and vitality, his fine, sturdy and flawless physique and golden hair contrasted so greatly from us that he might as well be a piece of the sun that had dropped on the *tanju* or outer verandah or the being that walked before our eyes made us feel and look so inferior in size and physique, thus prompting someone from among the onlookers to remark "Perhaps *Tapa* looks like him". "Tapa" means the Supreme Being or God or a god. But what was probably in the onlooker's mind then was God or a god as a superlative, as physical perfection and superior or ultimate beauty and God as the Celestial Being or one who came from a heavenly realm\*. But the remark certainly reflects the deep affection and reverence verging on adoration our people have for the Europeans. They were the Government, the Authority, the Law, the School, the Doctor, the Protector, the Know-all and everything that was good and necessary. But over and above all these they were good and gave themselves to us. They not only ruled, developed the people and country, gave us education but they also died for us. That they had died for us, directly or indirectly, was something that we could not understand for we were not yet taught the amazing power of love and how it motivated people to make sacrifices and do extraordinary things. They had found a niche in our hearts. The Europeans were never denied a smile from a grateful people. Therefore when the European missionaries came to bring the Kingdom of God the affection and reverence given to them came so spontaneously. Since they were so good and caring it seemed proper that they taught us about God who is the source of all that is good. It seems true to say that God revealed Himself to us, in a sense, in or through the Europeans. Nevertheless the European, whether as ruler, administrator or missionary, was someone that I watched

\* According to our folktales and legends the celestial realm has nothing to do with man's destiny but just another world situated higher up and which the earth people below could enter, albeit by accident, and leave. In a few folktales some men from earth even married women from such a world.

from a distance. Later on in my life I wished that I could have the ability and courage that others had to go a little closer to the Europeans and perhaps I could have learned more. But where I lacked such ability and courage I made up in my enduring loyalty and affection for them insofar as they were the embodiment of what is true, good, great and noble.

In my childhood I was horrified at having any encounter with a European not out of fear that they might harm me, because this is an unworthy thought, but because I believe I would become quite dumb and witless before them. There was a quality in him that was beyond my understanding. He seemed to have another dimension. Yet little did I know that I moved about and had my being undisturbed in my own element in the safety and tranquility of PAX BRITANICA and he was the administrator of that peace.

I was born to very hard-working parents of a hard-working people. Very rarely did I ever see my father or mother idling away. Everyday they would be engaged in one kind of work or another. Like everybody else my parents planted padi, being the people's main occupation, and planting whatever else that could grow together with it at the swidden, kept pigs and fowls, tapped rubber and did whatever seemed necessary and prudent depending on the times and seasons. When the night was right my father would be out catching fish at the stream and catching the bull frogs by its banks. In the dark he would therefore bring a kind of lamp called the *pirita pego* which was fitted with a reflector and which was often used to light the way when travelling or walking at night. He would hold the lamp by one hand and the other the scooping net called *siridok* for catching the fish, prawns and frogs. The next morning we would have a breakfast of fish, prawns and frogs to go with the rice. We children were seldom disappointed the next morning when our father went out on such quest during the night.

Our family was never short of rice. Indeed people and perhaps my own parents themselves seemed to believe in the myth that those of our household were of a lineage that was favoured in some inexplicable way so that we always had good harvest and therefore in the lead in this respect as well as in others. In those days people were mainly engaged in hill padi farming and could clear as much of the jungles (of which they were still in abundance) as their strength and need allowed and required respectively for the purpose and there thus existed the potential for reaping bountiful harvests. Yet I believe that those of our household did not apply themselves in the occupation in any extraordinary way but the yield was evidently always satisfying. Thus the talk that favours were showered upon us. But if our household was of that lineage it would appear that it was to lose such favour for a time was to come when our stock of padi dwindled. Apparently this coincided with the

days when hill padi farming in a big area of fertile soil were over and more significantly, when faced with the challenges of a changing time which necessitated my parents to shift partly from padi planting and to engage in other occupations in order to obtain cash.

I have often heard talks that in the days when wealth in our society was spoken in terms of an abundant and ever-increasing stock of padi, my father started to sell our surplus padi to obtain cash. At first it appeared a very unorthodox practice to the other folks but it later made sense. My father also derived cash from the occasional sales of livestock, namely pigs and fowls and also as the result of operating a village shop. His initial capital to start the shop must have been obtained from the proceeds of these sales. His entrepreneurial streak thus seemed to make him more well off than the other families in the community. He was not complacent upon the advent of pepper. He was among the first few at Sarig to plant this important cash crop. This effort proved to be rewarding being another good means of obtaining cash. In retrospect it would seem that my father was greatly influenced by the industry, adroitness and pioneering spirit of the Chinese. He would talk of their calculating ways, perseverance and success. He tried to emulate them but he never grew prosperous. But he certainly applied himself the best way he could and his efforts made a difference. With cash obtained from these sources he was to have little difficulty in financing my education. But when the time was to come when he neither had padi in abundance nor much money the lineage myth still endured. They said that his former wealth had not vanished into nothing but had only taken on a different form and that is having an educated son.

I have just mentioned that my father operated a village shop. Business was reasonably good but after a few years he was forced to close down the shop. Customers, who included his own relatives, had assailed the shop with such crushing debts that the business simply collapsed. Four memories stood out very clearly from the days when the shop was still in operation. These memories somehow imprinted themselves in my mind for some reason or other. By then I already had two sisters and a brother but the younger of my sisters had been taken away by adoption when she was an infant of only a few weeks old. Three of us and perhaps another two or three cousins were playing hide-and-seek, our favourite past-time, at one part of the shophouse and which also served as our living area. I tried to climb the wall in order to find a place to conceal myself. It was very dark. In the darkness I either lost my grip or could not find anything to hold onto and fell. If I had fallen on the floor I would probably have hurt myself. But I fell on and was somehow caught at the same time by my sister and I was saved from a possible serious injury.

Our lives were in possible danger on one occasion. We were having our

meal at night. Why we had to take our last meal for the day so late I cannot tell. The meal was in progress when there was a loud banging on the door. My father had always bolted and locked the two doors of the shophouse at this time of night. Whoever was banging on the door was trying to break in. If they were not robbers they must be people who would not hesitate to harm us. That they might even be head-hunters was very much in our minds for now and then we heard talks of head-hunters on the prowl, or simply head-hunters' scare. The banging continued. My father kept a shotgun in the house. He spoke loudly to the intruders. I could not quite remember precisely what happened later but whoever they were continued to scour outside. I thought what they did next was to bang the windows. Could they be pranksters? But we were scared. My father then threatened to shoot. By this time all of us had completely stopped eating and were all tense and afraid. Then there was no more banging and no harm came to us. In retrospect what strikes me as most dismaying was the fact that not one neighbour, by which is meant, most of all, my father's relatives, seemed to care about us. It would seem that the fact that our lives were in danger was a matter that did not concern them. If the intruders had succeeded in breaking in whatever harm they might inflict on us was anybody's quest. Perhaps many heard the rude banging but they were too overcome with fear and had become witless and so none came to investigate.

This same kind of fear showed itself in another incident. The wife of an Iban had evidently eloped with another man who was much younger than her husband who was not only much older but also had a physical defect. They were sojourning at Sarig. It seemed that the woman chose Sarig as the place of refuge because she happened to know someone there and the person had arranged for them to take accommodation in an empty house whose occupants were living at another home preparatory to moving away to another locality. I seem to remember vaguely that on occasions I saw the man as he went on his trip with the woman to the stream to take their bath and back. He looked a bouncing and lithe young man endowed with excellent physique. Possibly other than the man whom the woman knew nobody else in the *kampung* suspected that they had eloped and that they were being pursued by her husband and a companion. Their pursuers tracked them and eventually knew the whereabouts of his wife and her lover. They arrived one night and located the house where they stayed. The lovers were surprised and an ugly scene ensued. The woman's lover probably tried to fight the pursuers but he was soon overcome and the beating and kicking started. The villagers had heard the angry exchange of foreign words and the cries of the woman and followed by the sound of a fight and then the beating and kicking. The brutality and the howls of pain and agony of the hapless lover at the hands of

the incensed husband was sickening. But all around there was only the fearful and silent listeners. The very name of "Seribas", which means Iban struck fear in their hearts and who but a fool would dare to intervene. And so the lover was beaten and in all likelihood sustained serious injuries. I never knew of his fate after this.

I believe that my father was the very first person at Sarig to own a radio set. This was because he could afford it and also because it was necessary to him as a petty village trader. Operating a shop required him to know the daily market prices of rubber and other commodities which were broadcasted nightly over the radio so that he could buy these produce, which were mainly rubber and rubber scraps, at the correct prices. The wonderful invention was a great novelty for us and the village folks. They would come and gather at the shop on certain nights to listen especially to their favourite item in the programme and which was the song and music of a Malay folk dance called the *gendang*. But the sound that somehow imprinted itself in my mind was a strain of music which preceded the B.B.C. news in English or Malay. Later in my life I was to identify the heraldic strain that I heard in my early boyhood as a refrain made by the trumpet sound from Haydn's "Trumpet Concerto". I now think of it as a sound which spoke of the new civilization that had come to Sarawak.

One early morning my sister and I were sitting at the entrance of the shop looking out at the morning scene before us. I can still recall I knew somehow that I was a much-loved child and I was feeling well and therefore nothing should change that. Perhaps in that frame of mind a thought came to me. I remember saying to myself, "I want to live forever". In retrospect while on the one hand I did not think that most of my life thereafter was a conscious search for an answer on the question of eternal life but on the other hand I was somehow led to the path that would make me find an answer. When I finally did it came to me in the form of faith. I cannot live forever in this present body which must age, become sick, deteriorating into an ugly and distorted form and finally return to dust. But in my own life eternal life is a truth since a belief in it affects my innermost self or my spirit which in turn determines my personality.

In my early boyhood at Sarig I had a glimpse of Christianity and the encounter imprinted itself in my mind. There was a boy who went to a Catholic Mission school in Serian and he lived there as a boarder. During the school holidays he would return home. Apparently it was in one of such holidays that I was somehow among those who looked at his books. I seem to remember that they were the rendition of the books of the Bible for it was not the Bible in one book but in a series. These books were realistically illustrated in black and white. I saw a picture of God creating the world and he

was moving in space. Again I saw him in other illustrations as we turned more pages. God was bearded and looked ancient and the drawing by William Blake that I saw later in life were both reminiscent of this picture of God as well as a more profound rendition of Him. But his countenance was benign, wise and full of authority.

There were two other pictures that also imprinted themselves in my mind. One was the scene of the battle in Heaven between the good and the bad angels. Another was the picture of the Deluge showing the solitary Ark being tossed about by the waves. This latter picture disturbed me. I had a special dread of any talks of the deluge. Before I saw this picture I had already heard stories from the tales and legends of our people of the great deluge that happened a very long time ago. And lo and behold! There in the Bible was a picture of the deluge. My young mind regarded the story of the deluge not as a fable but as something terrible that really did happen since there was a picture of the event. How I dreaded to think that it would happen again. The story of the deluge as told in the folktales and legends of our people of course differed from that as told in the Bible which I was to hear and read in the years to come. But in these tribal stories and legends there was no mention that the deluge came as a punishment and an act of God. They do not give the reasons or the meaning of the deluge.

I had heard folktales and later when in school I was to hear and read fairy tales but somehow the Bible stories were different from these, although in some respect both are about man and the unseen or supernatural power that works wonders. I did not think that they were absurd or far-fetched. Like a fairy tale these biblical stories happened a long time ago and in faraway places but these stories seemed to explain something. Later when I attended a Mission primary school I was to know that the Bible led or contributed greatly to the great western civilization, humanity and Christianity. When I got very much older I was to understand that it contributed to the making of a better world. That there was a mission school or for that matter the education that came to so many native children in Sarawak was the result of the spread of Christianity and how it started was told in the Bible.

There was also another memory of what I saw and heard but which only much later in life I was to have a better understanding of and which was to reveal more about the Catholic Faith which I was to embrace. What I saw were medals being worn by some boys from Simpok (Pruman) who came to visit Sarig and the sign of the cross that they made before and after eating. Then I heard talks or mention of a new *adat* or religion called "Adat Kristen" and a place called "Apui Neraka" or hell where the lost souls suffered damnation for all eternity in a great sea of unextinguishable fire. I am not at all certain now if the stories and pictures in the Bible, the medals and the talks

about Christianity actually constituted my very first contact with Christianity. Or was it at another place that I made my first encounter? But if it was so the contacts with the Catholic Faith whether earlier or later had a deeper and lasting impression in my mind. I often wonder now if in some way that I was not aware of until looking back at it the sign of the cross and the medal did indeed contrive to make me eventually to walk on the path that led me to the Catholic Church.

My childhood was mostly spent at Sarig but the family also lived on and off at Kraki which was linked to Sarig by a footpath. We lived there long enough and often enough as to give me some memories and impressions of the place in those days. Perhaps in one's life there are places which one remembers for some special reasons. For me Kraki was one such place. Perhaps this was partly because it was there that I had my beginning and partly because of other reasons that seem apparent in retrospect. Evidently more than thirty years ago our folks left Kraki for the last time and never to return to live there again.

Kraki gave me many happy days of my childhood and early boyhood. I cannot remember any instance that made me sad. I did fall ill at times and this made me to confine myself in the house. I would be left quite alone during the day except for one of the grown-ups who would often be my grandmother for all the others were out working. But when ill I was shown even more tenderness. I remember Kraki in those days as a place of tranquility and nothing ever disturbed that peaceful atmosphere. It was a place where nature abound and a place of plenty. Its only disadvantage must only be its remoteness. In my days there I remember it also as a world of ponds, water hens, padi fields, of snakeheads and catfishes, of angling and fish traps, of tree swifts and molluscs. To the eye of a child our pond at Kraki seemed immense. It was my sea or my great lake.

I went to the pond mostly to take my bath or to angle there. On a warm sunny day the water in the pond would be gently heated and dipping in the mildly heated water was most pleasant and pleasurable. In many of those trips I would sometimes observe the pond. As the wind or strong breeze blew it would send tiny ripples across the surface. The same wind would blow some nearby sago palms making their leaflets rattle merrily. It was one of those happy, lulling and tranquil sound which one heard now and then. It suggested serenity and well-being.

Before I saw the sea for the first time in my life I would imagine those ripples to be waves and the pond was the sea. All ponds and lakes have their other sides. The other side of our pond seemed far away and whatever lay at the other side was a mystery to me. I never ventured there. At one end of the dam which blocked the stream and thus turning into a pond, and the part of

the sweep of the drainage area which spread from either bank, and which held the water, was dug a ditch to let out the excess water to escape and therefore to control the water level in the pond. In my days at Kraki there were three sources from which came the predominant sounds at Kraki. One would hear the grunting and chuckling of the water hens of which there must be a thriving population and the croaking of frogs. The other sound was that made by the mini waterfall caused by the water from the pond, which rushed through this outlet and plunged to the other side of the bund into a stream and where the water cascaded was a deep pool.

That there was a possibility that we might not have enough to eat never occurred to me. Rice was in abundance and the pond and the stream were abound with fishes and other marine lives. When the Job's Tears at our swiddens were ripening after the padi harvest my father would set traps to catch the wild pigeons which came to feed on them. It was probably not yet the age of the rice mill or if it was our people had not switched to this time-saving method and therefore still made unhusked rice the traditional way by pounding the padi using belian pestle inside a wooden mortar and so retaining all its goodness.

A typical day's meal would be rice taken with vegetables stew, or stew consisting of edible shoots, mushrooms, stems of plants from the bushes and fish. Occasionally the dishes would include chicken, the meat of some wild animals such as mouse-deer, barking deer and birds. There would also be a time when we had the meat of flying foxes which would come in the evening at a certain time of the year to feed on the fruits of a *bayuh* tree, a cousin of the bread fruit tree, which grew near the house. The vegetables were those grown with the padi in our swiddens and therefore we had those only during a certain time of the year and at other times we would have to rely on whatever edibles that could be procured from the jungles and bushes. Fishes such as catfish, snakehead and carp were plentiful and were caught from the pond and streams by angling or caught from the streams by means of fish traps or by using the scoop. The harvest of fishes in the pond was made by draining out the water. This was done probably once a year and we would be very excited. When fishes were obtained this way most of them were pickled using rice porridge and salt as the preservatives. For the sake of variety rather than out of necessity our meals would occasionally include mollusc stew among the dishes. For the same reason an edible floating pond algae called *rumut* also became an occasional dish. But I never liked any of these dishes for they were not delicious at all. I wondered why the grown-ups ate them, particularly the algae, with apparent relish.

My sister, whose name is Tunun, was also brought to live alternately at Sarig and Kraki. But somehow I cannot remember her presence there. I



came to know and realise later in my life that I was a favourite child inspite of being, at times, sulky, brooding and obstinate. Although my parents treated both of us well and affectionately the other members of the household were more fond of me than my sister. I could have my way but alas for poor Tunun she could not. There were many things which she must not do. Tunun would be told not to eat too much or too often of any food. She would be deprived of things that were lavished on me. Then there was always the likelihood that she would be spoken to none too kindly for doing or not doing things which no one minded or else overlooked if I was the one who did it or didn't. With hindsight it would seem that it almost looked as if I was my parent's real child. I had everybody's affection but the same was given grudgingly to Tunun by those of the household other than our parents. The reasons for it was because I was the first child and a male and something about the way I look. My mother must have noticed all these but she was well aware of the household that she lived in. She was seen, inspite of her beauty, to come from a poor family as compared to the household with its "lineage". She thus had an inferiority complex. Thus she could say so little even on matters concerning the treatment of her daughter. She was the type who suffered silently.

To digress. But if I was treated as a darling child then it had certainly spoiled me. I was told that I once wounded an old lady at Sarig. She had meant no harm and she was asking for something to eat or to use from us as she was wont to do. She was becoming beggarly. Being so pampered had produced an incipient arrogance in me and I simply looked at her as belonging to an inferior class and was contemptuous of her. I gave her a blow with a splicing knife for being such a nuisance. I was not conscious of having committed this infantile violence but I was told that I did it. I remember this old woman when I was older. The unfortunate woman had a disorder of an organ and as a result she was the smelliest and filthiest person at Sarig. As her condition deteriorated over the years she was virtually abandoned by her children and grandchildren and she was left to fend for herself. At last feeling so forsaken and weary of life she took a rope and hung herself.

I have an adopted brother named K...., a first cousin, from my father's side. His father had died when he was still a child and his mother married again but evidently she did not care about him anymore. Those of our household took pity on him and adopted him. But it would seem that he did not have a happy childhood and boyhood. My early memories of him was that of a boy who showed no gentleness to me. He resented the treatment and attention that I was accorded with by the members of the household. He would look for opportunities to chide and deride me. One day at Sarig I followed my father to the place where he was to cut down bamboo stems for use to replace the rotting ones at the drying place. My father had asked K....

to come with him and help him with the work. As for me I just chose to go but I was to be of no help. My father had to go just a little further away and he was barely out of ear-shot when K.... taunted me by saying that I was so useless that he doubted if I would even know how to cut down a bamboo stem. I felt like crying on hearing this. Then he left and followed my father. Because he was older, bigger, stronger and certainly not frail like me it seemed so unfair of him to think that I could do what he could.

To return to Kraki. For me life went on at a leisurely pace but it was by no means an indolent one. I was still too little to do any work though I would try to do something that I fancied. I would wake up on a fine morning and hear the singing and calls of the birds. I would emerge from the house, cross the inner verandah and out to the drying place and stand there awhile until I remember I had to take my breakfast either together with the rest of the family, if they had not yet gone out to work, or by myself. Then I would examine the fish trap that was set the day before. I remember emptying the fish trap of its contents which were mostly catfishes and snakeheads and how some of the catfishes escaped because I was not daring enough to grab and kill them which, when fully matured, could look quite ferocious to a little boy. Later in the morning I would go to the pond to take my morning dip. Only my grandmother and I would be at home. Then I would be out and about at the compound doing things to amuse myself and perhaps in the course of which I would discover and observe things. When it was the fruit season I would observe the rambutan tree, which grew beside the drying place and its boughs almost touching its edge. At Kraki the folks lived in single houses, of which there were only a few, and they were situated scatteredly at some distance from each other. I would observe how the rambutan tree flowered, then how the flowers developed into fruits, then maturing and finally ripening. When I fancied it I would go with the grown-ups to our swidden farm not so far away from the house. The farm would have been fired a few days ago and I would smell the scent of the burnt soil and vegetation. Reflecting on it now the scent is linked to life since it is associated with padi farming and hence the procurement of the life-giving rice. Later still I would watch the creepers sprouting everywhere and the sight somehow delighted me for the entire area that was our farm was filled with the myriad signs of the beginning of new life, albeit temporarily arrested during the weeding, after the death of the jungle. These sprouting creepers, resembling the *lowgay* or bean sprouts would sometimes be collected to be made into a dish. When it was the weeding time I would go with the grown-ups to the swidden farm and there while they were busily and labouriously doing the weeding I would stalk to catch grass-hoppers just for the fun of it, for apart from occasionally using them as baits for catching fish I

would just toy with them. The hill padi farm seems to provide a habitat for so many varieties of grass-hoppers for they are those which one cannot seem to find anywhere else or at other times as frequently or where they are as numerous as are found in a swidden. I would also pluck the berries of a plant called *ratuok* which, as I recall, would invariably be found growing on a swidden. The berry is edible but one cannot take too much of it. I would gaze at the dead and charred trees, which we called *sikidan*, with their branches partly chopped off and how they stood here and there in the swidden like sentinels as if keeping watch over the farm. From our swidden farm I would gaze at the sky and see the clouds as they sailed across it in an armada of great fluffy masses. At other times I would observe the cloud formations and how they constantly changed shapes sometimes suggesting human heads and human forms and then into shapes of things that quite terrified me and I would stop looking at them. I would look at the sky at sunset and its reflection in our pond and how the surface of the water was coloured with the changing colours of the sky. I would see the shafts of light of the departing sun caused by the breaks in the thick clouds. The effect was such as to suggest that somewhere there is a far country. Then there would be times when I would go with my grandmother to look for palm grubs, which when matured become beetles, from the sago trunk that was left to rot or from the stumps of a species of wild sago palm called *apit* at the swidden or elsewhere. We ate these grubs.

I like to angle in the stream. I began to know the right time of the day for fishing. I would venture some distance away from the house all by myself and to do fishing at some spots where the bed of the stream deepened. Quite early in the morning I would go past the great *tapang* tree which in all my days at Kraki was a landmark. It grew by the bank of the stream. I had often seen that this tree became a roosting place for the thousands of tree swifts at a certain time of the year. They would swarm in great confusion at dusk screeching and screaming before they finally settled down on the tree for the night. I continued on my way past our neighbours' houses, of which there were only two in that direction, until I came to the spot which I decided was where I should begin angling. I would usually use either earthworms or paste made from a mixture of rice and certain nuts as baits. I caught several carps. How delighted I was by my catch. When the fishes at the spot refused to bite anymore I moved upstream to the next spot and so I spent almost the whole morning doing that. I felt so carefree and felt I was moving about and having my being in a safe, free and happy world.

The world at Kraki was an especially happy one for me because not only was I surrounded by my folks who were so fond of me but also by our

neighbours who were so warm and gentle with me. I saw kind and smiling faces.

Then I found myself at Sarig again. By this time the village already had a school. Perhaps my parents meant to send me to this school but before they asked me to, one day I just followed the other pupils and walked into the classroom of my own accord. It seemed that the school was started in 1948 or thereabout but it was to function for less than four or five years. It was said to be a private school, run with government approval and having a "connection" with the Anglican Mission. The teacher received a salary which was supplemented by the money derived from the school fees. The teacher was also allowed to utilise the communal land for padi farming. Thinking back I could not sense any missionary characteristics of the school. The first teacher was a man named Pirin, a Biatah Dayak from Quop, but after teaching for only two years he left as the result of having committed a scandalous act. He was succeeded by one whom I shall call Buju and he came from another Biatah Dayak village and it was during his tenure as the sole teacher and headmaster that I became a pupil of the school. The first school building stood on the slope which had been levelled into a wide terrace. But the school was later moved to another site further away from the village at a place called Tibuat. It was closed after it had moved to the new site. I remember that this happened probably in a matter of days after a note was handed to the teacher one afternoon while he was conducting the class. It came from the *Tua Kampong* or village headman. The headman apparently expressed his disgust over the teacher's patronising behaviour towards a certain female pupil and fearing his continued stay would lead to another scandal he demanded him to leave Sarig at the earliest opportunity. He left and later secured a job in a government department. Thus Sarig had its first and last school.

## CHAPTER IV

### VISITS TO KUCHING

My world so far had been Sarig and Kraki. But on occasions my parents together with other *kampung* folks brought me to Kuching and there I had a glimpse of another world. Perhaps the first time they brought me there was when I was in my early boyhood. But I must have gone there with them on quite a number of occasions beginning from my early boyhood.

In those days going to Kuching was a big affair to the folks of the interior. Usually a few families would go together for a visit. Tucked deep in the heart of Kuching district Sarig was a long way from Kuching, being about twenty-seven miles in space and several hours in time journeying on foot and by bus. The party bound for Kuching would begin the journey in the morning and travel on foot along the well-trodden footpath that was given the name of Budok Path. At least twice along the way we would stop to rest at two resting spots. There were at least three of them along the length of the Budok Path and they were given names, as if they were stations, such as Tipara Bawang, Tipara Tibayan Tikara and Tipara Sigite. The Budok Path ran over many hills, slopes and crossed over streams of which one or two of them were either different streams or the same but crossed over at various points along the path.

A certain stretch of the Budok Path ran beside a tiny stream called the Yang Garu. There was a spot along this stream which mystified me everytime I passed it in our journeyings along the footpath. This was the spot where my grandmother would take me for a number of times in order to give me the "bath". I remember that when she and I arrived there she would split the bamboo stem that she had cut earlier on. She split it lengthwise to serve as a conduit. She had also cut another bamboo stem to serve as a container. Having done this she would make an offering and invoke on some terrestrial and aerial spirits called the *apu tarun* which seemed to have chosen to become our household's "guardian spirit" or the family "gods". The sharpened end of the bamboo conduit would be driven at a certain spot at the bank of the stream. Water would ooze out along the conduit and trickle into the bamboo container which was placed at its receiving end to collect the water. When the container was full she would pour the water over me to give me what could only be a symbolic bath as there was hardly enough to wet all my body, and still less to clean it and uttering more invocations to the spirits. She took me to this spot for a number of times in my childhood and early boyhood. I was often ill as a child and a boy. It seems that the purpose for bringing me there

was to give me the "bath" so that I would be cured of my illness or so that the symbolic bath would put me under the "protection" of the "family god" or "benign spirit" that would guard me from sickness. It seems also that it was to give me "protection" that I was often made to wear a hawk-bell during my childhood and boyhood. But while the hawk-bell did not seem to guard me from whatever it was that so often made me ill it certainly served as a sign that I was a child and then a boy who often fell ill.

When the party finally arrived at the point known as the Batu Dua Puloh-dua Sitengah or Twenty-second and half milestone along the Kuching-Serian Road, we had travelled a distance of some four miles. There was a Chinese shop at this embarkation point and someone would ask the shopkeeper when would the next bus be expected to arrive. After obtaining the information some would wait by the roadside while others sat down in the shop. One of them would make the announcement by shouting when a bus was in sight or at the sound of one. The buses that ran along this road were individually-owned as a bus company was not yet formed. I believe the operators thus competed fiercely with each other in terms of fare, solicitation and passenger intake. The fare would drop or rise above the regular rate depending on the degree of competition. Each operator would try to take the passengers on their return trip as well by asking them when would they do so and which lodging house they would stay in while in Kuching so that he would know where to look up for them on the stated day. I seem to remember that the operators often carried passengers and loads far in excess of the maximum weight and capacity of their vehicles. The mosquito bus, as it was known, was of the type that had seats placed sideways and thus the passengers would be seated facing each other. The middle area was for putting almost all manner of things including farming and gardening implements. The seats were just two wooden boards placed on some supports and without any cushions. But I found the bus ride wonderful, if uncomfortable, all the same although it ran an unsealed road for most of the way and the ride was therefore very bumpy. As we rode I would watch the trees by the roadside as they seemed to dance gracefully. It seems that it was not until some miles to Kuching that we came to a sealed road. I seem to remember that somewhere beyond this point that a world called Kuching started to announce itself. One seems to see more and better houses, more vehicles and as the bus continued to run, town life was becoming more evident as one saw more people, activities and urban scenes. But these passed quickly almost like a thought as the bus ran on. Then we entered Kuching. We continued to the inner part of the capital and finally to the bus station and there we alighted.

I must state here that there is a possibility that whatever recollections or impressions of things and people in Kuching that I had as a little boy may not

be absolutely accurate nor necessarily mentioned in their precise chronological order. They were recollections or impressions caught on more than one visit and some were more vivid than others and perhaps the less vivid happened first and the more vivid occurred later. It could also be possible that what I thought was my first sight of Kuching was really one that I saw at a later visit. But whereas my memories may not serve me too well, my intention is that the recollections and impressions would at least be accurate in essence and as a whole.

To continue with the story. When we went to Kuching it was the nearest thing to taking a holiday. We would spend a night there and the brief time spent in Kuching and for the grown-ups it was a well-deserved respite after many months to a year-long period of constantly engaged in the business of making a living which took the forms of making swidden, tapping rubber, cultivating pepper and generally out and about doing whatever else that was necessary and beneficial to us and all these caused much exertion and movement. Having a little good time for a day or two at Kuching meant having the simple pleasure of sight-seeing, shopping and enjoying Chinese cooking. Kuching in the Fifties already had much to show and to marvel at by those who dwelled in the interior but of course not nearly as much as in the decades to come. But for me it was a big, important and wonderful and even mysterious place. The authority had its offices there. It was a place where many of the things we used and needed came from such as the simple match to such a wonderful invention as the radio. A host of things and events took place in Kuching and many important, wealthy and clever people lived there. Kuching therefore meant all these and other things. And we who came from the rural villages had reasons to feel small and humble as we spent our brief "holiday" in this place.

As I was saying we alighted from the bus. There were people everywhere at the bus station and at the shophouses along the nearest street. Our folks referred to this group of shophouses as the *Pasar Barong* or Circular Bazaar alluding to the gyratory arrangement of the shophouses along the India Street, Court House and Gambier Street. I could see signs in various arrangements and colours and a great deal of noise. The bus terminal was at the waterfront. I therefore had my first glimpse of the Sarawak River. The opposite bank was much further away than the other side of our pond at Kraki. A ship berthed at the dock and if I remember rightly I could make out its white cabin and black hull. Little did I know that I was one day to sail in such a vessel. As I looked around I had perhaps a momentary vision that Kuching was a complex or maze of concrete buildings, shophouses, bright and colourful signs, streets, alleys, lanes and I had the notion that it spread far and wide.

We checked into a lodging house which operated under the name of N. C. Hotel. Almost at once I noticed that this lodging house which we called a hotel was staffed by elderly men. At what served as a registry there was one who was wearing a white singlet and long trousers and who took down our names and other particulars after which we were shown our room upstairs. I was to notice some years later how the elderly receptionist was writing our names *et cetera* in Chinese characters. Thus it was that I was to see my father's name and mine written in Chinese characters for the first time. But I do not think that I can recognise my name in such characters now without a prior knowledge of it.

It was also at this hotel that I was to see how a man tried to dupe my father. A man from the interior such as my father was very conspicuous to a town people. He looked timid, docile and humble. He was guileless but by no means an idiot. He did not have the quick eyes of the town people. Away in the country people were honest with each other in the sense that they were not like the streetwise persons in the town. My impression of this man was that he just seemed to be lounging about the place and not doing anything in particular. There he was idling away and so wicked ideas came to his head. In the idle mind grew a predatory tendency. He approached my father and tried to make him buy a piece of rottan which he told my father in so many clever and persuasive words had magical and curative propensity. Then he came to the point when he said that if my father was still skeptical about its power he would demonstrate it if he would oblige him with a little treat at the coffee shop. It seemed to me that he was also trying to trick my father into buying him a free cup of coffee and perhaps toasted slices of bread. He probably took my father for a fool and a simpleton and little did he suspect that the man's little son was listening and observing him and could understand what the man was up to. But my father neither bought the "magical" rottan nor obliged him with any drink and the wretched man troubled him no more.

During our visit to Kuching I was conscious of the presence of two entities there. I would call them the Authority and the Chinese. One could make out the former from an overpowering sense of authority and I could see it from the very moment when we boarded the bus bound for Kuching and it became stronger as we raced toward the capital. The fact that the grown-ups spoke in low voices or kept quiet showed their awareness of the Authority otherwise called the Government which required them to be civil. In my mind Kuching and everything there operated, existed and functioned by order of the Authority. The Authority was responsible for the power and telephone lines, the buses that ran, the amount of sugar or milk put into a cup of coffee. The amount of rice that was served on the plate at the eating places or the lodging fee were all sanctioned by the omnipresent Authority. We



perceived it in things such as these.

I believe I never entered a government office in those days and I did not fancy doing so because although I knew I would perhaps catch a glimpse of the European I did not want to be seen. I wanted to see them without being seen. To us they were synonymous with that which was good and noble but they were greatly a mystery to me. They seemed to tower above us in dignity, character, perception, understanding, knowledge, ability, taste and in many other ways. The picture of the world that presented itself to me even so early in my life was that there were many races of people on this earth. There were white people, dark people, yellow people and black people. But in that picture I saw that the Europeans occupied the highest place. They seemed to have an extraordinary power, commanding so much respect and making the world that was possible. They were also a mystery but this mystery had its source from the depth of goodness, wisdom, light and truth for how could the good they brought and did spring from the realm of darkness and evil. A boy had no knowledge of his country's history. He could not ask why things were the way they were. He would know it and ask this when he gets very much older. But he knew of no disturbances or any kind of straits in the livelihood of his people. True they had to work hard but he saw there was contentment. Was this not the result of things working properly and well and was this perhaps not because of the fact that the Europeans, the Chinese, the Indians, the Malays, the Dayaks and others were variously doing their parts to contribute to the well-being of the country?

The bus route through the capital passed through a part called the Pangkalan Batu, so that on our way to the bus terminal and on our return trip I could see an obelisk which later I came to know as the Brooke Memorial Monument. On the side facing the waterfront and the highway I could see, as we passed by, a white bass-relief of the profile of the Second Rajah, as I came to know later in my life. I could see also at the corner of the monument flanking this sculpture and placed slightly lower down were two figures also done in relief but on metal. The monument, standing silently and solemnly cast an impression in my mind as a boy. I wondered why it was built and made to stand there. In the future that was still far away it was to speak its message to me. It is associated with the making of this country, and of keeping it in a sphere so that all that is good, excellent and great, all that is true and beautiful and all that is noble in the human spirit are allowed to find expressions and to bear fruits, and these must continued and always to be the reasons for these things give and shall continue to give the country the foundation that was stronger than the monument which merely symbolises them. The fruits of what are good, true and beautiful are manifested in freedom, peace, harmony, prosperity, justice and those things that speak of

the greatness of the human spirit which are the prerequisite to the greatness of a people and nation. These must prevail for the alternative can only be suffering and disaster.

I noticed immediately that Kuching was a world where the Chinese presence was overwhelming. I have said elsewhere that it seemed so natural and good for the Europeans to be in the country and in our midst for they were there to do what we could not. Almost or the same thing could be said of the Chinese except that in our mind they occupied a different place. They contributed to the country in another capacity and noted for their role in another sphere but in concert with other factors, major and minor, that contributed to the general good. That they were found in urban areas seemed perfectly natural, that is to say, the other people of Sarawak namely the natives were not yet able — having yet to learn — to play their roles in business, commerce and industry and some people must play that role. They knew how to build a town, to make it function and knew how to live and survive there. They were in their own element that they themselves had made to a large extent. The town seemed a very wonderful place with its paved streets, shops, strong, massive and majestic buildings, tap water, electricity, telephones, cinemas and others. The Chinese appeared to be a remarkable people for everything they touched turned into gold. They usually succeeded in anything that was worthwhile doing. The scene that one saw, whether agricultural, commercial and industrial all the way along the Kuching-Serian road from where we embarked to the capital attested to the propensity of this people for success in their undertaking.

There were things that they did and the way they were done that gave Kuching its attraction and which greatly fascinated me. For instance, how was it that we could not make coffee like the kind that was served in the coffee shop? Drinking a cup of coffee there was an utterly delightful experience. The amount of coffee, the sweetness and the creaminess were just right. It was served in a thick-rimmed cup and saucer which seemed to be the standard utensils used in the coffee shop in those days. The waiter in white singlet and dark blue short would sail to where we were seated and deliver them, placing them deftly on the round marble table before us. Then everyone very carefully proceeded to stir their coffee. I watched as it changed colour from black to chocolate and to light brown and this meant that the milk was completely stirred.

Eating Chinese food was another attraction. Like drinking their coffee Chinese cooking was a great delight to our Dayak palate. My father would take us to the eating place called the Open Air Market at the heart of the town to have our meal during the day. But taking our meal there in the evening was much more pleasant. For the air was balmy and the street lights

were on and to the eye of a rural child this gave the atmosphere of a carnival. As we entered the precinct I had a momentary vision of all the food sellers there jumping to their feet and then rushing at us, each trying to take us to patronise his gastronomic wares. It seemed all so very amusing even undignified but it was really very serious business to them and thus giving Kuching a facet of its character. Of course they served more or less the same dishes and so any stall there was as good as the other and so we took a table and settled there and the unsuccessful competitors withdrew to their respective stations but their eyes watchful for the entry of the next customers. I remember the occasions when we went to this same place for our meal in the day time. Our eating was barely in progress when ragged, dirty and awful-looking creatures hovered around us and begging pathetically from us for a coin or two. They would flatter my father by calling him "towkay" or rich man. I thus saw the peculiarity of the town and the less pleasant side of Kuching. Later in life I learnt that some or probably most of them were not genuine beggars. The hand that gives is poorer than the one that receives.

In one of the visits to Kuching I saw a sight which gave me some fright. The sight was that of the stilt-walkers who seemed to have encased themselves in gigantic human figures in costumes both of which were in lurid colours. These figures had differing facial expressions looking either grinning or scowling all the time. These stilt-walkers walked together in a Chinese procession which took place at night. The huge and lofty figures towered above the crowd who watched the parade as it made its way through the streets. My father had taken me to watch it. When I had a glimpse at the figures when they were still some distance away I was so startled by the sight that I believe I tried to make my father not to watch the slow-moving procession any longer, but I believe I dared not gaze at the stilt-walkers as they passed by. Even with my father beside me I was frightened.

I recall that visiting Kuching brought wonderful sensations to me. They came as I perceived and had glimpses of life, people and things in the town, such as when I looked at the sights there, such as when I looked at the scenes and heard its noises and sounds. They came as I heard the chimes of the clock at the Clock Tower. Or as I saw and heard the myriads of swallows and hearing their screeching and screaming as they came to roost for the night at their nests at some majestic government buildings, with massive pillars, and shophouses. Or heard the curious calls of the cake vendor who would come up to the lodging house in the morning and the calls of other vendors down below at the street. Or as I heard the sounds of the cups and saucers being washed at the sinks at the coffee shops. Or the sound of the pressure cookers at the food stalls. Or when I took my bath from the tap water at the lodging house's bathroom in the morning. Or when I saw boys and girls in smart

school uniforms. It came also when I chanced to catch sight of two European nuns in their habits about to cross the road and they looked so happy and gentle and their big black strings of beads (which I was to know were rosaries) hanging down from their sides. Or when I saw majestic palms, beautiful flowers and ornamental shrubs and trees at the public park which I was to know as the Museum Ground. I might say that I felt then in all this the stirrings of a new world, a new civilization and that something was in the making, the forming of the country and people of a new world. That the people in the town left the swallows and their nests unharmed and undisturbed seemed to me to speak of a new civilization and higher culture.

Then we would return to the *kampung* and I thought I was somewhat sorry that our visit was so short. I would spend my days again in the interior.

## CHAPTER V

# EDUCATION AND EARLY EXPOSURE

I might say that I had received a rudimentary education at Sarig. But after the demise of the school my father decided to send me to a school at a Biatah Dayak Village called Quop to continue or to begin anew my education together with about a dozen boys and girls including K.... I was to have my sojourn there probably for two years. The place that I found myself living in was Quop in the first half of the Fifties, a period that was deep in the summer of British rule. I might say that my young and pagan mind was looking at a place and society that were awakening to a new world brought about by two forces, Christianity and Education and the influences of the modern world that was ushering in.

I thought the village, which was much bigger than Sarig, looked better and more interesting. It was certainly much cleaner with no foraging pigs about. Unlike the houses back home those at Quop were mostly separate and scattered and, if I recall rightly, many were with compounds. A few perhaps were still joined. Yet others stood close to each other but they were detached. Growing here and there beside the houses and by the footpaths were many kinds of flowers and ornamental plants. There were many growing beside the village football field thus forming hedges. As the houses were strewn over a wide area there were therefore footpaths linking one sector to the other and also leading to the village major footpath. There were parts of the village which were hilly and rocky but on these too stood several houses. I was often intrigued by the many jutting rocks among one hilly part. Their primeval presence was somewhat eerie to me when I associated them with our folktales telling about people and houses turning into stones. The people seemed appreciative of pleasant and gay surrounding and cleanliness. In retrospect, in short I was looking at a society that was making a perceptible cultural and mental ascent.

Quop lies some sixteen miles away from Sarig. Obviously in order to go to school there we had to reside in the village itself. I seemed to remember that at first we grouped ourselves together by taking accommodation in one house but later we apparently broke into two or three groups. There were among us from Sarig a brother and a sister who had an aunt or an uncle from their mother's side and they stayed in the house of one or the other. We were living as a family with the older among us assuming more responsibilities and taking charge of those who were still little such as myself and a cousin. This

was probably the reason why I recall that life was not so hard when we were staying in a private house. The girls did the cooking and they also washed our clothes thus performing the role of an older sister and leaving us to do the lighter chores. I seem to recall that only the two of us little boys stayed with the girls while the bigger boys including K.... stayed elsewhere.

The education of K.... and myself at the school, called St. James's School, meant a financial responsibility for my parents but evidently they lived up to it. I could not recall any inconveniences which involved financial matters. We had sufficient clothes, provisions and money to pay for our school fees, to buy our exercise and text books and whatever else we needed as pupils and boarders. My education, in all probability, began all anew but it was the beginning of a formal education. The majority of the pupils at St. James's School were already teenagers. Those in the higher classes were decidedly in their late teens and probably some were past their teens. I cannot tell how old I was when I began my education at Quop, but I felt certain I was still below ten. I was among those pupils who were very much younger. The St. James's School was a big rural school. It catered for pupils not only from Quop itself but from other Biatah Dayak villages such as Siratau and others. It also attracted us from Sarig and pupils from Padawan and Staang. It also drew at least two Iban pupils. Its staff consisted of at least four teachers. It seemed that in my first year only one teacher was assigned to our class and he taught us all the subjects including vernacular in Biatah and Song. And who should teach us to sing but a very talented man who was to turn out to be the only known composer of many original Bidayuh Dayak songs perhaps then and most certainly in the future. But oddly enough although a mission school I cannot remember being told the Bible stories or taught religion in my first year. I remember being told to learn and recite the Our Father in English, but at a later stage in my schooling at St. James's. I did not have many vivid memories of the classroom but I believe that the learning process went its normal course. I cannot remember having any unpleasant moments in the class. I would suppose that under the watchful eyes of the teacher the pupils generally behaved well enough. During recess we would play games, frolic about and fly paper jets and it was at such a time and after school that I made some friends and began to speak the Biatah dialect. Others were generally friendly or they just minded their own business. Some would have fun teasing me. But there was one boy who was not of our class but who was somewhat pugnacious and thus become somewhat of an antagonist. Yet this was also to be the boy whose path in life was to be similar to mine insofar as we had our education in a mission school in the *kampung* and from there proceeded to a government school and then secured government jobs. Apart from the vernacular class the medium of instruction was in

English. During the evening we would be doing our homework and learning our lessons under the light of the kerosene lamps. The local boys from the higher classes would come to visit us in order to see and talk to the girls but I believe they later behaved themselves. On certain evenings I would sometimes chance to take a look at the notebook and text book of another pupil who was in the upper class. Somehow I took note of an illustration which explained why the earth is round. I saw in the geography text book pictures depicting scenes of peoples and places in foreign lands and they gave glimpses of people and scenes in other parts of the world that one never knew before. I felt then as one who was on an exciting voyage of discovery. I too would learn these when my time came. The picture in the geography text book were also meant to be coloured and the pupil made attempts to do so. We discovered that yellow produced by the colour pencil was indistinguishable on a white background under the light of the kerosene lamp.

In my first year the school building that was used was one that stood on a hill or rather on the gentle slope of a hill that appeared to have been levelled and enough to provide space for the building and compound. If I remember rightly the building was quite old. But it would appear that by this time plans had been made to build a new and bigger school building-cum-dormitory at another site. It would seem that the old building was constructed to serve two purposes, a school and a community hall. Among the most charming aspect of the Quop people was their strong musical tradition which was founded by the missionary, Mr. Frederick William Abe, during the reign of Rajah Charles Brooke. The tradition was evidently very much alive when I was at Quop. It would appear that the people not only had the propensity for music but were appreciative of entertainment in the form of stage shows. Orchestras and stage shows would be held in this school-cum-community hall. Indeed there was a stage in this building meant for holding these. I was once together with other little boys who were made to perform on this stage in conjunction with the Feast of St. James, Quop's patron saint. We were made to sing and to suggest or mimic with our movements and actions according to the words of the song. I believe my performance was a dismal failure. I was no budding entertainer. I must be a disappointment to our class teacher, whose name was Kipcha Siel Juke, who arranged the performance. He himself had certain claim in the entertainment field because he could play the violin and other string instruments. In the future I was to hear his many lovely, delightful and distinct melodies and songs in Biatah that he composed over the Land Dayak Service of Radio Sarawak and later Radio Malaysia Sarawak. During the terms this stage served as our classroom. The lower class or classes thus occupied the most elevated place in the building so that we of the lower or lowest standard could see the classes of higher echelon down below. It was

when we were occupying this building that some Europeans who, I deduce, was either connected to the mission or the government came to pay the school a visit. After spending some time inspecting the classes down below they climbed up to us in the lower echelon on the stage. I remember that they looked at the exercise books of some of the pupils. I cannot remember if they looked at mine. If I remember rightly there was a girl in our class and I had the impression that she was among the bright pupils. When our European visitors looked at her exercise book she received an applause from them for getting all or nearly all her answers correct.

The Anglican Mission made Quop into a missionary and education centre. This probably explained why we from Sarig and the boys and girls from other *kampungs* could be admitted to St. James's School. The annals say that it had begun to become a centre since the Reverend Father William Chalmers moved there in 1859. It would seem therefore that Quop had a claim to a history of education that went the furthest back in time among the Bidayuh Dayaks. Thus in the early Fifties there were already among the Biatah people at Quop those who were employed as teachers and civil servants, whereas elsewhere in the Bidayuh Dayak land such as at Sarig the same generation was still illiterate or a very few of whom were semi-illiterate. They were the first to savour the fruits of education. One of them was to rise to the rank of a Resident and another a magistrate. It had the same claim in terms of its history of Christianity. The St. James's Church is one of the oldest churches in Sarawak. The annals say it was consecrated in 1865. It stands today old, venerable but durable like a monument to give testimony to this claim. Life had contrived to make me step into this old church when I joined the others from Sarig to attend Sunday services. But in spite of having attended these services I believe my mind was still largely that of a pagan. If I remember rightly by this time Quop already had a native priest, who resided there and I heard that this priest had made his coffin in preparation for his death although I could not establish the fact. The presbytery had an air of mystery to me. To my pagan mind that a man should prepare his coffin while he is still alive makes the man a no ordinary human being. He actually seemed to look forward to his death. What extraordinary thing Christianity made people do! I never ventured further than the huge rock that stood a little way from the presbytery's entrance.

Two sights come to my mind when I think about the church at Quop. To the left of the altar area was the sacristy and if I remember rightly, a red light was kept burning where it opened to the altar area. I seem to remember that some superstitious persons saying to the effect that if that light stopped burning some catastrophe would befall the world. After I became a Catholic I came to know that the red light in the Catholic church speaks of the presence



of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. If I had remained longer at Quop I would in all probability have been baptised and become a follower of the Anglican Faith. Several of my school mates from Sarig, including K...., were to join this Church. But the Church of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel or S.P.G., otherwise called the Church of England was not for me. There was to come an eventful day in my life which was to set a course that was to lead me to the Roman Catholic Church.

A short distance away from the Church was the cemetery. This was my first sight of a Christian graveyard. The care, the respect and the maintenance accorded to the resting place of the departed ones speaks of Christianity's recognition of human dignity and belief in immortality and the resurrection of the dead. But the sight made me wonder when I first saw it. By contrast the pagan burial ground at Sarig did not speak of such recognition. The graveyard was a dreaded place which the living treads on only when bringing and burying the dead. The burial ground is not the peaceful resting place of the departed but the dreaded haunt of the ghosts of the dead and one which the living must keep away from in order to stay out of harm's way. The dead person, no matter how kind and good he was when still alive had become a thing to be feared and therefore must be cast away and forgotten. A dead person is lamented, but to all intents and purposes the dead is no longer loved and no longer respected and remembered for those whom he leaves behind, being fearful, never visit his grave. Such seems to be the fate of a pagan who dies.

In the later part of my sojourn at Quop, all of the boys from Sarig and others from elsewhere with the exception of the boys who stayed with their relatives took accommodation in the dormitory which was the upper floor of the new school building. I believe life was a little or much harder for me from then on. Living in the school dormitory required one to lead a more regimented life compared with the more homely life one led while still staying in a private house. But for me life was made harder not so much from doing chores and a new mode of existence but from the treatment I received from my adopted brother. One would have thought that living far away in other people's country would induce a fraternity between us. But such was not the case with K.... I cannot recall all the acts of unkindness he did to me. But I can recall a few. The way he would jerk me in order to wake me up in the morning was not the kind of thing an older brother would do if he had a tender affection for his younger brother. It was done not so much as to make me face the harsh realities of life, to which he, in all probability, saw I had no inkling of, as to take the occasion to show his dislike for me. I would wake up but only to be seized with sleepiness and he would shake me roughly and tell me not to pretend to be sleepy. I rose to find that it was still very dark and

very cold but I would carry out his orders obediently. I did not resent doing my share of work but I felt so vulnerable to his whims and fancies. He would show a scornful face to make me hurry up with whatever he asked me to do. On one occasion he became very cross with me for reasons I cannot recall and as a result he was becoming violent and he could have hurt me physically but was prevented from doing so when our teacher told him to stop. I believe he was also spiteful. On one occasion I was playing with some pupils, who included a few girls of the village. But at the moment when I was so merry he shouted at me with a dark look on his face and told me to go back to the dormitory at once. Most reluctantly I broke off from the others. Apparently being away from home and thus out of my parent's protective shield gave him an opportunity to show his disdain towards me.

In the earlier part of my sojourn in Quop I had another encounter with an European. We were then still staying in a private house. Evidently some of us from Sarig went to what I believe to be the staff room. I cannot remember our purpose for going there but whatever it was it seemed that at one point we were opening and looking at some books. While we were thus engrossed a movement made me turn and look up and I believe I was frightened out of my wits by the spectre that loomed into view. A giant had stalked into the staff room. He was tall, lanky and had a visage that was full of importance and authority. The sight was overwhelming and when he was looking elsewhere I promptly bolted out of the building. Probably the others were greatly amused at my reaction. The spectre that I saw was the Reverend Father P.H.H.Howes, the author of the book entitled "Shiun Nyamba Nang" which was used in our vernacular class and he was the spirit who was moving and working among the people of Quop and other Land Dayak areas. The Father gave me a fright not because he looked hideous or menacing. Indeed, if I remember correctly, there seemed to be a hint of a bemused smile on his countenance when he saw the look on my face. My fear of him was one of the humble and timorous. Also it was the fear of the poor primitive. I trembled as a little creature in the presence of the majestic, so conscious of his littleness and the other's greatness. I was by nature an extremely shy child especially of strangers and I was easily frightened.

To digress. At Sarig I was once terrified by the hideous face of a woman. It was very strange that this woman who lived all the time in Sarig and whom I had seen for as long as I could remember should one day seem to transform her countenance the sight of which filled me with terror. Even from a distance I had a vision of a face that was grotesque. And horror upon horror she seemed to turn in my direction and gaze at me who was hiding. How could she possibly know where I was hiding? To return to Quop. There was a man here who gave me a similar fright with his sinister grin and weird

gestures. He seemed out to catch me all the time and he lived just down the hill from where we were once staying. In retrospect this man whom I supposed was out to catch me and trouble me from the fright he gave me was, in all probability, really trying to look friendly but which produced an unfortunate effect on his face.

I believe the attitude of the Quop people towards us from Sarig was most cordial and accommodating. We found them to be generally warm and friendly. I was to realise later in life that our sojourn there was well and fondly remembered by many of them. We sometimes visited some of their homes and we found them ebullient. In these homes I would see something that was new to me and they seemed to make a revelation. I especially remember a divine picture depicting an event in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. As I looked and ruminated on the picture I was also thinking of what was taking place at Quop to the people and the place, particularly the cleaner and pleasanter environment and the outlook of the people. In another picture in another home I saw a mighty army marching to battle. It was probably a fantasy but it was nevertheless based on fact. The picture spoke of a certain great event that had happened elsewhere in the world or which could happen. It indicated that something had entered into their consciousness for they had a glimpse, even though highly eulogized, of the magnitude of an epochal and terrible event that made world history. As we socialised or, for that matter, as we sojourned at Quop I saw again how the modern world was breaking into the society and therefore into the mind of a boy who was exposed to it. One was somewhat conscious that being there was like coming into a clearing amidst the jungle of illiteracy, ignorance, backwardness and paganism. One detected it, among other aspects, in the way the people dressed up particularly when they went to attend the church service on Sunday. Then I saw something new in the boys who had fun by running about the village pushing and balancing the rim of the bicycle wheel with a rod. Again I saw the new world in such wonders and ingenuities as the films, among which was one of Tarzan which we went to see in a cinema in those days and the comics on Roy Rogers. It also spoke in the wonder of education and what it enabled the people to do. It was at Quop that I heard of a newspaper called the "Sarawak Tribune" for the first time although I never had a look at it. I only saw the older boys reading it. But my curiosity was aroused and I also realised that reading it was something that was still unattainable for me, for I still had a number of years more to go in my education before I could acquire the ability to read it. In my life at Quop as well as that passage of time that I went through constituted a point when I thus made more contacts with the modern world. Films of Tarzan and the Roy Rogers comics cast such a strong appeal to a boy and I would have been a

poorer lad if I never experienced the thrills and enjoyment that these wonders, inventivenesses and novelties afforded.

During our sojourn we became, to an extent, a part of the community. Thus we could go in search of firewood and edibles in the woods. We would go to the durian and fruit groves when it was the flowering season and would collect the fallen stamens of the flowers and these would make a good dish. We would also try our luck and look for ripe mangoes that had dropped at the community orchard. At other times we would go to the bushes to get a kind of undergrowth called the *seri iyang* which from a distance looked soft and feathery, to be used for decorating arches and entrances put up in connection with certain functions of which I am not very certain of now. On one occasion we made an excursion, together with some boys from the village, to the mountain, which seen from a certain angle, forms the village's back-drop, and climbed its highest point. Here was adventure I said to myself. From that altitude we could see the countryside within the vicinity of the 13th Milestone of the Kuching-Serian Road which stretched on either sides in a straight line for a limited distance, broken at a few places by the trees growing by its sides. I believe it was the very first time that I ascended a mountain to such a height. The others probably had a sense of conquest. I felt the same way but there was something also that was bothering me. I was wondering if I was becoming suddenly ill. But after we had made our descent whatever it was that had caused a peculiar sensation had disappeared and I felt cheerful again. I could not understand it at the time but what had perplexed and made me worried was the effect of high altitude on the ears.

I saw as a boy that although Quop had made strides in enlightenment, such as detected in the people's mental attitude, and in its march to the modern world but its people, much like the people of Sarig, still suffered from diseases and afflictions that the modern world was striving to eradicate. There were certainly persons who were suffering from tuberculosis. Then I noticed that there were many boys and girls who were afflicted with yaws which they would scratch and which bleed as the result and then these poor boys and girls must constantly keep the flies off. I saw a few men with their legs which were swollen horribly. They were the unfortunate victims of elephantiasis for which there was still evidently no cure. The sight evoked both horror and pity. I wondered if the incidences of people suffering from yaws were linked to their environment. As far as I can remember I knew then of no boys or girls at Sarig who suffered from it or if they did, their number was insignificant. As for elephantiasis I knew of no one there who was struck by it.

At Quop water was to all intents and purposes a precious commodity for it was not available in great abundance or as easily and conveniently as at

Sarig. It would seem that Quop's locality was such that clean and safe water could only be obtained from the nearby mountain. It seemed that a stream or two that flow within the village vicinity were used for washing only but the water was not fit for human consumption. The safe water was conveyed to the village by a long line of bamboo aqueducts. Bathing, washing and fetching water was such an ordeal for people often had to wait in what tantamount to a queue for their turns. When it was one's turn to bathe or to fetch water every pair of eyes there gazed at one's person.

During the school holidays we went back to Sarig. Quop then was accessible from the Kuching-Serian Road by at least three footpaths. Their entrances along the highway were at Mile Fifteen, Mile Thirteen and Mile Ten. Most of the time we took the Mile Fifteen footpath. Back at Sarig on one such holiday my female cousin and I were scooping, using the *sikop*, at the Yang Sarig, the name of the stream where the Sarig people took their bath and obtained their drinking water. We had always liked to catch fish this way. We were scooping below that part of the stream which served as the village's bath and washing place. This made people throw their refuse downstream including broken bottles, glasses and empty cans. Thus it was that I must have stepped on one of these, or that was what I believe to this day, and it gashed my foot at the part just above the heel cutting into an artery. It bled profusely and the pain was great. Added to it was the shock. I limped home leaving a trail of blood on the path. In retrospect I cannot help seeing that this incident was a turning point in my life. The wound was, I believe, quite injurious but it seemed that my father did not think of sending me to the clinic or even the hospital for treatment. The reason was most probably the distance. But I would never want to be sent there anyway. Stories or mere rumours about what the hospital people did or allegedly did struck fear in my heart. I would never go anywhere near the dreaded hospital for I would die there. It was the fear of the ignorant.

To disgress. My father was once to bring me to a private clinic in Kuching and I believe the doctor who ran it was a Dr. Sockalingam who was known to our people as the Indian Doctor or "Doktor Tambi" (any derogatory connotation is not intentional) and his clinic was referred to as "Klinik Tambi". Apparently the doctor recommended that I should be sent to the hospital for further investigation with the possibility that I might be hospitalised. My father evidently was all for sending me there but I refused to go and I fought tooth and claw against bringing me there. I had my way. Apparently I was not too ill to make a scene. This was in contrast with how I was to feel in the future.

To return to the incident of the wound. Traditional treatment was applied to my wound. It healed very slowly and I was confined indoors. In

such a condition taking one's bath was a difficult affair. Most of the time all that I could do was to lie down or to sit quietly and to keep the wounded leg as still as possible for any jerk or agitation would hurt. When the school holiday was over my wound was apparently far from healed. Infact it kept me away from school for such a period that it seems that I could no longer go back to St. James's. I have always believed that I was no longer allowed to resume my schooling there because of the absence caused by the wound. Otherwise the real reason was not clear. Thus it was that after my wound was eventually healed my aunt and I went to Quop. I cannot remember precisely what we did but I presume now it was to attend to certain formalities with regards to my leaving school and to collect whatever personal effects that they were still left there. After these were done we left Quop and it was not until more than thirty years later that the nearest that I was to set foot on the village again was only as far as its periphery.



*A scene of Kampung Sarig in the Kuching district. The children in the photograph are the author's younger siblings and a cousin.*



*The author's mother about 1950.*



*The earliest photograph of the author (right) taken together with his younger sister named Tunun.*



*Henry Sandin*



*A group photograph taken in the early fifties of the pupils and staff of the St. James's School, Kampung Quop in the Kuching District. The author is sixth from the right in the second row (nibbling his finger).*



*Orang Kaya Pemancha (now Penghulu) Sinyam anak Matod.*



*The old St. Peter's Chapel, Kampung Simpok, Kuching.*



*A view of the premises of the Kanowit Government Secondary School showing a teacher's quarters and behind which is the 'Complex'.*



*A photograph of the author (standing) and his father taken just before his departure to Kanowit, Third Division, before the commencement of the academic year in 1958.*





*Happy days at the Kanowit Government Secondary School. The author (extreme left) and his classmates. Second from right is the late 'Bob'.*



*A group photograph of the students of Form 3A in 1961 at the Kanowit Government Secondary School. The author is at the extreme right (standing, second row).*



*Sitting for the Sarawak Junior Examination in 1961. The author is seated at far back nearest to the staircase.*



*The author in his lower secondary years at the Kanowit Government School School.*



*A morning assembly at the Kanowit Government Secondary School in front of the 'Complex'. At extreme right (standing) is Mr. Smith, a Colombo Plan teacher from Canada. Sixth from the right (standing) is the Principal of the school, the Reverend Father Rawlins.*



*A photograph taken at a party at the Resident and District Office in Kuching around 1965. The author is at the extreme right.*



*The author, doing an assignment, under the keen eyes of a lecturer, at the Ravensbourne College of Art and Vocational Studies, U.K. in 1972.*



*'E.C.', a winner of the Malaysian Essay Competition beside the author and two others. The essay was entitled "How a Young Sarawakians Looks at Malaysia" and was launched in conjunction with the formation of Malaysia in 1963.*



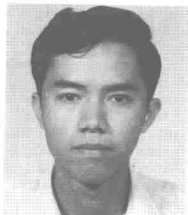
*A group photograph of the staff of the Borneo Literature Bureau in 1967. An expatriate officer, Mr. Douglas Pearce (seated, seventh from right of front row), was heading the department. The author is third from right at back row.*



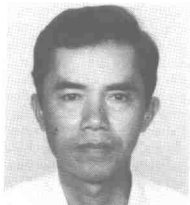
*Kinyan in 1970.*



*The author in the days of his final year at the Kanowit Government Secondary School in 1963. In the background is a view of the Kanowit Bazaar.*



*The author just before his departure for the United Kingdom in September 1970.*



*The author today.*



## CHAPTER VI

# ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

**M**y entry into the Roman Catholic Mission school at Simpok was also my entry into the Kingdom of God and it was brought in a manner which I shall narrate presently.

The vehicle that brought education and Christianity to the Bisapug Dayaks, initially at Simpok, was the Roman Catholic mission. The mission then existed in an era when its vineyard was both social and spiritual and it could fully play its dual roles. The government then evidently looked upon the Mission as a valuable ally in the field of education and hence human development. How did the mission come to the Bisapug land? How did the mission school that I was to go to start? How did the Church there come to be?

It seems that a school was started at Simpok during the time of the Third Rajah by the people from Quop. It was probably intended as an Anglican Mission school. The teachers who were sent there were one named Nabong and the other Runa. This might also have led to the spread of the Anglican Church to the Bisapug Dayaks at Simpok but such possibility was totally wrecked principally by the reportedly unruly and scandalous behaviour of one of the two teachers. It seemed that this teacher had misbehaved himself and the Simpok folks resented this. In the end they were denied co-operation and as the result the school was closed. The *kampung* was without a school until the village chief, being concerned with the development of his people, decided to go and meet His Grace the Prefect Apostolic at Kuching. It seems likely that his move served as a response to the Bisapug Dayaks to an exploratory visit that the Reverend Father Hoptgartner, the Prefect Apostolic, had made earlier to the vicinity. According to the source\* his stroll into the area was made during the time of the Japanese Occupation. Apparently he could move about without any fear from the Japanese authorities as he was not from an enemy country. It can be said with some certainty that the Prefect Apostolic's travel to the land of the Bisapug Dayaks and the village chief's initiative constituted an early contact that the Bisapug tribe made with the Roman Catholic mission and consequently the preambles to the spread of the Catholic faith to this people and the eventual founding of the Catholic Mission school at Simpok. The labours of the mission among the Bisapug Dayaks began from there. The works were carried out in the tradition of the

\*Mr. Justin Rajang ak. Jimap

missionary tasks in mission lands such as to spread Christianity and to set up schools thus bringing about the Kingdom of God and becoming a civilising force. The baptism of the first flock of Bisapug Dayaks, numbering only a few doors, and the opening of the mission school were administered and carried out respectively by the Reverend Father Harry van Erp. He had come to Simpok for the first time towards the end or just after the Japanese Occupation. The old timers who saw him would recall that when he first appeared at the *kampung* he was dressed in what they described as a military uniform\*. It seems therefore that his coming really marked what was to hasten the labour of the mission to bring the kingdom to the people and education to the boys and girls of the community.

The spirit had deigned that the beginning of the Catholic church in the land of the Bisapug Dayaks began with the baptism of a flock of them including no less a notable as the chief of the tribe, Sinyam ak. Matod. He was fervent and devout in the practice of the new-found faith and still is. At the time of writing it is true to say that his life as a Catholic and the history of the Catholic church at Simpok moved at the same time. The history of the Catholic church in the Bisapug community is as long as his life as a Catholic. His faith grew with the growth of the Catholic church in the Bisapug land and the latter of which began at Simpok, and then spreading to Sarig and becoming visible at Mundai. Throughout the decades which saw the progress of the church at Simpok from its infancy, its steady if gradual growth in the intervening years until its dramatic growth in the later half of the Eighties, he had been unfaltering in the practice of his faith. Today Simpok is the heartland of Catholicism in the Bisapug Dayak country.

With the opening of the mission school the first to teach there was a Patrick Satob, a Biatah Dayak from Siratau. He had received mission education at St. Joseph's School in Kuching. His life as the teacher at this school was a hard one. It meant he had to subsist on whatever that came in the way of school fees or other kinds of contributions from the villagers and with a bit of financial help that came from the mission. The village chief, being so keen on the development of his people, often dug into his own pocket, which did not contain very much either, to contribute to his upkeep. After about two years of teaching at this school Patrick Satob left and he was succeeded by one Leo Minyon, a Bisapug from Simpok itself. Succeeding Leo Minyon was one Stephen Abeng, a naturalised Biatah Dayak from Siratau, who is still fondly remembered by the Bisapug Dayaks as a good man, a dedicated teacher and his fervent faith also contributed to the growth of the Catholic faith among the Simpok folks. When he left a Peter Nambi, the eldest son of

\* This was because he and the other missionaries had only recently been released by the Australian soldiers from a Japanese prison camp.

the man who was among the first converts at Simpok, taught at the school and he was succeeded by a teacher under whose tenure of service both as teacher and headmaster of the school I was a pupil.

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Upon my return from Quop I stayed at Mundai with my aunt. By this time my aunt had set up her home there but she was still regarded as a member of the household. Thus it was that we really had another home at Mundai. The new village was situated more than four miles away from Sarig and linked by the Budok footpath. My parents and my grandmother went to live there on and off and the latter often living with my aunt longer and more often than the former. These sojourns at Mundai were to become what amounted to the prelude to our eventual settlement there.

My parents went to Mundai to do hill padi planting, to plant rubber trees and to grow pepper and these were the same tasks that they did at Sarig, but they moved there apparently to obtain land as there were still abundant virgin jungles at this vicinity. This meant that they would live there for several weeks to a few months. It was during my stay there and after leaving school that my father's cousin dropped by. His name is Justin Rajang. I could not remember him paying us any visits before but apparently he decided to do so that day. He was on his way to Simpok after having gone to town. Justin Rajang had graduated from the Batu Lintang Teachers' Training Centre in Kuching and he was the headmaster of the St. Peter's School at Simpok which is four miles away from Mundai. He is the very first person from our community who had graduated as a trained teacher and among the very few to secure a salaried job at the time. He received his education in the mission schools, his secondary education being at St. Joseph's School in Kuching, and he had become a Catholic. At the time of writing he is the first person to reach retirement from service and the very first one from our Bisapug community to receive a pension. At a time when so few from our community were educated he was like a burning torch, an agent of change and literacy and looked upon by the *kampung* folks as someone knowledgeable on important matters and could render certain services and give advice by virtue of his education, training, exposure and his role as a teacher in a Catholic mission school. When he was at St. Peter's School at Simpok I had the impression that the majority of parents there sent their children to school. It seems that the mission had a good and zealous man to help carry out the task of giving primary education to the Bisapug boys and girls and to contribute to the growth of the Catholic faith in the Bisapug land. Such was the person who called at our home at Mundai.

stories was to set me on a path which was to give me a sense of direction. He took me on a voyage with his stories but it was the voyage of a soul. It was an interior journey rather than a trip from one place to another.

Physically Henry Sudin was tall, thin and dark. As a catechist at a later time and an apostolate that he laboured at for more than a decade until his tragic death in a road accident, he would amuse his listeners and congregation by making jokes about his emaciated form. He would tell them that so emaciated was he that others would call him a *sikiwang* or a long bamboo pole, a staff, a stick or a blade of the *lalang* grass. But such a defect, when accepted in love and humility had an amazing power for it endeared him more to them. It actually transforms itself into a thing of beauty rather reminiscent of the way people talk about the beauty of Abraham Lincoln.

He was once among the group of Bisapug boys to receive primary education at St. Peter's School, or the forerunner of the school. He left this school to continue his primary education at another Roman Catholic Mission school called St. Theresa's School in Serian. He attended this school as a boarder and it was a hard life. He left after completing Primary Five and eventually found a job as a temporary school teacher at St. Peter's, his former school. So it was that there at St. Peter's the narrator and teller of events and stories from history, stories from the Bible, stories of the early Church, stories of the terrible persecutions of the Christians, who preferred death than to renounce their faith, by the Romans and fairy tales and his young listener, admirer and pupil met.

Henry Sudin knew these stories not so much because it was required of him as a teacher in a mission school to know them as the fact that he was such a voracious reader. He had a gift - perhaps a rare one - for story-telling and narrating. Hearing him was both thoroughly enjoyable and edifying. Those stories and events that he told have such deep meaning for me. In the stories about the rivalry between the Ancient Greeks and the Persians I learnt about loyalty and patriotism. In the story about the Roman hero, Horatius, holding back the invading Etruscans at the bridge over the River Tiber, I learnt about valour, honour and love of one's country and people. As I heard these and other stories from Henry I was conscious that I was taking sides. I was on the side of the Ancient Greeks, the Romans, the Jews and Christianity. In the years to come as I was to see films and looked at and read comics and read story books I was on the side of the outlaw named Robin Hood and not the Sherif of Nottingham, on the side of the British, the Americans, the Australians and all the Allied forces and not the Germans and the Japanese. These stories and events told me about right and wrong. There was a great deal of good that the Ancient Greeks did and gave to the world but the Persians, because of the struggle for power and supremacy, wanted to destroy their



civilization. The Jews stood for the dignity of man because he is made in the image of his Creator but the wicked pharaoh of Egypt did everything he could to keep them in subjugation. The British, the Americans and the people of the Allied countries fought to free the world from the diabolical design of the Nazis and the Japanese. They stood for the right of every man to be free.

While at St. Peter's and sojourning at Simpok I saw at least two missionary priests and they were the Reverend Father Harry van Erp and the Reverend Father Herman Plattner. Christianity wore the face of the white man but the European missionary priests brought the Good News which speaks of a new life of grace and the salvation of mankind. But if Christianity then wore the face of the white man it was certainly good for it brought wonderful results. The Europeans, whether as government officers, whom we called *tuan*, or missionaries, whom we addressed as Father and called *tuan padri*, mystified me. Physically they looked so clean and immaculate and their faces had such astonishingly good colours. It would seem to me that the radiance on their faces and their immaculate look made them, to our mind, especially and naturally fitted to bring us the Good News about the God that we have never heard before in the same way that they, being so different from us and whom God had made to be His missionaries, also came from some great, fabulous and faraway lands. The fact that the hitherto unknown God was made known to us by a people who came from countries so far away seemed good. They told us of the God so very different from the pagan gods and the gods in our folktales and legends. These gods could not change us but this God was to change us as nothing else could, making us so completely new, if gradually or even falteringly. While it was sometimes our notion to picture that God was beautiful like the men whom He sent to us, the love that these men manifested as spoken in their untiring labours did indeed represent the God who is Love. It seemed that everything these men did, as far as we could observe or perceive, were purposeful. As I reflect on this now they were really working tirelessly and well for they were sent to us in order to raise us to a higher state, to remake us as they themselves had been remade. I remember that the Reverend Father Plattner seemed to move about ever so quietly and with great dignity and he would speak gently and slowly in Malay or *piminyu Melayu*, as we call it, during his sermons. I never seemed to recall him becoming angry or irritable.

I believe that when I eventually received Baptism I must have been well prepared for it having been well instructed and having passed the test. I was baptised together with several others, all pupils of St. Peter's, at the old St. Peter's Chapel. Our Baptism was administered by the Reverend Father Plattner. I took the Christian name Justin after the Christian name of my mentor. At Baptism something really wonderful had begun in my life. Of

course I could not see all at once how this worked in my life because what happened was only the beginning. But at Baptism I entered into a new life of faith and of becoming and growing as a child in the Kingdom of God.

Upon reflection I believe that God, through an age of grace which His unfathomable wisdom had ordained, had brought me into the fold that is the Roman Catholic Church. The memories of the boys who went on a visit to Sarig and the Sign of the Cross that they made, the medals that they wore and the prayers they said before and after meals all came back to me. I must have been attracted by these. I had learnt so little about Christianity at Quop although it did cast certain impressions on me. But at St. Peter's Christianity showed a somewhat different face and touched my heart in a way that it did not or more than it did at Quop. The new life of becoming a child in the Kingdom of God really began at St. Peter's. Within the school perimeter the new life of faith was fully practised - insofar as the practice formed a part of mission education and formation - and outside it in the *kampung* it was chiefly expressed in going to the Sunday service and the Holy Mass, to go to confession and to receive the Eucharist at St. Peter's Chapel and to say prayers and make observances as required of a Catholic. When I was taken back to Sarig and to live there again there were certainly instances of lukewarmness. Although one is made new at Baptism and aware of the Ten Commandments and the Six Commandments of the Church one still sins. But in spite of having sinned again and again I remembered my Baptism which made me a new person.

My becoming a Catholic was not without its somewhat ludicrous consequences. I remember that I was so happy to have a new name and on my exercise books I crossed out or rubbed off my Dayak name which is Perog and replaced it with my Christian name, Justin. Thinking about it now it was quite a silly thing to do. I should only have added my Christian name to preface my Dayak name. But at that time I just wanted my Christian name to be my first name and my father's name, Kirim, to be my surname. Thus the name Justin Kirim was to endure. I did not ask about nor inform my pagan parents of my baptism. But whatever would have been their reaction, decision or opinion I was determined to become a Christian. As it turned out they did not say anything when they knew about it. My impression was that they neither understood nor rejected my becoming a Catholic. They probably regarded Christianity as something whose time had come. Or they regarded Christianity as synonymous with the new world or civilization that had come to the land resulting in a general awakening. My mother was to be very happy that I had a new name but for a very different reason. A few years later upon coming home to spend my final term holiday after having attended a government school at Batu Lintang in Kuching where I was to live as a border she

was to notice that I looked much better being cleaner and less skinny and this delighted her very much. She began to call me by my Christian name, Justin, but later she called me again by my Dayak name probably because I had become the skinny Perog again. In the years to come in my life such seemed to be the state of my physical condition, blooming and wilting, the latter being more often and longer than the former. My mother seemed to think that it was because I was called Justin in school that I became healthier and calling me by that name had the effect of making me more fleshy, but she probably did not think so anymore since my relapse to my skinny self had disproved it. The notion that names had an influence on the condition of a person's health was not her own. She had only subscribed to it. It was supposed, according to superstitions, that one reason people changed their names was so that they become "incognito" to the bad spirit that would otherwise make them to suffer ill or poor health.

Justin Rajang, our headmaster, carried out his role as teacher and headmaster with great zeal. He would check on his pupils on some nights to see that they were doing their homework. Of course he could not check on every one of us because Simpok was a big *kampung*. This was an indication that our headmaster spared no efforts in bringing about discipline among his pupils. To take such initiative was his privilege as headmaster and teacher. For me his word was my command for I obeyed him without question. He once told us pupils not to go or even to take the footpath that went past a certain shop in the *kampung* and I simply obeyed and I would not go by that way. I believe I always wanted to be worthy not only of the kind of pupil he wanted of me or expected me to be but also that I must never fail him in any way. After all was he not the one who made it possible for me to go to school again. Yet I failed him once. I was punished for it. The school compound and football and sports field had to be maintained by the pupils. Unlike the pupils of today many of them were quite big and thus they were dependable as a work crew. We were carrying out our duties when it came to the mind of one boy to play a "battle". It was fun but we could also get hurt. The "battle" was "fought" by trying to whip each other with a cord made of the *lalang* grass and creepers. "Fighting" the "battle" meant abandoning our manual duties. When the headmaster saw us we received a scolding. Needless to say we the culprits were punished by receiving the cane.

During my sojourn at Simpok I believe my aunt looked after me well enough. Next door to her house was a house in which lived a child whom I would sometimes notice but my memories of her were somewhat vague. This child would one day become a young lady. Little did I know that she was to be my future wife. One day as I was taking my meal at the kitchen my mother appeared at the doorway to the kitchen. It seems to me that I could not

remember the last time I saw her or my father and whether it was at Mundai or Sarig. It would appear that I had been virtually living my own life since I had come to Simpok. The money needed for my upkeep must have been channeled to my aunt and the money for the school fees, pocket money and, for other expenses were given through her. But I believe too that being my aunt her attitude towards me was maternal and so she took me under her care and was not very particular about counting the cost. She had two grown-up sons and she had long lost her husband. I must have been very happy at Simpok that I believe I sometimes did not think about home. But there was my mother that day. She had come to take me to Sarig as my family had gone back to live there again. Leaving my aunt was a very simple matter to me. I could not tell what my mother and she had said to each other. I had not many personal effects to pack. They were my books and all the items that I used in school and my clothes. Then we departed for Sarig. Thus ended my sojourn at Simpok and probably deep in my heart I was sorry that I had to leave it.

I had detected that there was a community spirit that was perhaps unique or much stronger at Simpok than that I sensed at Sarig. The friendliness of the boys and girls towards me had made my sojourn such a happy and memorable one. But apart from this I saw in certain of the boys a new kind of boldness such as I had never seen before and an urge to break away from a mental cocoon. This was certainly attributable to the Christian atmosphere in their homes. Also this came from the exposure and the influences of the modern world. They came from the families that were not inhibited by superstitions and somehow their parents had foresight and consequently more advanced in their thinking. All this was having its effects on them. Therefore in these boys I was watching a new breed and a new generation of Bisapug Dayaks in the making.

By this time more than a dozen boys and girls from Sarig were going to school at St. Peter's and among them was my sister Tunun. With my coming to Sarig I was added to their number. Later still my little brother named Pengos also joined this little band of school boys and girls but he left not very long after this and he was taken to live with our aunt at Mundai. The Anglican Mission later opened a primary school there called St. Matthew's School in 1957, and my little brother was sent to this school and there he was to have part of his primary education. From there he continued his primary education until completion at a Catholic Mission school called St. Elizabeth's School at a Biatah Dayak village called Tijirak and this led him to become a Catholic. I came to know at a later time that the Reverend Father Harry van Erp had tried to open a Catholic primary school at Mundai in 1956 or earlier, but the proposal was opposed notably by the two brothers, one of whom was the former *Tua Kampong* of Sarig, the same man who upbraided the teacher

at Sarig and the latter consequently left bringing about the demise of the school. The wife of the younger of the brothers is a woman from Quop and the folks sent their sons and daughters to the Anglican mission schools at Quop and Taiee in the Serian district. It was also said that a person by the name of James Kiyas (pseudonym), who was educated and held a government job, held a strong opposition to any Catholic "intrusion" into Mundai. The Mundai people also had association, if wispsy, with the Anglican mission dating to their days at Sarig and this therefore added to their resultant bias in favour of the Anglican communion. These factors and others then seemed to form the origin of the Anglican Church at Mundai.

For me the trips on foot and from St. Peter's School probably lasted for about a year and within that time our number began to dwindle. Many families from Sarig had begun moving to Mundai to settle there and also to the Pang Piin (By the River)<sup>1</sup> vicinity, roughly more than a mile away from Mundai, to settle scatteredly there and consequently their children had to leave St. Peter's. The remaining number was made smaller still when my sister and I left this small band. Our family was moving again. Sarig seemed fated to be without a school of its own since its first and last school folded up in 1951 or thereafter.

Apart from those who moved away to settle at Mundai and the Pang Piin a few families also moved to Simpok. While those who moved away to Mundai and Pang Piin were to constitute a group from which the Anglican community of Mundai was largely drawn, those who remained at Sarig were to be drawn into the Catholic Church thus making Sarig a Catholic *kampung* today.

The place where our family moved to this time is known as Singgahi situated roughly between Sarig and Simpok. There is an area which is made into a community reserve land and this is the fruit of the foresight and wisdom of the community chief. Our new home was also sited at the fringe of this reserve land. Living at this new home meant that my sister and I had to go to school from there. We had to go on foot along the newly-made track which ran through the reserve land. We really felt like literally coming from the bushes to the clearing of a civilization which is the school perimeter. But having to use a jungle track did not deter me, my sister and a few other boys and girls, whose parents also coincidentally moved to this place, from attending school. As far as I can remember we attended school regularly.

<sup>1</sup>In reference to a stream called Yang Tapah and along this stream the people set up their homes.

Up to this time I have reason to believe that I was doing well in school. I did not know how Tunun was doing but it turned out later that all she was to get in the way of education was only up to the primary stage. From St. Peter's, she was to go to a Catholic Mission School called the St. Michael's School at Tiang Bekap, along the Padawan Road in the Kuching district, where she received her baptism, but after spending a year or more in that school her education ended. I believe that my father was unfair to her because he was not concerned about her education as he was about mine. This seems typical of the attitude of parents in those days with regard to their daughters to whom so little importance is attached where education and the future are concerned.

After a time we returned to Sarig again but the home at Singgahi was not abandoned. It was to remain as another home for the next few years after which our family left the place for good.

I have said that Justin Rajang was my mentor for I was his obedient pupil. Whatever he asked me to do, whether for his own personal purpose or to him as my teacher and headmaster I did so with a sense of duty, obligation and loyalty to him as my mentor. I have reasons to believe that in my three years at St. Peter's School he was observing me. Perhaps he had his expectations of me and in this he was not to be disappointed for his energy, his zeal and dedication to teaching was to bear fruit. One of his pupils was to be selected for admission to a government school in Kuching.

## CHAPTER VII

# PRELUDE TO MY ENTRY TO THE BATU LINTANG SCHOOL

My days at St. Peter's were coming to a close. There was a government-run public school called the Batu Lintang School in Kuching and it had been admitting students who were drawn from all over the country through an examination called the Entrance Test. If a candidate passed the Test he would be admitted to the school. Five of us were recommended as candidates from St. Peter's to sit for the Entrance Test. The venue for sitting this test was at Batu Lintang School itself. And so the day came when we went to the school accompanied by our headmaster. We arrived there late in the afternoon. On our arrival our headmaster took care of the formalities concerning our purpose for coming. We were to sit for the Entrance Test the next day and so we had to spend the night at the school.

That evening we took a stroll around the place. It was not only a school but also a Teacher's Training Centre. As it was the term holiday the place looked quite deserted but already it spoke of the students, trainees and the joint institution authority that had kept and made the place into what it was with its ornamental trees, shrubs, flowers, lawns and with everything looking generally clean, orderly and tidy. We entered a building and I saw decorations on the walls and perhaps on the beams as well and these works astounded me with their sheer boldness and intricacies, and I also saw water colour paintings and in them I had some ideas of the clever and wonderful things that the school made the students produce or the kind of students who were drawn to this school. Hitherto Sarawak was more or less my *kampung*, the mission primary schools, the Bidayuh Dayak community at Quop and what I remembered about Kuching Town as a very young visitor but that evening at the Batu Lintang Teachers' Training Centre and School I saw more glimpses of my country in the display of native arts and young talents. There were peoples in Sarawak who were different from us and that brought about a cultural wealth and diversity in the country such as reflected in these decorations and show of talents. Was I to be in this place to continue by schooling? What a great privilege that would be. Our evening meal and breakfast were provided by the Institution. What I remember most about the gathering during these meal times was that everyone was behaving very well and one boy seemed very kind to me probably because he saw that I was small and rather delicate-looking. After the breakfast the next day and at a certain

time we trooped into the examination room which was a classroom. I seem to remember that we were given just one test paper called the Intelligence Test. I found that the questions were somewhat unexpected but I believe they were not beyond me. The test was apparently more to gauge our intelligence than to test us on what we had assimilated in school. It turned out to be that many were called to sit for the test but few were selected.

The Entrance Test to the Batu Lintang School took place toward the end of the year, if I remember rightly, and the result would be made known before the next academic year began. I returned to the *kampung*. Eventually the next academic year was soon to begin and I still had not know the result of the Test and my father evidently did not know how to find out. Evidently he presumed that I had failed the Test. He therefore made preparations to send me to a Catholic Mission School at Serian, together with a classmate who was also one among the five candidates from St. Peter's who had sat for the Entrance Test. And thus it was that one day we and our parents were on our way or supposedly so to this mission school. It seemed just as simple as that. Had any formalities been made with the school authority? I believe there was none but our parents were concerned about our education and were determined to put us in school. But my classmate's father apparently had some experience about admission to this mission school\* for his older son had gone there. This was the same boy who had shown me his books of the Bible stories. We went by way of the Budok Path heading for Mundai en route to Serian. My father was carrying most of my personal effects such as bedding, cooking utensils and whatever I would need as a boarder and leaving me to carry the lighter ones. We went by this footpath until we came to a vicinity called Minyan at a point when in a minute or two we would cross the bamboo footbridge over the Yang Tapah, the name of a stream. It was here my mentor met us or rather intercepted us. He appeared to have proceeded from the opposite direction. He had actually been looking for me and he was told that my father was bringing me to a mission school at Serian and that we had left Sarig that very morning and so he was rushing, taking the route called the Pruman footpath, to find me and determined to intercept us before we boarded the bus bound for Serian. He was rushing along the same footpath which we trod on three years ago and for me it was the same path that took me to the Catholic Mission School and the Catholic Church. Now he had walked on it again in a reverse direction and this time to look for me and to tell me the direction I should be heading for. The Reverend Father Sheridan\*\* had told

\* St. Theresa's School, Serian.

\*\* A tutor at the Batu Lintang Teachers' Training Centre and School seconded to the government by the Catholic Mission.



him that I had passed the Entrance Test and I was the only one of the five candidates from St. Peter's School who are selected for admission to the Batu Lintang School. So it was that there at Minyan and when we were supposedly on our way to a mission school that I was told the good news and one that was to decide any future path. The news was not really a total surprise to me but the way the result was conveyed to me showed Justin Rajang's concern for me. How good a mentor he was. My success at the Entrance Test was also the fruit of his labour as the headmaster and teacher of a school where I was once a pupil.

## C H A P T E R    V I I I

# BATU LINTANG: INTO THE UNIVERSAL ARENA

*It's a far cry from Gunung Murud to Kuching .....*

*From the Baram down the Rejang from Kalaka do we come.*

(Remembered lines of the anthem of Batu Lintang Teacher's Training Centre and School)

Passing the Entrance Test opened a door into another stage in my education and in my life. I was to be among the crop of native boys who emerged from the primary schools - in my case it was a Roman Catholic Mission school - and sent to a government upper primary and secondary school. There to live from the company of a people and culture to a community of people with varied communal and cultural backgrounds. Then to be nurtured, educated and formed in the government public school. At the Batu Lintang Teacher's Training Centre and School or Batu Lintang for convenience, my life as a child of the public school was to begin. My father would speak of me as an "anak prentah" or government product being for some ten months in a year virtually consigned to the care of the government school that I was sent to. To be admitted to Batu Lintang was to become a beneficiary of government under-taking that was still young. There I was to receive and excellent training in managing my own life under the guidance of our superiors and within the bounds of school rules and regulations and in a setting that was reflective of the reality of Sarawak.

The Institution was started in 1948. I was admitted in 1957. There one joined a community which fostered the corporate and universal spirit. Looking back to those days I see that at Batu Lintang, the student teachers, students and pupils worked, studied and lived together. We the pupils and students were fashioned in a certain way so that we learnt to be self-reliant, obedient, diligent, persevering, disciplined, responsible, broadminded and to learn to respect one another, first in the school perimeter as a prelude, and preparation for a life of service beyond it. We were to carry the torch of a new generation and to light up a new horizon as graduates of a government-run institution.

I lived at Batu Lintang as a boarder. Life in the boarding school was not entirely a new mode of existence for me but there was a great deal more to life in boarding school at Batu Lintang than that a Quop. The dormitories were

called huts and were built billet-style. On the day that I arrived at the school to begin my life and schooling there I was deployed to take accommodation in Hut Number Eight. As I stepped into it the atmosphere that greeted me was one of orderliness and cleanliness. It was well-ventilated which with the thatched roof kept the interior cool. Because there was no paint-work the interior looked somewhat drab but it was well-lighted. I could see frugality in the simply-constructed building but it served its purpose excellently. If I remember rightly the hut accommodated some thirty or more boarders. At one end was positioned the hut captain and the other end the vice captain so that nothing escaped their gaze, so to speak. I was to know that our hut captain was an Iban boy (one of the native races) and the vice captain a Malay boy. On the day that I took my accommodation there I found that the bed and living space allotted to me was located in the middle of the row of beds. The beds were arranged in two rows leaving a passage running lengthwise across the hut. The bedstead consisted of five wooden planks which looked well-used and laid on top of the wooden supports. My mat and mattress were to be laid or rolled and placed on them. The rest of my belongings such as clothes, toiletries and whatever else were kept in a locker placed to the side of and above the bed. My father and my mentor accompanied me to the school. Justin Rajang had done his part as my mentor for the last time. And henceforth I was to come under the care of and be subject to other superiors. He had made all the necessary enquiries at the Institution's office and had taken care of the formalities after which we headed for Hut Number Eight which was not far from the office block. A list of names had been put up at the dormitory's notice board and mine was there. Having found my place in the hut my father and my mentor remained with me for a little while, said some encouraging words to me and then left.

I tried to be brave but I was almost suddenly seized with a feeling of loneliness and abandonment and I nearly cried. My community was now shut out from me. I felt the first experience of being left on one's own. I was in the midst of strangers. Those students who were there probably saw the forlorn look on my face. They, on the other hand, did not seem to look sad. To all intents and purposes they seemed to settle easily at their new home. Henry Sudin was also to be admitted to Batu Lintang as a trainee teacher and he would be my ready companion and to whom I would undoubtedly run for company and solace in my loneliness. But he did not enroll himself much to the chagrin, as I was to hear in the future, of a Father who had looked after the formalities pertaining to his admission. However I recognised two faces there either on that day or the day after and they were my school mates from my days at Quop. I was not to be a total stranger at Batu Lintang after all. After a while I found out that my house mates were all native boys of various

ances. The occupants of the hut consisted of newcomers like myself and the older boys. This racial composition was also true of the entire student population but not of the trainee teacher population which included Chinese.

What did this mean to a boy? Did I ever wonder why this was so? In retrospect in this community I was really witnessing but not yet knowing, as I do now, of the providential time I was living in for it is seen in the form of the caring and sympathetic aspect of British rule for the school that the government ran had places for boys coming from the various native communities throughout Sarawak. It occurs to me now that Batu Lintang was a unique government enterprise. At Batu Lintang the British Government showed itself as an agent of human development. The faces that one saw there reflected on a government that cared about the more backward and less privileged communities and therefore gave educational opportunities to the boys from these communities who merited them. One sees correctness and fairness. It was a stewardship.

Throughout the weekdays I underwent the motion of the daily routine from waking up in the morning to sleeping time at night. I woke up at the sound of the morning bell or even before it rang as must be the case with a student teacher who would play some soft tunes on the piano at the hut which served as the Recreation Room which was almost next to our hut in the quiet of the dawn. Mr. Goodson, the Principal of both the Training Centre and School, would race down on his bicycle from his quarters or bungalow and no one wanted to be seen by him to be late for the assembly at the sports and football field. The very mention of Mr. Goodson or "Gosh", as I had heard he was referred to by the boys, jolted everyone from bed and all headed to the bath place to brush our teeth and then to tidy up before the morning assembly. The mosquito nets disappeared and beddings rolled back like magic. Very swiftly pyjamas or whatever nightwear was worn was shed and everyone was in shorts and singlets or just in shorts. How sturdy and athletic so many of the boys looked. Many were endowed with fine physiques. I must be looking so small and frail amidst that mighty phalanx of he-man. It could be very cold in the morning but not for long for the physical exercise and the morning run round the field soon warmed us up. After that we went to do our morning duties at our respective huts and compounds or elsewhere within the Institution precinct. My everyday duty never rose above the status of either a rubbish collector or dormitory sweeper. The reason was because I was the smallest. I was sometimes to be referred to playfully or teasingly by my schoolmates in the years ahead in my school life as "elf" or even "fairy".

After the morning duties came the time for taking our bath. There would be a crowd at the bathing place. This daily ablution was just a daily routine but in being able to cope with this and other things relating to the

daily order of one's life as a boarder in a government school made one fit to live in this community. Which brings to my mind also that apart from training us to be able to manage one's life this community had its own way to shed features that were a carry-over from one's former life. My background must have somewhat made me still look a poor primitive in a civilising centre like Batu Lintang. I was probably not the only one. I was so blissfully ignorant of the ways of cultured society. I remember that I put on my shoes when going to the class but there were times when I walked about barefooted. This must have happened when I was still in my first week at Batu Lintang. One day an older boy discreetly told me that I must stop walking about in "kaki ayam" (literally means chicken feet) or barefooted. Having been thus admonished I always remembered to wear shoes or slippers when I walked about.

Toilette over we went back to the huts and we put on our school uniform which was a white short-sleeved shirt and dark blue shorts over the vest and singlet, a pair of shoes and stockings. Everyone must look and smell clean. Then we were all ready for breakfast. At the sound of the bell we headed for the Mess Room. For nearly the whole of my time at Batu Lintang the meal I enjoyed most was breakfast. The food served at lunch and dinner was excellent and nutritious but I was really miserable at these meal times. I could take only a little and however much I tried I just could not bring myself to feed on them as did all my table mates who must be wondering about my curious problem and odd behaviour. Thus I was starving in the midst of plenty. I was thinking of the food at home and home cooking but school cooking was so different and disagreeable. I was often to be so desperate that when the others were taking their meals I would sneak out to some nearby shop to buy titbits.

In due course our Chinese matron noticed my worrisome behaviour and on occasions she would stand behind me during meal times to watch me hoping that by doing so would induce me to eat. But it was of no help and it was an ordeal. But she was a very caring and good matron and she wanted to ensure that I must be properly fed but it was so difficult for me to eat like the others and she just watched me in dismay. But I believe she was thinking about my predicament and how to make me eat and thus on occasions she would send me some tinned stuff. It happened that back at home we occasionally took tinned stuff and I had a liking for it. The tinned stuff she sent helped me to eat a little more, probably because it was more appetizing than school cooking although the food that would really build me up was the food that was provided. Eventually I learnt to get used to the school food although I could not say, with the exception of the breakfast, that I ate it with relish. It seems that my eating problem had made her notice me but this problem aside it was probably my diminutive size that made me conspicuous

to her. I had never heard anyone in my one year at Batu Lintang making any unfavourable comments about her. She must be a model matron. She certainly was the first and best matron whom I ever knew in my life as a student of the government public school.

One day she asked me if I would like to be temporarily adopted by her. She said she would look after me and then give me back to my parents after a time. I think now that seeing my rather frail physique she wanted to put more flesh into me. But how astounded I was on hearing this. If she was not saying it jokingly then it must be an extraordinary proposal. I cannot remember now if I said anything back to her or if I did what was it that I said. But I did not agree to her most astonishing proposition.

I was admitted to the Primary Five class and the pupils in this class were all native boys and there were about thirty or more of us. Gradually we came to recognise each other. I suppose in any group of boys there are the quiet ones, the observant, the witty, the talkative, the friendly, the timid and even the pugnacious. This probably spoke of their nature as individuals and reflected on the society and community they came from, their background and upbringing. Some boys played a practical joke on my classmate who stayed in the same hut as I did. They hung his mosquito net right up to the ceiling. He was not at all amused on seeing this. His primitive self took the better of him. In anger he took a knife and slashed the mosquito net. I believe he reacted in the wrong way. He just could not take it as a joke.

Which brings to my mind about my schoolmate from Quop. I heard some boys who habitually called him by his father's name. In the culture of our race it was a matter of gross disrespect and insult for anyone to call a person by his father's name. But this name-calling did not seem to bother him at all. He was an older boy and evidently the universality of Batu Lintang had squeezed out this bit of parochialism from him.

A new-comer would be the target of pranks played by the older boys and I was not spared my share of these. One morning I was told by the Hut's Vice Captain that the Principal wanted to see me immediately at his office. How could a new-comer know that he was only playing a practical joke? Who would disregard the bidding of one who was vested with some authority? We were then about to settle for breakfast but I had to leave it and went obediently to the hut where the Principal's office was located with a somewhat vexed mind. When I arrived there a few boys, all new-comers, were already gathered outside the office which was still closed. So we waited for the arrival of Mr. Goodson. When he finally arrived we were very puzzled to be asked by him as to what were we up to gathering outside his office when we should be having our breakfast. But surely he must be expecting us, I told myself. We told him that we were told to see him. I cannot remember now

what exactly was the expression on his face when he heard our answer but he told us that he never sent for us. He told us to go back to the Mess Room on the double since we were already late for breakfast. Unknown to us the scene outside the Principal's office was intently observed by the boys at the Mess Room. How the scene that they saw must have tickled them. The morning that we were told to see the Principal was the morning of April's Fool Day and it had become a tradition but one that we, poor ignorant primitives that we were, had no inkling of. That year the pranksters were not short of victims. But it may be said that it was all part of our formation since this tradition instilled a sense of humour into us and acquainting us with the world of the universal community.

It seemed to me that a class in a public school induced my mind to be better disposed to being very attentive. Our text books, exercise and note books were supplied to us free. That we were lavished with them amazed me. I only understood myself as having passed the Entrance Test and as a result I was admitted to Batu Lintang but I had actually won a scholarship. The exercise and note books looked so important and distinctive with their make and with the front cover bearing the name of the school, its insignia and this was all new and exciting to me. I not only liked them immensely but I respected them and I asked myself if I was worthy of them.

In the first week of our classroom life we saw all the different teachers who were assigned to our class. Our class teacher was a petite Chinese lady by the name of Mrs. Lee and she taught us more subjects than the rest of the teachers who taught us one subject each. The teachers were of different races. Our History teacher was a Filipino or of Filipino descent, a Mr. Vincent Uzaraga and he was later to become the first Principal of the Kanowit Government Secondary School which was to be started the following year. Our Nature Study teacher was a Malay whom I was to remember especially for something that he said that was connected with an event of which I shall come to later in these reminiscences. The other teachers were another Chinese and a Malay and they taught us the other subjects. To have teachers of different races to teach us was itself an education for it taught us that education is a bridge to better understanding between peoples. So we students ought to see them less as Chinese, Malays, Europeans or Filipino but more as members of that wonderful world called the educated or universal community, thus giving them a unity of purpose which is to bring out the best in people. For the student just to see this unity and universality is the beginning of his education in broadmindedness and tolerance. It was an education that ought to free us pupils and students from having prejudices while retaining whatever that was good in our ethnicity and true individuality.

Classes were held until late in the afternoon with tea breaks and lunch breaks in between after which we were dismissed for the day until Preparation Time which commenced an hour or so after the evening meal. It was a time for me to attend to my personal chores such as washing. When a boy entered this school community he underwent all the motions of life and routine in a boarding school during the weekdays or weekends in the process of which he invariably got to know the other students. Many boys would be merrily playing football or engaging in other sports and recreational activities. I perceived that playing football was too rough for me and I was too timid and shy to try to join in the less strenuous sports and games. One evening when I had no washing to do I just walked about looking at the other boys playing when I saw a stout sort of boy with a dark complexion but with a friendly look about him playing a shuttlecock with a table tennis bat by himself. I stood and watched him for a while. I had not yet recognised all my classmates but this boy whom I shall call Bob was in fact my classmate. I could not remember now how it happened but after observing him we eventually ended up playing shuttlecock together. That was the beginning of our friendship. He was my first friend at Batu Lintang and we would be playing shuttlecock very often. I did not feel so alone anymore. My new friend was an Iban boy from Bawan in the Kanowit district in the Third Division and like me he was a Catholic. His destiny was similar to mine for we had our education in a government school and which eventually was to lead us to secure government jobs. At the time of writing I learn with great sadness that he had died.

On another evening I found myself looking at the boys playing a football game. I had already attended to my personal chores and it was free time for me before the evening meal. I remember that I was looking at the football game but I was not really following it. I watched it in a detached way. After a while I was conscious of the presence of a European gentleman whom I was later to know as the Reverend Father Sheridan, a Catholic priest, who was residing at Batu Lintang itself. I glanced at him and I saw that he smiled at me. He was elderly and his hair was white but his countenance was placid and benign. I cannot be sure now whether I said any words of greeting but he later asked me very gently in a deep voice what my name was. I told him my name after which he asked me where I came from. I gladly told him where I hailed from and the mission primary school that I attended. I did not know at that time that he remembered my mentor, Justin Rajang. Thus it seemed that I had the idea that of all the pupils in my class or even in Batu Lintang itself I was the only one who came from a place that rang no bell in the minds of anyone in this place. It was not a famous place like Kanowit, Kapit, Quop, Lundu, Simanggang, Saratok *et cetera*. I cannot remember if my answer drew



an "Ah-I-have-heard-of-that-place-before" or "I-know-of-someone-who-comes-from-that-place" from him. I really did seem to come from an insignificant and obscure little place. But I was happy to be able to speak to him and especially when he spoke so kindly to me. He probably also asked me how had I been doing thus far at Batu Lintang. I believe I told him whatever and in whatever way I could. Then I mentioned to him that I had lost my mug. I told him this probably because what had happened was both a shock and a disappointment to me. Somehow I did not think that this would happen at a place as special and of such glowing repute as Batu Lintang where only the select were admitted. But this was only to be a mere assumption and naivety. The boys and trainees were perhaps selected but they were certainly not all good. Someone had stolen my mug. I had put it together with my other eating utensils on one of the racks in the place where they should be kept and where one supposed they would be safe. I cannot remember now the expression on his face when he heard me mentioning this. I told him about my stolen mug because it seemed right to tell someone about it. Besides, since the Father lived at Batu Lintang he therefore must be a member of the staff in some capacity to whom a student could tell his troubles. I cannot tell how I appeared to him when I told him this. But the very next day I received a thick-rimmed earthenware cup, the kind that was often used in the coffee shop, and I was told it was given by Father Sheridan. I was a little surprised but I accepted it all the same but reflectively. It was his way of consoling me. But on looking back it was more than that; for the cup that Father Sheridan gave reminded me always of the little chat that we had that afternoon beside the sports field and the goodness and kindness he exuded remained imprinted in my mind. But alas! I was able to use it only for a short time, hardly a week it would seem, for, like the mug I believe it too was stolen. This time I did not think that I should tell the kind Father or anybody about it again. It seemed a futile thing to do. I just had to buy a new mug. Perhaps I was not the only one who had his mug stolen and perhaps other utensils as well for I noticed that my house mates had kept theirs in the hut and I decided to do the same and there my mug and other utensils were safe. It was a sad but an undeniable fact that in a milieu of young people there would be some bad elements. In the years to come in my school life I was to lose my money and even a pair of trousers.

What about my Catholic faith now that I was in a universal arena? What does it mean to be a Catholic in a community where one mingles with believers of other faiths? It never occurred to me to ask myself the latter question in those days. I had entered the Kingdom of God. Was I still in that Kingdom at Batu Lintang? With hindsight I see that I could then practise my Catholic faith to the full and putting up no barriers between myself and the

other pupils and students. There was a Catholic community at Batu Lintang as so were other communities of believers of other faiths. One sees the British government displayed great wisdom in matters of religions for it gave due respect to all religious communities. The Kingdom is not necessarily any particular place on earth but it lives or is present in the heart of the believer. He carries the Kingdom with him. It becomes present in him.

There was a moral class held every Friday afternoon and one period in a week was allotted for it. We would group ourselves according to our faith. There would be pandemonium as the boys of different faiths or of no faith dispersed and headed in different directions to their respective moral and religious classes or elsewhere. There was a good number of Catholic boys and if I remember rightly we were crammed into one classroom during the Moral class. The Reverend Father Sheridan conducted the class and I remember his class was a lively one. But what I remember his class was a lively one. But what I remember most about the class was not so much the instructions as the amount of goodwill and fellowship that prevailed during the entire period. There would be laughter and moments when we were still as we pondered on some truths. Perhaps it could be said that we came to the class not only to hear moral lessons and religious knowledge but also to be together as Catholics.

We also gathered in another room in the evening to say our night prayer although I did not go there every evening as I ought. On Sundays we the Catholic boys went to the Mass at the old St. Joseph's Cathedral. In these and other ways I practised my faith. But was it a deep and strong faith? At Baptism a very wonderful event - an outward sign of a spiritual reality - happened in my life yet a decade and more were to pass before I could have a fuller appreciation of it. The spiritual life that I received at Baptism only began to work or work more appreciably only when I was in my manhood and only then was I to see its transforming power in my life. The inspiration to write this story comes from that spiritual life. But if the spiritual life had worked even then in my boyhood then attending the moral class, abstinence on Fridays, reciting the rosary and going to Mass were expressions of this life although done without a better understanding or awareness of the deep meaning and truth attached to them or their efficacies.

Saturday morning was a time when we cleaned the huts and aired our bedding in the sun. Because a number of boys were asked to join the groups that were required to work elsewhere in the premises therefore not everyone worked in the huts or the huts' compounds but all aired their bedding. The Institution did not employ any groundsmen or gardeners and thus the entire premises with its trees, shrubs and other ornamental plants were looked after by the boys using implements supplied by the Institution. Our existence at

Batu Lintang certainly had its share of rigours but how obediently we carried out our obligations and duties. This was another spirit and stamp of Batu Lintang. The entire premises was a hive of activities as we went about our Saturday duties. There would be sounds of laughter, of shouts, tomfooleries; of boys talking and teasing each other and rushing or walking hurriedly about picking things up, slashing things, gathering things and carrying them away to where dried leaves, dead twigs and rubbish were being burnt at the incinerators or elsewhere, producing columns and wisps of smoke here and there, giving an air of merriment; of boys sharpening their tools and implements and of other sounds and noises which spoke of the kinds of works done to keep the premises spick and span.

In my life the images of civilization speak in ornamental trees, palms, shrubs, flowers and well-kept compounds. I have already implied my first sensation of this civilization at Quop and how the people there seemed appreciative of clean surroundings and flowers suggesting a cultural ascent. At Batu Lintang this sensation of civilization was felt even more perceptibly in the immaculately kept ground, the grassy lawns, the many varieties of ornamental trees and shrubs along the several footpaths and the myriads of flowers that were grown beside the huts. I was to see in a book a reproduction of a drawing of "Mr. Brooke's Bungalow". The drawing captures and shows a scene of Sarawak in the long ago. Somehow it made me reflect on how that piece of ground which surely was once a jungle and probably the haunt of wild beasts but when fashioned by a man had acquired a new dignity and status. On that ground Nature had been refashioned by a man in the form of landscaping.

By the time our Saturday duties were over we were all very tired and hungry. Our beddings which had been aired and exposed to the sun were returned to their respective place and the dormitories had been inspected by the members of the staff and even by the Principal himself. After all the work we had done we needed to take our bath before taking our lunch after which began the week-end and our free time.

It was on one weekend that I was to delve more into the world of comics. I was first introduced to this kind of literature at Quop when I read the "Roy Rogers" comics. My friend Bob turned out to be kindred spirit for we both seemed very keen in reading comics. The Institution had a Reading Room. I cannot remember now the name of the comic book available there which we so loved to look at, but among its contents were stories and cartoons that appealed to us boys. Some stories appeared in serialised parts or episodes and others as complete features. The front page which appeared in full colour featured a story of outer space adventure. It seemed that the space adventurers had to deal with a cunning and wicked alien chief who seemed bent on

thwarting their every move. I did not know why they were in or had to go to the outer space in the first place a realm that seemed so fraught with dangers and unknown things. The alien chief had a head, which in earthly term, was out of proportion to its body and it was all green and it was always floating in space and was as evil as it looked. As I tried to follow the story I kept wondering when the space adventurers would return to the safety of Earth, but weeks went by and they never could return and they seemed helplessly trapped in the forbidding outer space.

I suppose I myself was born with the idea that no matter how far away a person went to he must some day return home. It seemed a very sad thing for anyone to have left home and never returned. Therefore that the space adventurers never returned to their homes on Earth seemed a horrible fate and most perplexing. In the years to come I was to look at the Europeans who laboured in our country whether as government officials or missionaries like the space adventurers. They too came from some part of the earth that was far away and indeed there were among them those who would die and be buried in a land many thousands of miles away from their homelands. It seemed so very sad.

In the film called "The King and I" that I went to see on a weekend at the Sylvia cinema I was to see a very alluringly and regally beautiful English lady teacher and her young companion, who left England and sailed to an oriental land called Siam to teach the children of a Siamese king. I never liked the Siamese king. He looked cruel, fierce and to my mind which held the notion that gentleness and amiability in a person's countenance spoke of kindness and goodness at once equated the king's cruel and fierce mien with elements of savagery and wickedness in him. I wondered therefore why so fair a lady would want to be about at the court of such a very strange and rough-looking character king or no king. I feared for her life and her young companion. I abhorred the king when he laughed loudly like a madman. How I wished that she would pack her things and sail home before certain danger befell her. How glad was I to see that in the end to harm came to her and she did return home none the worse after spending her time in the court of a very strange king in an eastern and mysterious land.

I was to hear of the British and Commonwealth servicemen, Britons, Gurkhas, Australians and New Zealanders who fought an enemy that was bent to crush a newly-born nation and many of them fell in a land thousands of miles away from their own countries. Why were we so worthy of their sacrifices? The explanations were there and they were described in different way but perhaps the greatest explanation was love. The fallen ones never returned home or returned alive but their sacrifices gave life and freedom to a great many. Their sacrifices were the manifestation of the unfathomable love of the unseen but real Power that worked in time and history through

peoples, nations and events.

The weekend was also a time when one could go to the town. Perhaps after being exposed to an universal arena like Batu Lintang, Kuching shed some of its mysteries but for me it still had that magic which so fascinated me in my younger days. I found that going there was still something to look forward to. My parents supplied me with enough money to take care of my needs and other expenses. We were also provided with a fortnightly allowance which made me realise again that when a boy was admitted to Batu Lintang he had in fact come under the special care of the government and this was one among such aids that he received. I was thus able to visit the town and to buy comic books and even to go to the cinema in company with other boys with whom I had struck some casual acquaintanceship. I would also go home during some weekends to get some money as well as to be with my folks. In all the time that I was at Batu Lintang my parents visited me at least twice, the first time just my father and the next both my parents. I especially remember the latter visit which was on a Saturday when it was almost lunch time.

Both my parents were in good health. My mother, who still looked young, was radiant and it was obvious that she was eagerly coming to see me. How she beamed with gladness at seeing me looking clean, quite plump and healthy "as a boy living in the town should look" she would say subscribing to the view, not altogether erroneous, of the rural folks about the people living in the town. It was thought that the people in the town looked cleaner, smarter and healthier as if comfort and conveniences only contributed to good health. My father did not show his feelings as my mother did because she was more simple-minded and tended to be naive, but I could tell that he was proud of me because I had been able to endure this long in the government school and particularly when I was the only one there from our community. Indeed there were times when I became so utterly homesick that I thought of running away and leaving school but such a decision, which would have been disastrous to my life, was never acted upon.

My mother was talking to me or remarking on me admiringly. Then she noticed an incomplete rattan basket that I had made during the Handiwork Class. I had placed it on the top of my locker. How it surprised and pleased her to see that I was able to do it. But what she found amazing was only what had come out as the result of being taught to do handicraft. I was actually extremely happy by this visit although I did not show it outwardly. Winning a place as a pupil at Batu Lintang must have given my parents no small joy. It gave them a great honour. They took much interest in me and thus they came to visit me. Perhaps the other pupils or students also had occasional visits from their parents, but I would suppose that not very many of them came to

visit their sons for reasons of sheer distance and the heavy expenses involved, or whatever else that prevented them from coming. But I did see on one occasion a Kayan boy whom I shall call Laing being paid a visit by either his parents and relatives or his people. They were people of sturdy build and some of them wore their traditional hats thus allowing me to see for the first time the fine-looking people who came from a faraway part of Sarawak and their distinctive head-gear.

I saw another distinctive feature of this people in the *sape*, a stringed instrument which I had never known or seen before. I remember the night when I first heard Laing playing it. I thought the music that it produced was sweet and delicate and I like hearing it. It was time when everybody in the hut must be in as it was almost bed time. Laing was entertaining himself before he went to bed. The beautiful music when heard as one was in bed had a lulling effect.

It was also on a weekend that we went to see a film and this time again at the Sylvia Cinema. I cannot remember what was the name of the film but it was about the Red Indian and White man conflict in the days of the Wild West in North America. In the opening scene the white people were completely overpowered. The Red Indians were vicious and merciless for they had a certain way of killing people and they killed everyone, men, women and children. I could not fully understand the plot of the story but I understand enough to be able to take sides. It looked to me that the white people were good folks but for some reasons the Red Indians in that film appeared to me to be the villains who were fierce and blood-thirsty savages. I thought that the white people had not done any wrong as they were moving about to make a home in the new country but they fell victims to the hostilities of the Red Indians. For some reason the latter had become very angry with the white man or were just cruel and merciless and were therefore always lurking and ready to pounce on and kill the white people. I must state here that what I had said was what was seen by the simple mind of a boy. I thought of the white people in the same way as I thought of the Ancient Greeks and the Romans and that they were the people of the civilised world and the Red Indians as the Persians, the Etruscans and the barbarians. The white people were good and civilised like the Greeks and the Romans and the Red Indians were bad like the Persians and the barbarians. In my life I see that the white man is good and had done a great deal of good to the world probably more than any other race on earth. While every act of savagery is deplorable but what made the Red Indians to commit it speaks of man's fallen nature as a whole and which throughout history had manifested itself in conflicts and strifes between one country and another, one race and another and one ideological bloc and another. In the film it was seen by the mind of a boy that the white

people were good and civilised but the barbaric Red Indians just killed them. Thus his mind saw the Red Indians as the villains and they rightly met their end which was defeat.

The comics that we often looked at in the Reading Room and this film inevitably made me to look for other comics on cowboys and Red Indians or on the Wild West in general. The film about the exploits of Robin Hood that was shown at Batu Lintang led me to buy comics on the legendary character and his band of merry men and they were easily available. On looking back to those days that literature such as this was obtainable again spoke of the era and sphere that Sarawak was existing in. In this comic the forces that stood for justice and tyranny were clear cut and I was of course on the side of Robin Hood. But it was not so easy to tell these in a tragedy. I was utterly absorbed looking at a comic on "Romeo and Juliet". When I came to the end of the story I realised that I was having a taste of a totally new kind of literature. It was nothing like Robin Hood, the cowboys and Red Indians or the British and the Germans in war comics. It was the first time that I came across a story with an ending that was so heart-breakingly sad that it could make me cry. I felt dazed, being struck with an ending that I did not expect.

I had heard that Sarawak was a British colony but I was still too young to understand what this meant. All that I could understand was that the Europeans were associated with the government and authority and it was good and I could not see or understand beyond that. One evening I happened to be listening to the radio with some students. Also listening was our Nature Study teacher, of whom I had mentioned earlier, and he is a Malay. Over the radio we heard that the people in Malaya were happy about something called "Merdeka". Something big and important seemed to be happening there and this made the people so jubilant. I remember that our teacher seemed to be listening to the broadcast with intense interest. Then he said "Malaya has achieved Independence. What about Sarawak?" At that time I could not understand what he was talking about. But it did seem to me that it was as if he was complaining. His tone and bearing seemed to be one of bitterness and cynicism. I could not understand why he seemed bitter. Thinking back this remark appeared to be a vehemence against something and spoken in whisper at some corner but in anger. It was an anger which at a later time I was to understand as that which sprung from a nationalism which nowadays finds expression in the national life and forming a part of the national ideology. Little did I know that my path in life had brought me to make my first encounter with a nationalist.

The academic year was about to come to an end. I felt that I was becoming a creature of the school and no longer feeling so timorous and how I looked forward to the years ahead at Batu Lintang. In the following year I

would be an older boy. I often heard of the boys who had been at Batu Lintang longer and who talked to each other and spoke about what happened, what they did, or what they saw "last year". Poor me! I had no "last year" to my credit to talk about. But when the next year came round I too would be able to use the term "last year" to prefix a sentence or two in my conversation. But as things were to turn out there would be no years ahead for me at Batu Lintang for towards the end or probably the last week of the Third Term we were told that we would be sent to Kanowit. The year 1957 was my first and last year at Batu Lintang and which was also the last year that it functioned as a school. From henceforth it existed only as a Teacher Training Centre.



# CHAPTER IX

## KANOWIT: 1958 - 1963

### Part One

I might say that the Kanowit Government Secondary School or K.G.S.S for convenience began because the Batu Lintang School had closed. With the termination of the latter the pupils and students were moved to a new location at Kanowit in the Third Division. With the closure of the government school at Batu Lintang the K.G.S.S became one among the very few government secondary schools in existence, the others being the Maderasah Melayu School in Kuching and the Tanjong Lobang Government Secondary School in Miri until others were opened elsewhere later. The Batu Lintang School was the handiwork of the stewardship of the British Government and the K.G.S.S was another. The government gave the K.G.S.S its beginning and early growth at a time when it was itself already approaching the evening years of its own stewardship of the country. The school was opened in 1958 and when I left it six years later in 1963 British rule had ended. My years at the K.G.S.S was to constitute the longest period in my life as a student and boarder. Those years, as a whole, were wonderful, happy but, most of all, vital years for me. I can look at my six-year sojourn at the K.G.S.S as a time when I was given excellent education. It was a further period of training in self-reliance and to be industrious. Then it was time when I underwent further exposure and formation in a universal arena. But apart from all this it was perhaps also a period which worked on my life in other ways and consequently of how all this further moulded my thinking, outlook and personality.

To go to the K.G.S.S meant to leave home and to see and to live in a place outside my own hometown and district and away from the familiar scene and surroundings. It was to go to a place and a riverine country of the Rajang Basin that was more than two hundred miles away from my home. Getting there meant going on a journey which included sailing on a ship and spending an entire night on it as a deck passenger. After that it was to board a motor-launch which finally took me to the school arriving there in the morning after spending an uncomfortable night on it. Then it meant for nearly one whole year I would be conversing and thinking rather more in English and also talking in Iban and talking in the Bidayuh dialect only occasionally since there was a handful of us Bidayuh boys there. But even

among ourselves we the Bidayuh boys spoke English very often. It meant also that for nearly the whole year I could not see the people of my community.

For us the former students of Batu Lintang being at the K.G.S.S was to have moved to a new home perhaps rather like an army that moves to a new base. Or it was Batu Lintang planted on a new soil for the spirit, the stamp and the tradition of the former, which was also characterised by universal orientation, lived on because they lived in us.

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I departed Kuching for Sibul in the "M.V. Rejang" in the evening. Somewhere after I was aboard the ship I heard signals coming from the vessel itself. When it started to move the movement was barely perceptible. I was not sure what was happening at first as the wharf seemed to be slipping slowly away but I then realised it was the ship itself that was moving. All my life thus far I had only known travelling by land. Seeing me off at the wharf was my father, my sister Tunun and some relatives. Going on the same trip were many of my school mates from the First and Second Divisions. By coincidence K.... was also in the ship and he was bound for Sibul to work in the unit of the Medical and Health Department called the Sarawak Malaria Eradication Project or S.M.E.P. It was his first job and first posting. I was to learn that he had stayed away from school for an entire year but realising his foolishness he returned to St. James's. It seems that by the time I was at Batu Lintang he had left school this time because he could not go any higher academically. He had evidently applied for a few government posts and finally secured one in the Medical and Health Department and he was posted to the Third Division. K....'s attitude towards me had markedly changed. This indicated that he had realised that although in his contempt in the past he had looked upon me as "useless" but he apparently grew to like one who was selected to a government school. Also, although small and frail, I was as brave as he since I was going to a school so far away. That night we slept on the fore deck. We lay beside each other and covering ourselves with his blanket. It was windy and cold but we were snug and warm under the blanket, protected from the elements. I had my first experience of marine travel. As the ship crossed the South China Sea I could feel it rising and falling as it struggled through the waves. I felt the rhythm of the waves until I fell asleep. We arrived at Sibul in the evening of the next day, after the ship had called at Sarikei and Binatang, and there K.... and I parted company.

From the wharf where the "M.V. Rejang" berthed we went to the floating wharf at the waterfront, further up the river, where the motor-

launches were moored carrying out luggage with us. I had more or less the same amount of luggage as my school mates. But my size and constitution being what they were, the luggage was beyond my capability to carry in one go. But some kind companion helped carry the rest for me in addition to his own. On reaching the floating wharf, enquiries were made after which we boarded a motor-launch which was bound for Kanowit and beyond. We arrived at the K.G.S.S very early the next morning. The school is situated on the right bank of the Batang Rejang. From the School's "pangkalan" or landing place and also the main entrance to the school premises to the boarding house, which was several hundred yards away, bringing the luggage was made less arduous as it was carried on a trolley. Whatever that remained was carried by those who were not pulling or pushing the trolley. All the male boarders were accommodated at the dormitory. The female boarders, who were probably hardly a dozen in number, were housed at a quarters not far from the "pangkalan". The journey from Kuching to Kanowit and all the hardships and discomfort that it entailed was an exhausting one. I was not in a cheerful spirit when I arrived at Kanowit. At the dormitory we were grouped into compartments called Houses and they were called Red, Blue, Yellow and Green Houses.

After being at Batu Lintang where boarding facilities were adequate the conditions that awaited us at the K.G.S.S was rather dismaying at first, in terms of boarding facilities and amenities. The existing facilities there were the inheritance from the Rural Improvement School which had been closed the previous year. The place was therefore initially not fully equipped to take us boarders. At the dormitory, which was a very large and sturdy wooden building that was reminiscent of a longhouse with its wide common verandah, "bileks" on the lower floor and the "sadaus" on the upper floor, the furnishings inside were either inadequate or the make-do sorts, and thus some or quite a number of us had no proper bedsteads or cupboards. If I remember rightly, only later on were we supplied with these facilities. As a result of coming later to the school than most others or because the other pupils and students had come much earlier, what was left for me as bedstead was the most unsatisfactory one. The same with what was left as my living space which was a grotty spot with the wall covered in places with dark stains. The bedstead or what served as one was nearly as high as my shoulders. I fell from it on my first night at the dormitory but a boy, whom I was later to know as a Bisaya, one of the native races, and who was also the House Captain, heard the sound and saw me and picked me up and put me back on the bed. The fatigue caused by the journey and exertions must have been such that I did not wake up when I fell and when I was put back on the bed. I would otherwise in all probability have slept on the floor and bitten by mosquitoes

until morning.

Among the unsatisfactory amenities was the school water supply. It was obtained from the Batang Rejang by means of the water-pumping engine, again inherited from the Improvement School, and was available as untreated piped water only for certain times during the day, and therefore the water we got was exactly the same as the state of the great river such as muddy when it flooded and clearer when there was a high tide. At Batu Lintang I believe one took such amenities as water supply and electricity for granted as they were available all the time. But at the K.G.S.S we the former pupils and students of Batu Lintang came to appreciate all this. The school electricity supply was made available by the school's own generator, another of the Improvement School's inheritance, and it gave us light and power only from the evening until about ten o'clock at night. Perhaps it was also made available at other times for special purposes. It did strike me that I was coming to a part of Sarawak that was much less developed than Kuching.

If the facilities and amenities were dismaying what awaited us in the way of manual works was formidable. If I remember rightly the premises was almost everywhere overgrown with tall grasses. But we all did our bit and put ourselves to the task and by and by the entire premises breathed a new life.

I had elsewhere made an inference that the place where I came from was not famous like Kanowit and others but I said this partly because I saw these names in the map in a text book and I was curious. But I could not possibly have any preconceived idea of how Kanowit might look like but for some reason I remembered names like Kanowit and others namely Sarikei, Bintang, Sibu, Song, Kapit and Julau. One was curious as to how these places might look like. I was curious about these places in rather the same way as I was curious about Greenland because it is so high on the world map. They were place names on the map in a geography book of Sarawak but little did I know that I was indeed to come and see these places and to live in one of them which on the map are represented only as big dots.

The first Principal of the K.G.S.S was Mr. Vincent Uzaraga and the first group of the teaching staff consisted mainly of the teachers who had taught us at Batu Lintang and who were transferred along with the pupils and students. Apart from them there were also a few new teachers including a European lady by the name of Mrs. Micki, Mr. Ong Boon Lim, a Sarawakian, and a Mr. Wang who, from hearsay, came from Hong Kong and who spoke English with an accent which greatly amused us. He would pronounce "bread" as sounding almost like "bride". Thus here at the K.G.S.S universality continued to prevail. The school opened with only a few classes, the highest being the Form Two and the lowest being the Primary Six. I proceeded to Primary Six at the K.G.S.S. Our classroom was on the upper floor of a

building which I shall call the Complex which apart from housing the other classes also comprised the Principal's and Administrative Office, Matron's quarters, Mess Room and Kitchen. The Complex stood a short distance away from the river bank and thus from the classroom one could see the Batang Rejang, Sarawak's longest and finest river. At this point the great river is very wide with a breadth of about 700 yards. The K.G.S.S is situated across the river from the Kanowit Bazaar. The latter made up of two long rows of shophouses with few firebreaks and stood along the left bank of the Kanowit River. The downriver ends of the two rows of shophouses faced the Batang Rejang and could be seen from the School.

To be in the classroom meant being attentive, obedient, being able to concentrate and where one would either be listening to the teacher, reading, writing, which meant taking down notes or doing exercises and answering questions. In the classroom the process of education and the development of one's character and personality took place. It took place as periods turned into a day, days into weeks and weeks into months. It took place in the classroom of a government secondary school sited deep in the heart of Sarawak. It took place in the classroom amidst the tranquility and quiet of the country. It was a tranquility that was broken by the sometimes faint or more audible sounds of outboard engines, the motor-launches and other river crafts and the lapping of their wakes against the bank. It took place in the tranquility of the country broken by the sounds emanating from the other classrooms and from the activities in the school itself. It took place in the classroom of a school that was cut off from the nearest town by the mighty Batang Rejang.

Being separated by the river therefore usually the only way and the only time one could go to the Bazaar was by the school's outboard, and we were allowed to go there on Saturday afternoons and on Sundays at certain hours and for a certain length of time. The first trip on Sunday was very early in the morning and this was to send us the Catholic boys and girls to attend the first Mass at St. Francis Xavier's Church. The Catholic pupils and students could take the later trip if they decided to attend the third Mass. The later trips were also for other boys and girls and occasionally the teachers who went to the Bazaar. After the Mass we would go to the Bazaar but towards noon or thereabouts we would join the others and must all return to the school. We were permitted to go to the Bazaar side on the other days to watch the football matches between our school teams and the other teams and in the years ahead in connection with other school activities such as the inter-school sports.

It did not take long for anyone at Kanowit to notice that the *lingua franca* there was Iban in much the same way that the *lingua franca* in Kuching

district is Bazaar Malay. I cannot remember now how I managed when I went to the Bazaar but somehow I could buy what I wanted. In my first year at Kanowit I could not speak Iban.

Throughout the year I would naturally enough sometimes think about home but somehow I felt that I had got over my occasional homesickness with no great difficulty. My father's comment about his son becoming an "anak prentah" was not entirely superficial. I was certainly living my own life insofar as it was lived independently of parental care. But I could not claim such independence in terms of maintenance, although the financial support received seemed like a wheel that took me from the beginning of the academic year to its end.

The letters that I wrote home were few and far in between. But I believe I wrote home as soon as possible after my arrival at the school. I could imagine how relieved my mother was on learning of my safe arrival at Kanowit. On the night of my departure, as on the nights of my many future departures, she would lay wide awake until far into the night or into the early hours of the morning or until she could not fight off the sleepiness that eventually seized her, thinking about me.

With the exception of the students coming from the Third Division itself the rest of us remained at the school during the First and Second Term holidays. Those of us from Kuching and other parts of the First Division could go home on our own initiative. If I remember rightly the students not from the Third Division were given the privilege of being provided with free passage home only for the Final Term holiday and for coming back to the school the following year. For those students coming from the Second, Fourth and Fifth Divisions there was no question of going home during the short holidays as doing so would mean to undergo so much hardship and to incur so much expenses.

Mr. Vincent Uzaraga served as Principal only in the first year of the school's existence and was to be succeeded by the Reverend Father Rawlins, who was to serve as Principal during most of my time at the K.G.S.S.

The public examination that I sat for in my first year at the K.G.S.S was the Common Entrance Examination. The examination centre was at the Catholic Mission school, called the St. Francis Xavier's School, not so far from the church. The candidates included those from the mission school itself. After the examination, one's mind was all set for going home. As the final term holiday was approaching and after knowing the departure date of the "M.V. Rejang" I wrote home to tell my father of my arrival and to wait at the wharf in Kuching. On the homeward journey the discomfort, the inconveniences and boredom of riverine and sea travels did not depress me as I was so excited and full of joy to be on my way home after being away for some

eleven months in a faraway place. The "M.V. Rejang" at last ascended the Sarawak River in the morning. How good it was to see signs, as the ship cruised up the Sarawak River, which announced that we were approaching the capital and my hometown. Somehow seeing Kuching again was like coming back to civilization. The dock where the "M.V. Rejang" was about to berth at last came into sight and the vessel slowed down. Then the ship came nearer to the wharf. It was crowded with people and I was anxiously searching for my father among the throng. I then spotted him. To see my father again after such a long absence was the happiest sight that I saw.

## Part Two

I passed the Common Entrance Examination and I therefore returned to Kanowit and there to continue my life as student, boarder and sojourner. What was in store for me in the years ahead at the K.G.S.S and in my life henceforth? Apart from receiving education in the classroom and undergoing all the routine of life in the government boarding school, the latter of which contributed to the development of one's character in no small way, there were to be other factors and things, noteworthy or trivial, but which spoke of the time that I lived in.

In the second year the student population increased and would continue to do so in the years to come. The rooms in the Complex were not enough to house more classes and this necessitated the construction of a new classroom block, adjacent to the Complex, to accommodate the additional classes. A few members of the staff including Mrs. Micki and Mr. Wang had left and we were never to see them again. And for us students it would also only be a matter of time when we too must leave the school perimeter and for so many never to return again. We were just passing through a certain passage of time on the face of this earth. We lived at Kanowit for a time and then left to go on our way in the journey of life. The members of the staff who left were replaced and therefore we saw new faces among the staff. We would see more in the years ahead. Among them was a volunteer of the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). We knew his name as Michael. He was the first of such volunteer teachers numbering about more than half a dozen who would come to the K.G.S.S in the years to come and they included more VSO volunteers, the Voluntary Service Abroad or VSA volunteers and members of the United States Peace Corps. These volunteers were young men. One, whose name was Ian Bailey, was to teach our class Mathematics. He and a volunteer from the Peace Corps whom we knew as Bob were to be very popular with the bigger boys. Later still there was to be a Peace Corps volunteer, a Mr. Shuey,

who taught us Art, and I remember him for a comment that he made about my drawing from a live model and he said to the effect that perhaps I might decide to pursue Art further which, as it turned out, I would do so to an extent in the future. Because they were young men they probably showed certain characteristics of the young people of their countries and perhaps they inspired many of the boys who saw in them, as they lived among us, glimpses of the great and wonderful countries they came from. My impression was that they were warm, understanding and happy to impart their knowledge to us in the class and out of it. Michael, the first volunteer, appeared to me so youthful that he was probably as old or only a few years older than the oldest among us in the school. Evidently he was an expert at making canoes and they were probably the only ones ever made then and in the future in the K.G.S.S.

The Reverend Father Rawlins took over from Mr. Vincent Uzaraga as Principal of the K.G.S.S. He was a priest of the Anglican church but what we the non-Anglican Christians and other students of other faiths saw was not his priestly side but the man in his secular role as the Principal of a government public school. It seems to me that he was probably the kind of principal that such a school as the K.G.S.S needed in its pioneer years. The weight of his authority was strongly felt by the students. The stamp, spirit and the tradition of Batu Lintang were never more consistently upheld than when he took over the principalship of the school. Perhaps he enhanced them by inculcating in us also with a sense of industry. It seems to me that all this again contributed to the excellent upbringing of the student of the government public school and a preparation for life beyond the school.

The school had a immense precinct and to maintain it depended entirely on the labours of the students. But as in the past how faithfully and obediently indeed we students carried out our manual duties, routine as well as additional, and the result surely spoke of the high degree of obedience, discipline and enthusiasm among the students and the Father was the motivating force. He was also to involve the students in projects and activities such as vegetable and pineapple gardening and later still making fish ponds and rearing fowls. Thus it seems that the K.G.S.S was not just a place of study but one which also developed in us an attitude to labour.

Attirewise the Father was a constant, like a landmark, with his khaki shorts and white short-sleeved shirt and a big red handkerchief a part or corner of which was perpetually hanging out from his trouser pocket. His countenance could be exceedingly genial and avuncular but that look could vanish like a bright sun that had slipped behind the clouds. The next moment there would be a clap of thunder. He became stern and inflexible. As for me I nearly always found myself at a loss with regard to the state of his mind. He



was something of an enigma to me. I feared to get close to him. I would find things that he said in our class and elsewhere as somewhat uninteresting. But on looking back those things were really very useful and how I appreciate them now. By implication among the things he would tell us was that we must not do anything just because others were doing it. Conformity does not necessarily mean that one is doing the best or even the right thing. Mrs. Rawlins seemed like-minded in this respect. She would tell us not to be gullible in regards to the printed words for not every printed text is always authoritative or free from errors for falsehood and deceit can also be printed in letters of gold. She taught us to be critical.

Mrs. Rawlins taught our class History. It seemed to me that for some reasons I found it difficult to follow her. It appeared that I had totally failed to appreciate her. Yet, with hindsight, what a great privilege it was for us to have her as our History teacher. My impression with regard to her method of teaching was that she had her own way but which, perhaps, did not suit me. At a later time she was to write a history of Sarawak. A time was to come when Sarawak entered an era when there was a certain kind of nationalistic thinking in the government which, among other things, expresses itself in the call to rewrite the history of Sarawak. I was not to believe my ears when I first heard it. But what was wrong with our history as we knew it? Why must history as a chronicle of facts be questioned? Yet this call implied that the history of Sarawak had inaccuracies or had been falsified and therefore must be righted. Sarawak in that era was to be an independent country within a federation. Independence was to be a concept that was totally new to me and more so its implications and consequences. For a new order of things was about to emerge but whether or not this has its source from the depth of Truth, Wisdom and Enlightenment only time can tell. Independence was to be like turning a corner and what lay beyond it can be so unexpected. What was legitimate and esteemed in the past is now looked upon with disfavour or is reduced in status. Gone now from use by the school is the History text book entitled "The Story of Sarawak" by Vernon Mullen and so also is her book entitled "Sarawak: 1839 - 1968" to become another artifacts of another era.

In my life to find myself in a government secondary school at Kanowit made me feel that I was going through what seemed to me to be a very special stage in my life. One felt that one was infact a part of a phenomenon. It was the phenomenon when a government-planned and government-run secondary school was very much a new undertaking and its planners, administrators, the principal, teachers and others were not unlike pioneers breaking a new frontier in the growth and development of a young country.

A beautiful feature that I saw in the scene of education in the government secondary school in Sarawak in those days was linked to English for it

brought about and projected a universality. The fact that English was used as the medium of instruction drew teachers from other parts of the Commonwealth countries as well as countries outside it namely, Great Britain itself, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America, India and Hong Kong to come to the K.G.S.S. I believe that all this gave me a wonderful vision of the universal community which encompasses all that are good, beautiful and true from everywhere and anywhere.

In the class we were taught the songs of the British Isles, America, Africa, Australia, China, Europe, Sarawak itself and other countries. We received universal education and so were the songs. As I sang or heard these songs I saw the scenes of the universal community for the songs gave glimpses of other lands which these songs conjured. As far as I am concerned, these songs have a ring of timelessness, beauty and indestructibility about them. They are like epigraphs of man's thoughts, his unique spirit, idealism, dreams, his witness of time and life and his search for truth and beauty, as one age succeeded another, as captured and immortalised in these songs. Yet we were taught these songs only because we had lived in a certain era. If I can liken the era that I had lived in as a household with a master then little did I know a new chapter would open in the future and how the new master of the household in another era would decide what songs the boys and girls would sing.

Being in a government secondary school put me in the position, for the first time in my schooling life, to be taught by an Indian teacher in the person of Mr. Abraham. We heard that his background was in the Catholic Mission school and he was reputed to be a fine but very strict teacher. Unfamiliar with an English spoken with a strong Indian accent one had to be doubly attentive in order to catch what he was saying. Never hearing English spoken with such accent I believe one found it amusing to hear him speaking, but obviously no one in the class was so indiscreet as to show his amusement but elsewhere some of us would mimic him. But woe to the student, while attending his class, who became tempted to be so amused by his accent and forgot to be attentive. He would be liable to find that Mr. Abraham would not take his unattentiveness lightly. As he talked one sensed that he kept a sharp eye on us probably more so at certain of us and everyone had better be prepared to expect to be the one to be shot with a question. This happened to me on the very first week, if I remember rightly, of a first school term. But I had been paying attention and I could answer his question correctly. Perhaps he was rather pleased to note that the most conspicuous boy in the class, by being the smallest, showed himself to be very attentive and was not dreaming away. Whether or not that was actually the case I cannot tell.

It seemed that underneath that stern exterior was a tender spot. I had indicated earlier that there was a broad footpath of several hundred yards long leading from the "pangkalan" to the dormitory and from the same spot the footpath ran in another direction leading to the Complex. Beside the footpath leading to the boarding house stood the teachers' quarters. One afternoon on a weekend I was on my way to take my afternoon tea at the Complex. I was about to pass by one of the quarters where Mr. Abraham and his family stayed when a lady whom I deduced must be Mrs. Abraham came out from the quarters and walked to the roadside and stood there. Her standing there could not possibly have anything to do with me I thought. But as I came nearer she made a sign to me to come to the house. I was somewhat taken aback and I could not guess or imagine what was to happen. I turned and followed her hesitatingly and timidly. Upon entering she bid me to sit in the living room. It was quiet and cool inside the quarters. After that she slipped away from the living room leaving me to sit quietly and I was feeling not at ease wondering what was about to happen next. I gazed at the walls and at the framed photographs hung there. Then she returned holding a tray and on it were some cakes and a drink. Now I knew why she had called me in. Mr. Abraham must have chanced to look out the window and saw me coming and he must have told his wife to call me to have tea. After putting the tea things on the table she bid me to help myself to the proffered goodies and then she disappeared again. Mr. Abraham must have kept himself out of sight. After a while she reappeared and I felt it was also time for me to leave. Whatever was Mr. Abraham's reason for his act of kindness to me it was something that I would always remember.

The presence of a large number of Iban boys among the student population was felt in the frequency of Iban being spoken. In my years at the K.G.S.S. I felt that I mingled easily with the Iban boys. That was probably because many of them liked my company and *vice versa*. Mingling with them eventually made me learn to speak their language and I believe that when I left Kanowit I could speak Iban quite fluently. Among the things which made my sojourn at the K.G.S.S such a happy and memorable one was this conviviality. But perhaps such conviviality varied between individuals. Possibly others may not look back to their days at the school as quite a happy one as I found it. There was conviviality too with the students of other native races namely the Malay and the Melanau. But as far as I could see they appeared to be less venturesome. If I recall rightly they would not join us in our weekend excursions into the bushes or to do fishing in the stream, a stretch of which flowed into the school premises. I remember hearing one of them saying that he would not dare venture into the bushes for fear of snakes.

The K. G. S.S made a niche for itself in the soccer history of the Kanowit District for our football team was the best. The match would be held at the public football field which was beside Fort Emma, built during the reign of the First Rajah, and now housing the District Office and other government departments. It was also called the "Kubu" and it stood on a bluff overlooking the Batang Rejang. The river bank near where it stood therefore rose steeply and high like a cliff. I would see at some matches that the players of the other team that played against our team was no less a personage than the District Officer himself, Mr. H.A.R. Harlow.

To digress. For me what were to be the images of British departure from Sarawak was to be this District Officer and Mr. A.R.F. Griffen, a Resident. I was to see Mr. Harlow as he strode out from the District Office in Kuching where I was newly-serving as a clerk. Somehow these instances remain imprinted in my mind. I could not possibly tell of course what precisely was on his mind at that moment but he could very well be thinking of all those years of dedicated service probably mostly carried out in the outstations and not always under the best of conditions. Maybe he had seen the soul of the people and had understood them and the people had held him in great affection and esteem and now with Independence he had to leave them forever as he had to bow out to the inexorable force of history. In my days at Kanowit I was also to see him and his wife at the funeral of an American doctor by the name of Dr. Cooper. I had heard it said that it seemed that this good doctor had died from an infection that he caught from his patient at the government hospital in Sibuluan. I never saw this doctor but we were told he was someone who had been very good, caring, sympathetic and so well-liked by the people of Kanowit. Our Principal told us to join the big crowd that was giving the late Dr. Cooper their last respect. He was buried at the parish churchyard. At the burial site the District Officer's wife was crying. I remember his wife was petite. I seem to remember how tenderly his strong arms held his tearful and trembling wife. I think now that they must have lost a very dear friend. From the same office I was to see Mr. A.F.R. Griffen walking slowly past presumably on his way to the office next door. Or was he going elsewhere? Sarawak had by then already been given her Independence but the expatriate officers were still made to serve and thus speaking of a great deal of good sense and graciousness in a time of transition displayed by the first State Government of independent Sarawak under the leadership of Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan. But it was only a matter of time when he must leave the country that he had devoted so much of his life to and which he had served for so long and so well. The force of history seems cruel. He died not very long after returning to England. The glimpse of him walking slowly past the District Office one morning also imprinted itself in my mind.

To return to Kanowit. In many of the football matches we would hear the jolly and booming voice of the Reverend Father Bruggeman of the Catholic Mission in Kanowit and whom the Catholics and peoples of Kanowit affectionately called "Apai Grog" or what sounded to me more like "Apai Gerok". The Father was apparently fond of watching football games. Our teams proved to be the best, virtually beating all the other teams so much so that among the young supporters of a defeated team that our team played against emitted such uncomplimentary utterance as "Bunuh Secondary" or translated means "Damn the Secondary".

In faraway Kuching my mother had most strangely been beset at times by anxieties about me in the first few years of my sojourn at Kanowit. It would appear that she had grown so anxious that she could not refrain from grumbling with my father for allowing me to go to a school so far away from home. She thought about the hardships, hazards, inconveniences and dangers when on my journeys to and from Kanowit. My father never chose to send me to St. Peter's, Batu Lintang and now the K.G.S.S. He simply abided by the circumstances which contrived to chart my path in my life as pupil and student. My mother wanted him to ask for my transfer to a school in Kuching. At first my father ignored her talks but at one point she must have so exasperated him that he decided to act. And so it was that during a final term holiday we went to the Education Department in Kuching to find out and ask if there was any possibility of transferring me to a school in Kuching or at any rate to seek for counsel on the matter. The education officer we were led to see was a European whose name I did not remember. But I seem to remember he had a visage that was austere. I have a notion now that he was a Mr. Steele. Before this officer, who was really a superior in my life as a student in a government school and who knew so much better than could my father about my destiny, came my father and me to make a request for my transfer. But my father's pleading was all in vain. Instead he was told that it was good that his son remained at the K.G.S.S and gave his reasons. And that was the end of the matter. My father had his answer which he conveyed to my mother and it seemed that after this she never brought up the subject of my transfer anymore.

When a final term holiday was over I would be rather sad to leave home and to return to Kanowit. My father always showed the keenest interest in my going back to school. He would accompany me to Kuching and return only after the ship had sailed. My journey back to Kanowit would take place in January which was a landas season when the North-East monsoon would bring intermittent rain, floods and rough sea. I recall a time when it rained so much that a part of the road to our home at Mundai was flooded. But the time of my departure had come. My mother was not content to see me off from the

house. She accompanied us until we came to the flooded part of the Padawan Road. My father and I waded through the water and she stood at the water's edge. When we reached the other side she was still standing and looking at us. That instance remains imprinted in my mind. I was going on my way through life to where she could not follow. The flooded part of the road symbolised the journey of life which so often separated a mother from her son.

To travel in a ship as a deck passenger was not something to look forward to. When there were more passengers than was normal one had almost to scramble for sleeping space. In one of the journeys back to Kanowit I could find space only enough to put my luggage but could find no sleeping space. Needless to say I was in a bit of a distress and I must have worn a face of great melancholy. I found a place to sit at the stern of the ship wondering about where to sleep. As the ship approached the mouth of the Sarawak River I could see that the sea ahead was rough and as the ship steamed ahead the waves got bigger. I believe I have never known the sea to be this rough in all my previous trips. If I did not lie down soon I would get sea sick. By then it was getting dark, cold and windy. I was getting desperate and perhaps quite ready to cry like a child. I must be a forlorn and pathetic sight to anyone who saw me as I sat there quietly and staring away with distress written all over my face. Then something unexpected happened. One of the crew members whom I had always took to be the cabin boy, beckoned me to enter the cabin just behind where I was sitting. I was very surprised but I went in quite gladly. How snug and warm it was inside compared to the cruel wind and cold outside. The cabin boy was a Chinese and he had always seemed to me to have the most amiable countenance among the crew members. Very possibly he had recognised me after seeing me in the previous trips but in those trips I could always find a sleeping space. On this trip he indeed showed himself to be as kind a soul as he looked for he showed kindness to a boy in distress. He did not say very much. He pointed to me where I could lie down and sleep. So I lay down and slept almost immediately. My mother had every reason to worry about me everytime when I left for Kanowit with its hardships, miseries and inconveniences as this trip proved to be. But the world was not filled only with dangers, unsympathetic, coarse and rough people because there were also good, sympathetic and kind-hearted people such as the Chinese cabin boy in the "M.V. Rejang" and whose kindness I remember to this day.

One late afternoon, in my third year at the K.G.S.S, I was playing a marble game with my classmate underneath the dormitory. It was our free time being one after the afternoon classes and before the meal time. On looking up in the direction of the footpath which led to the dormitory I saw a visitor coming. As he got closer he called me. Then I recognised who he was.

It was K.... I had neither seen nor heard from him since we parted at Sibuh. How well and happy he looked. He smiled and appeared very glad to see me. He asked me to come with him to the town and I gladly agreed since it was my free time. I was wearing only a short pant the way I was usually clad at this time. I learnt later that he was stationed at the S.M.E.P base at Nanga Balleh or a locality within the proximity of the mouth of the Balleh River, the name of a tributary of the Batang Rejang. The Unit's operations usually involved riverine travelling, a predominant mode of communication in the Third Division. The teams of the S.M.E.P spraymen and other personnel travelled in outboards. It seemed that the team he was with was passing by either on its way home to its base at Nanga Balleh or it was operating in the area. He did not want his mates to be kept waiting so he took me with him there and then and we hurried to the jetty allowing me no time to run for my shirt and short trousers. On arriving at the school jetty his mates saw me and I heard they expressed their surprise at seeing me looking small and so far away from home, and also because the boy who was supposed to be his brother (for K.... must have made others to have the impression that I was his natural brother) bore very little resemblance to him. I entered their longboat and we headed for Kanowit Bazaar. That evening I had my meal at the Bazaar and later K.... bought me some foodstuffs which was a boy's delight, consisting of a popular beverage, cream crackers, condensed milk and others. He even bought me a shirt and gave me some money. As we walked about the Bazaar he asked me if I would like to spend the coming mid-term holiday with him up at Nanga Balleh and without hesitation I answered in the affirmative. Then he told me how to get there and also I must write to him so that he would know the day of my arrival at Kapit which was the last point of the launch service.

When the term holiday came round I joined the other students who were bound for Kapit and boarded the motor-launch. We started in the morning. I thus had the opportunity to travel further up the Batang Rejang. I cannot remember how far above Kanowit was the Batang Rejang still broad and the country still generally flat, but eventually the somewhat monotonous line of vegetation on either banks began to give way to more irregular outline as we progressed further into the interior. The river was still wide but I believe it later started to narrow as we journeyed into the hilly region. If I remember rightly we passed through mostly pristine and sparsely inhabited country. As we rounded a bend a longhouse would appear in sight. We would slowly come near to it and see boats and people taking their bath at the jetty or by the beach and then go past the settlement and the next human habitat would show perhaps after the next few bends. But the incidences of longhouses were such as to suggest that we were journeying into the Iban country. We had journeyed for nearly the whole day without arriving. I was wondering

just how much further we had to go. But we finally arrived at Kapit in the evening. Far in the interior was found at last this speck of civilization. The interior town stood on the left bank of the river. The bank appeared high at this point but such impression was created probably due to the low water level in the river. The opposite bank was forested and seemed uninhabited enhancing the feeling that the town was a lone human outpost deep in the wilderness. As the motor-launch was preparing to berth at one of the jetties I was anxiously looking for any sign of K... waiting for me. But he was nowhere to be seen and when I got to the town with the others there was no sign of him coming to meet me either. I grew anxious. However upon enquiry I was told that the S.M.E.P people would turn up fairly soon as they were wont to do. Just before it was getting dark K.... showed up and he looked rather amused when I told him that for a moment I was worried that he would not show up and what would happen to me. We proceeded to the S.M.E.P. Station at Nanga Balleh, above Kapit, that night.

The S.M.E.P Station stood beside the Balleh River. What one saw there was what looked like a crudely-constructed wooden building and this served as the living quarters for its personnel and workers and three huts beside it serving as stores and office. Lamps were used for lighting at night and water for cooking and drinking was taken from the Balleh River. The occupants took their bath in the river. Despite the somewhat ramshackled look of the quarters it was kept clean as so were the huts, the compound and the entire premises. I detected a high degree of discipline among the men who were maintaining the place. I would see them, in the course of my stay, leaving the station in their longboat on their way to their various areas of operations. They were like troops leaving their base on their way to battles. One seems to see at the S.M.E.P station at Nanga Balleh the British style of incurring minimum expenses to give maximum service to the people.

K.... was in charge of the store and it seemed to me he was a very efficient, hard-working and conscientious worker. My impression was that his colleagues and subordinates found him rather strict. He often spoke with a stutter and now and then I espied how his colleagues would surreptitiously imitate him. Apart from the trips downriver to Kapit Bazaar there was nowhere else for me to go but I made good use of my time. After doing whatever that needed to be done or what K.... asked me to do I would retire quietly to our room upstairs on the upper floor and read a story book that I borrowed from the school library and which I had brought with me. From the room my attention would sometimes be distracted by the monitor lizards which came to scavenge at the garbage dump or to prey on the chickens which would wander to the periphery of the premises. At the sound of someone coming they would scamper away but only to return when all seemed calm



and quiet. They seemed very persistent in their pursuit.

I enjoyed most of my time during the holiday. We made frequent trips to Kapit either in the evening of the weekdays or in the morning on Sundays. I sometimes saw the people coming from the upriver country doing cooking using firewoods, which they had probably gathered elsewhere and brought with them, at the river bank. I saw the imposing Fort Sylvia which housed the various government departments as was the case with Fort Emma at Kanowit. I saw too the hills behind the town. Fresh river fishes and venison were often on sale at the market and I remember they were cheap in those days.

The mid-term holiday came to an end and it was time to return to Kanowit. It so happened that on that day of our departure a government boat called the "M.V. Kachang" was to leave and my school mates from the Malaya *kampung* at Kapit and myself were allowed to board it. We departed in the morning. It was a free trip for us. K... had bought me foodstuffs which filled a cardboard box to bring with me and of course gave me some money. He was to send me money quite often from then on. On board this vessel was no less a personage than Temenggong Jugah and a European gentleman who most probably was a high-ranking government official. The latter wrapped himself with a blanket. They were sitting at the bow of the vessel engaged in a conversation. The two spoke softly and gently to each other. It was the first time that I espied how two eminent people talked to each other. I enjoyed the trip on this vessel as one felt one was travelling in better style than in a commercial motor-launch. The crew, who seemed to be all Malays, provided us with a lunch. We arrived at the school still early in the afternoon. As we disembarked, the Temenggong spoke some encouraging and kindly words to us. He really seemed to appear avuncular speaking to us as to his nephews or nieces. At the "M.V. Kachang" I thus saw the Temenggong, a vital figure and the man who was to help shape the destiny of Sarawak, at a close range. Years later, after Sarawak was given her independence and when I was to see this very important person again who was by then was to be known affectionately as "Apai" or literally "Father" but translated means "Venerable Leader" at close range when he came to pay an official visit to the Borneo Literature Bureau, my future place of work.

What of my faith at this stage in my life? I have come to Kanowit, a place where there was a Mission Station and therefore there existed a source from where I could obtain my spiritual nourishment and needs in the form of attending the Holy Mass, going to confessions and receiving the Eucharist. Here at Kanowit I was perhaps thrown to a place far away from home but only to find myself in a place that was a major mission station in the Rejang River and Kanowit River basins. In the years ahead I was to receive my Confirmation at the St. Francis Xavier's Church. Through my friendship with

Bob I was to have my first encounter with a Catholic periodical called the "The Crusader". It was an indication that Bob was ahead of me in his knowledge about the Catholic faith and presumably was deeper in his faith. I was much impressed by this. Another feature of the Catholic faith which imprinted itself in my mind was a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary which I espied at the Mission House. It was quite unlike those that I remembered having seen before. It was most likely either a picture of the Blessed Mother of God as she appeared at Fatima or Lourdes but what struck me was its image of holiness. With hindsight, as a whole in all the years I was at Kanowit thus far I had practised my faith but it seems that I had not fully realised how great and important is the faith that I embraced. But it was a faith that was yet to be tested.

As was at Batu Lintang the Moral class was held once every week. The number of Catholic students increased with every passing year. Added to our number from Batu Lintang were the Catholic students who were formerly pupils of the St. Francis Xavier's School and others from elsewhere in the district or in the Third Division. I remember that the first to conduct the class was a Chinese who, I assume, was a catechist. He had a deformity which caused an awkwardness in his movement when he walked or when he made gestures with his hand. But he appeared to be a cheerful soul and he tried to make his class as lively as possible.

I cannot remember for how long he came to give us moral instructions but evidently after he had served his stint the next instructor was the Reverend Father James Meehan. In the class the Father taught us religious knowledge. He also presided over the Legion of Mary that he started in the school and I was one of its members but not for very long. After a time we did not see him. I was to see him again in the years to come at the newly-made St. Anne's Parish in the Kuching District. He was often to say Mass at the St. Peter's Church at Simpok. Eventually he came to know me but I did not tell him that I had known him before. There was to come a period in my life, which I shall come to touch on in the last chapter of my reminiscences, when I felt like the living dead to be followed by a time when I could not be said to be living up to my Catholic faith.

Looking back, I was to return from England in July 1972 after taking up a training course and I was very much a believer but it seemed that I had "wandered away" from the Catholic Church. But what was the real cause of my "drifting away" was because, I believe, I was yet to understand the Catholic faith as I understand it beginning some twenty years ago as I write these lines. I also believe that I did not understand it better prior to that because my faith was not strong. When I met the Father I had in effect said to him that I did not value the Catholic faith. Knowing my education and

exposure he went straight to the point, doing away with gentleness and patience, and he replied that if that was so then I should cease to call myself a Catholic. In effect he asked me to make a choice, to live my Catholic faith or leave the Catholic Church. I sensed that he was very serious. Somehow the reply had an impact on me and I believe it struck me like a bolt of lightning. It was not so much a threat as a revelation of what I would lose if I left the Church. I saw the light after that. I realised that I did not really know what I was saying. In my blindness and foolishness I never looked at the matter that way. I had never seriously meant to leave the Catholic Church. I realised that I was a poor soul who had partly lost his way. There and then I understood that faith is freely given and freely received. One comes to God by His Grace. Faith is a gift and is given not by one's merit but by the power of His Love the principal vehicle and the sign of which is His Church, the Roman Catholic Church. My days as a lapsed Catholic was to be over. It was to be that from then on I lived my Catholic faith seriously and I saw and experienced its transforming effects in my life as I lived it and grew in my faith. The Reverend Father Meehan had ignited something in me which was to lead to my interior conversion. That something is called humility which opens up one's heart and allows God to be the centre of one's life. The Father showed me the way and the means to possess a spiritual life and thereby to grow in faith, to bear fruits and hence to find fulfilment which, in my life, means being motivated. I had been ill or undernourished spiritually and it can be said that in my life the Reverend Father Meehan nursed me back to spiritual health.

My years in the lower secondary was coming to a close. I sat for the Sarawak Junior Certificate (SJC) examination. The candidates from the school consisted of our class, the Form 3A and the students from the Form 3B comprising the Chinese boys and girls. When the examination was over we had to remain in school until the end of the final term. Our minds were now freed of all thoughts of studies. But we did not just laze away and frolic about all the time for we did manual works and we did so in good spirit. When the final term finally ended I packed all my personal effects and together with the other students left the school on my journey home.

I have now gone through four years of my life at the K.G.S.S. Apart from those reminiscences that I have mentioned there were memories of those things which were perhaps trivial, incidental and peripheral but they nevertheless formed the daily routine as well as became features and gave glimpses of those days. There were the daily trips to and fro along the long and broad footpath. There were the late afternoons in the week days and in the afternoons of the weekends when many of us went to the bushes, which together with the jungles and rubber trees almost encircled the entire school

perimeter, and climbed the oil palms, planted during the Improvement School days, and extracted their ripe fruits which we cooked and ate. It was amazing what great appetite we had. Many were the times when we played in the spacious verandah of the huge dormitory and there, on some nights we caught the cicadas — the silly creatures being attracted by the bright lights — and then tormented them. There were the weekends when I would stand by the bank of the Batang Rejang and watched the high tide and the resultant colour of the water which had changed from its customary muddy look and appearing almost clear. I remember that as I gazed at the vast expanse of water I sometimes had a sensation of fear. I thought of the unknown things of the deep that might lurk underneath the almost placid and gorgeous stretch of water. There was that delightful interlude after the evening meal and the preparation time when we would mill about leisurely on the lawns, field, along the footpath, beside the classroom blocks and elsewhere under the soft evening light before going to the classroom. When preparation time was over we would have our last tea for the day and after that we the boys would troop along the broad footpath on our way back to the dormitory and to bed. There were the story books and others that one could borrow from the school library for reading pleasure as well as to expand one's vocabulary. There were the comics and pop magazines the latter of which some boys seemed good at procuring and how these literature and publications infected us. Many were the times when a group of boys were heard having a pastime by singing together merrily the songs that they had learnt in the class or some popular pop songs. There were those occasions when we were excited on hearing that we would be seeing a film show to be shown in the school. On rare occasions we were allowed to see some good films at the cinema in the Bazaar. Then there were the hobbies or crazes that we became infected with such as collecting stamps, writing to pen pals, taking cuttings from newspapers and magazines to adorn our song books, taking snapshots of each other and writing autographs. All this occurred in the course of acquiring education.

### Part Three

I passed the Sarawak Junior Certificate examination with a Division One. Again I returned to Kanowit to enter into the secondary stage of my education and the last two years of my life as student and boarder at the K.G.S.S. I believe the school's performance in this public examination was impressive. When we proceeded to Form Four not very many faces were missing.

In these two years rapid progress was seen in the school. As from the year 1962 the K.G.S.S functioned as a full secondary school with a Form Five for the first time. We the boys from Batu Lintang being the "pioneer" group who was at the K.G.S.S up to 1963 watched the school grow and at the same time we ourselves grew in mind and body with the school.

There walked at the K.G.S.S a teacher by the name of Mr. Smith, a Canadian. He had joined the staff in my fourth year at the school. I had my first glimpse of him at the "pangkalan" one afternoon but already he gave me an impression. I thought there was something gentle and almost child-like about the man in the way he looked, greeted and smiled at us as we passed by. It seemed to me that he was probably hoping that we would stop to say a few words or even to talk to him. I was to find out later that this was not just a notion or an isolated facet of him but the man had an interior beauty, and that gentleness and child-like quality was a reflection of that beauty in him. As far as I am concerned Mr. Smith did more than just teach us English and English Literature. His person introduced a new element, which I might call a charisma, in the school. In him I saw that a teacher's role was more than just to transfer knowledge but he was also an inspiration to us the students. Mr. Smith had his own way of inspiring us to cultivate worthy qualities. His personality was infectious and in his way he contributed to our formation. Perhaps I might say he was an architect of persons. All of us could be as good as we wanted to be and as a result those around us, as we lived our lives, could be made a little happier and consequently the world can be a little better. In everyone there is a capacity to be good. He did not actually state all this but it could be seen in the man himself. He was a spark that came from a source that I was yet to learn. The life of a person could make a great difference to humanity and to the world. Indeed his own person at the K.G.S.S certainly seemed to make a good deal of difference with his uniqueness and charm as a person and his method of teaching as a teacher.

It was not as a stray thought when he mentioned to us about a great man called Mahatma Gandhi who was assassinated by a religious fanatic and how God's name was on his lips as he was about to expire. By mentioning Gandhi he was thus letting out something of his own personality. Mahatma Gandhi was one soul who had made such a great difference to the world for he was a turning point in world history. But I cared nothing more about this Gandhi other than remembering what Mr. Smith had told us about the great man's last utterance.

To digress. There was to be a time in Sarawak, after she was given her Independence, when power in the government was outwardly shared by the political parties which represented all the main races in the State, but real power was in the hands of the nationalists whose history went back to the first

political agitation in Sarawak known as the Anti-Cession, which resulted in the assassination of a British Colonial governor, Sir Duncan Stewart. The anti-cessionists were against the cession of Sarawak to the British Crown but the force in favour of British rule prevailed. For seventeen years or more the adherents of this nationalism harboured the resentment against foreign rule and later foreign influence which meant British rule in particular and the West or the rule of the white man in general and foreign accretion. But when Independence was granted to Sarawak power was transferred to a British protegee in the person of a Dayak and not given to the nationalists. However, in 1970 the nationalists occupied the seat of power and they were to exercise their power in such a way that its effects were eventually felt by an institution, the Roman Catholic Church, which had grown steadily since the era of the Second Rajah. In this light the Church, or Christianity in general in Sarawak, had until 1970, gone through, in a certain sense, a time of grace, when nothing whatsoever disturbed it but after that it experienced interferences and intimidations. The younger crop of European missionary priests were made to leave the country and the Mission could no longer exercise direct control over its schools but were given up to become national schools. All this was to coincide with the period of my own interior conversion and the subsequent rekindling and growth of my faith. I was to delve into spiritual literature in my endeavour to enrich, deepen and strengthen my spiritual life. The literature consisted mainly of Catholic books and other Christian publications. But to me the things of the spirit are also about or related to Truth, Freedom, Beauty and Goodness, and so books on such subjects drew my interest as well and this was to lead me to Gandhi and his struggle for the triumph of Truth. I learnt that the result of the struggle took the form of winning independence for India. It seems to me that Gandhi saw Truth and acted on it. It became his motivating force that enabled him to fight the government of British India using a principle called *satyagraha*. It seems to me as I read about his life and works that Gandhi did not fight the British out of hatred. His struggle was not characterised by vindictiveness. He fought and won and as a result history was changed. His struggle, characterised by courage, dignity, brilliance, charm and charisma, ended British rule in the sub-continent although the birth was so cataclymic\*. Gandhi said when it was all over that he believed he could succeed in his struggle only because the nation he fought against was Great Britain and the British with their great sense of fairplay and commitment to decency recognised the force of change and history in Gandhi. He won independence for India yet he had believed that the British Empire had existed for the welfare of the world\*\*. In Gandhi

\* L. Collins and D. Lapierre: Freedom at Midnight.

\*\* M.K. Gandhi: An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiment with Truth.

I see what is great, noble and beautiful in human spirit and because of this there opened a new vista in better understanding between nations and peoples and one that can help to lead to the ultimate good for mankind. In Gandhi one sees how man's spirit can move mountains. The greatest manifestation of such a spirit is in caring for one another. For what good is an ideology if it does not advocate compassion? As I think about what Gandhi stood and laboured for, it seems to me that all can do their part in making this world a better place to live in by caring for each another in the home, in the community, in the neighbourhood and so on.

To return to Mr. Smith. What I saw in him was what I had never seen in anyone. He seemed to have a special quality. Could it be that this quality was the main factor that made me look forward to his class? Before the class began he would say something as a preamble to put us in the right frame of mind. Then there were things that he said which surprised and delighted us so that we could better appreciate ourselves and have better understanding and insight. Some frontiers in our mind were pushed back and our horizon was broadened. If I remember rightly he once said that Sarawak was a land of smiles. It was a revelation but which the people themselves perhaps took for granted. I thought he was a beautiful person and he was beautiful because he was uncommon, and this uncommonness emanated from his interior self. I could not tell how old he was. But he was tall and thin and walked with a slight stoop but there was vitality in him but one that appeared to come more from his spirit than his physical energy. I could see light and sparkle in his deep set blue eyes. With that very wonderful smile of his he would say things such as are said by some characters in the novel. For a moment he was an incarnation of the character in the world of fiction. For a moment I came so close to something that hitherto only existed in print or in another part of the world and now had come alive in a person. When he called himself "an old gecko" such self-deprecating remark only made him more endearing.

Our Geography textbook was written by an Asian. He was not teaching us the subject but he saw the book. Mr. Smith made us see what this meant. The implication was that a new era was breaking into this part of the world. It was the sign of the march of time. It was a sign that we the Asians were beginning to participate in various fields of human endeavour and ultimately to acquire adequate know-how passed on to us by our mentors from the advanced countries in the West to prepare us for the eventualities ahead. Someday we too must come to take our place and share in the responsibilities which time shall usher in.

It seems that a very special person was living among us at the K.G.S.S and when he left to become the Principal of another government secondary

school in Bau in the First Division I could feel that he had left a place which, somehow, to my mind, nobody else could fill. Such was his uniqueness. A big crowd of students went to see him and Mrs. Smith off at the "pangkalan" and I went with them. A feeling was welling up in me. There were tears in my eyes.

Our instructor in the Moral class was sometimes a priest from the Catholic Mission. I remember that he gave a talk on the Theory of Evolution, Hell, Eternity and Lourdes of which I heard for the first time. His argument to show the flaws in the Theory of Evolution was so admirably revealing. His illustration of Hell was so poignant. It was a place of utter hopelessness without end. Then he mentioned about the miraculous cures that happened at Lourdes. His talk had an impact on my mind.

Little did I know that as I went through my last two years at the K.G.S.S that Sarawak was on the threshold of a new era. A new chapter was to open in her history. There were things therefore which in due course we in the school were never to do and never to see again. We would be shown films occasionally at the hall in the Complex and which at other times ordinarily served as the Mess Room. At other times we would also gather there for other purposes. Film shows meant a break for us for we would put away our books for the evening. After the show or function that were held there, and at the signal from the Principal we would all stand up and sing the anthem of the British Empire, the "God Save the Queen". Somewhere above us in the hall was hung a portrait of Her Majesty the Queen and so we sung the anthem under her serene gaze. It was the anthem that I had heard for as long as I could remember for it was already the anthem of Sarawak before I heard it for the first time. A time was to come very soon in the future when we would sing a different anthem and when we would no longer see the familiar image.

In passing, in this same hall Father Rawlins, the Principal, once introduced a gentleman who represented an institution of learning in the United Kingdom. This gentleman came to give us a talk in which he mentioned that the institution which he represented was offering a special scholarship to a student who merited it. It turned out that a Bidayuh boy, a schoolmate from my Quop days, won the scholarship. He was known to be a brilliant boy and often looking very reserved. In due course he left the school and proceeded to the United Kingdom and continued his studies in Form Six in this institution. This led him to take up medicine which eventually made him a doctor.

Which also leads me to recall that in this same hall the Father had introduced to us an Indian national globe trotter who happened to pass through Kanowit. If I recall rightly he was a Sikh. He gave a short but



charming speech in English and my impression was that he was as interesting a fellow as the cape — or was it a robe? — that he wore and to which were pinned or stitched the crests and insignias of the countries that he had visited. What imprinted itself in my mind was that in him I saw the heterogenous face of the people of the English-speaking community.

At the end of an academic year a school concert was held. Among the items on the programme was a singing performance by the choir from our class. As the curtain parted and after it was announced that the choir was about to sing a song of the British Isles called "Over the Sea to Skye" Father Rawlins, who was sitting at the front row suddenly rose and conducted the choir from below the stage. It was a song that he had taught us and which he wanted to see being sung with the dignity and meaning accorded to it. One may picture that it was an image of patriotism and of an indomitable spirit set against the setting sun of the British Empire.

Father Rawlins' career at the K.G.S.S was crowned by an official visit to the school by no less a personage than the representative of the Crown, His Excellency, the Officer Administraig the Government who was Mr. F.D. Jakeway. Very possibly the K.G.S.S was accorded with one of the very rare visits made to the schools from so exalted a personage as the O.A.G.

The winds of change were coming. Sarawak was to become an independent country and there was the proposal for the merger of Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo States of Sarawak and North Borneo to form a new nation called Malaysia. The proposal was eventually to become a historic event. A commission called the Cobbold Commission had been formed for the purpose of ascertaining the wishes of the people as to whether or not they wanted Sarawak to join the Federation. It seemed that the Commission had arrived at Kanowit and one morning Father Rawlins gave this information to us at the assembly. This indicated to us that the proposal to create a new nation had taken on a further step. This event was one among others that had been happening and among more that were to happen which finally led to the formation of Malaysia and Sarawak's independence within the Federation. We heard also of the opposition to the merger and the subversive activities of the communist organisation and the latter seemed to be gaining momentum. Meanwhile President Sukarno of Indonesia was trying to stop the formation of Malaysia, but failing which he decided to crush it by confronting the infant nation militarily. And so Sarawak entered into that period in her history when there was a guerilla war and internal danger from the communists. It was to be a war that was almost entirely fought by the British forces, comprising the Britons and Gurkhas, against the Indonesian guerillas. But the defence forces also included the Commonwealth forces from Australia and New Zealand, the Federation's own forces comprising

the Army and the Police Field Force and a special unit called the Border Scouts, the creation of the British Army for the special purpose of assisting the British Army and the Commonwealth forces during the Indonesian Confrontation.

After the crowning touch to Father Rawlin's outstanding career there came a time when a curious incident happened. I could not get the correct picture of this incident to this day. Suffice to say there was an element of rebellion against the superior by the boys of the Form Three and this happened after the Sarawak Junior Certificate examination was over. How it started and who was the ringleader remained a mystery but it put a slight taint on the K.G.S.S's spotless and every glimmering escutcheon.

I have my own theory to the incident. After the students had sat for the S.J.C examination they had nothing else to do but to wait for the end of the last term before they could go home. Therefore the Principal gave them manual works to do rather than to allow them to lounge about. The previous groups of students had always accepted these labours with good grace. But the boys of the previous groups consisted almost entirely of the Batu Lintang students and they had carried out these works obediently and enthusiastically, and to me this attested once more to the spirit of Batu Lintang which lived in them. The thought of mutiny was unthinkable. Significantly, the group that had sat for the S.J.C Examination that year was the first group of boys who were almost entirely drawn from other schools in the Third Division. At first they appeared to carry out their labours obediently but later they rebelled against the Principal and refused to be subjected to anymore rigours. Did they think that they were being abused? But rightly or wrongly it would seem to me that those boys had not learnt about loyalty.

The Reverend Father Rawlins was the Principal of the K.G.S.S for most of my time there and left the school after this incident to take up a post as Assistant Director of Education in the Education Department in Kuching. I believe he had a claim to the K.G.S.S as his high watermark. He had built and guided the school virtually from its infancy to its astonishing growth making it easily into a model government secondary school and maybe some of the most memorable days of his life were spent at the K.G.S.S. Whatever those boys in the Form Three thought of him or did to him could not outweigh the tremendous achievement that he had made. He was succeeded by the Reverend Father Heery, a Roman Catholic priest.

The Reverend Father Heery taught our class English and English Literature. I believe that from this time on I began to take English with the enthusiasm and keenness that I never had before and as a result my English showed a marked improvement. It seemed that the Father triggered something in me. I felt that to be able to have a command of it was no small

achievement. But for me it was to be more than a matter of achievement for it speaks of a world and civilization and is linked to a whole set of values, ideals and norms. My attitude to it was to be one of allegiance. If I may compare it to a master then I am its ardent pupil and disciple.

I came to observe that a Chinese girl in our class whom I shall call by the pseudonym "R.W." had been quietly but labouriously reading one book after another of the Everyman classics. I used to see a row of these classic novels bound in mellow covers in the library but I had never thought to lay my hands on them. It seemed that while one such as I was feeding myself with lighter literature for extra reading, she was going for a literature in its concentrated form, and that while I only skimmed the top of the literary wealth of the world she had dug deeper and savoured it in its vintage form. The comparison is while most or the rest of us were enjoying pop music she was already developing an appreciation of the classical music. I supposed the difference this made was in herself. I did think that she was showing signs of maturity more than it showed in one such as I. It seemed that she had a sense of direction. She appeared to have developed principles, discriminate taste, values and norms. How did she or what made her begin to read the classics in their original form? It was apparently her love for learning and a certain seriousness of character which was perhaps linked to her background and her Catholic faith. But however and whatever they were they must be a contributing factor to her good English and her character and personality development. She had dared to walk into a territory that I had not been too. It makes me ask now if this was the point in my life that was a further step in the road that led me to choose my world as the result of the example of this good, industrious, exceptional and erudite girl? Perhaps there were other contributing factors, as I lived my life in the years ahead, but altogether they gave me principles, values, norms and ideals that I would live by and stand for.

The new nation of Malaysia was born and in conjunction with this historic occasion a Malaysian Essay Competition was launched. The Essay was entitled "How a Young Sarawakian looks at Malaysia". We were informed of this by the Principal one morning at the assembly. I believe I had a brainwave. I cannot remember now if the competition was open only to students in the Fifth Form in the school. I entered the competition and my essay was among the entries selected by Father Heery at the school level for submission for final selection at the State level. The result came. I won the First Prize in the Boy's Section and the First Prize in the Girl's Section was won by "R.W.", the girl who had been reading the classics. Thus the K.G.S.S came up top in this Essay Competition. The Second Prizes went to the students from St. Joseph's and St. Mary's Schools in Kuching.

Tragedy struck at the K.G.S.S in my final year there. One evening our new outboard driver, a Malay, had apparently gone up the Kanowit River in the school's speedboat. I do not know whether or not he went on an official errand. But he never returned. Then a report came that the speedboat was seen drifting but without him. I cannot remember now what I heard as to what actually happened on his ill-fated trip but his body was found floating. I felt sad. I remember him as a jolly man and he always seemed to have a ready smile to anyone who showed him any regard. I felt sorry for the late man's family. I remember his son always looked so happy as I caught sight of him now and then on his way to the primary school at the bazaar side and at other times. Sometimes I saw the late man's wife who characteristically looked happy and contented. The family seemed happy to be at the K.G.S.S and probably looking forward to many years of living at the school. Now tragedy struck and they had to leave the school.

This leads me to recall another sad incident. A Gurkha had drowned — if I heard it rightly — and his body was retrieved and was lying at a wharf at Kanowit Bazaar awaiting to be collected. He died in a country that is thousands of miles away from his homeland. But he did not die in vain for he was sent to fight an enemy that was threatening to take away the freedom of an infant nation. What comes to my mind when I think of the Gurkhas is great admiration and amazement at their extraordinary loyalty by serving in the army of another nation. I see in such allegiance a picture of a world when man's struggle transcends national boundaries into the struggle for the common cause of making man no longer divided and torn but brought together as one great family with allegiance to the King of truth, love and righteousness.

One morning we stood during the assembly and we sang the new Sarawak State Anthem and above us were flown the Sarawak flag. The Union Jack flew no more. The singing of the "God Save the Queen" had become history. I heard Father Heery commenting that the anthem was very beautiful and somehow I always remember this and the anthem called "Fair Land Sarawak" indeed seemed so as I heard it in the coming years. It was a work of art and it revealed its beauty little by little to one who could not understand it at once. This anthem was the work of F.C. Ogden and G.R.K. Freeth. Yet a time was to come when it was replaced by another anthem in another era which was to be the reign of the nationalists. I was to think that it was a callous act and the renunciation of a thing of beauty. It was to seem to me that the banal was actually preferred to the sublime. It was the lowering of standards. It was to seem to me that the criteria for choosing the new State anthem were not aestheticism, sublimity, majesty and the spirit of Sarawak. It did not evoke images of a land where fine rivers flow, of the mountains and great caves, of the great forests, of brave warriors, of the heroism and

sacrifices of those who had served her and who fought and died defending her freedom; a land of opportunities; a land of the bamboo band; the land of the *sape*; the land of the *ngajat*; the land of the *gendang*; the land of the *gawai*; a land with peoples of diverse cultures living harmoniously together; a land in the great Island of Borneo, a land in the Far East that had a colourful history and the hopes and aspirations of the people for peace, harmony, freedom, justice, prosperity, happiness and greatness.

For us the Catholic students, the presence of the Reverend Father Heery meant that we had a resident priest in the school itself to minister to our spiritual needs although being the Principal he could not fully attend a pastoral matters. Sunday services were at first held in the Principal's residence, the magnificent bungalow which was perched on top of a hillock, but later a block was constructed and was used as a chapel and masses were celebrated there.

As I entered into the last two years in my secondary education I came to a stage when I realised I had stepped from the realm of boyhood to a youth. I noticed physical changes in myself. I felt myself bouncing with health and youthfulness; I was conscious of my look which was revealing its fullness. Along with physical changes a feeling that I never had before stole into me leading me to act on it and thus doing something which resulted in a distraction from my studies and later gave me a complex which I was to suffer for many long years and was only to be cured by spiritual healing.

I sat for the Senior Cambridge Certificate examination.

## CHAPTER X

### A VIST TO WEST MALAYSIA

The award for winning the Malaysian Essay Competition was in the form of cash prize as well as a visit to places to interests in West Malaysia. "R. W" and I also received a present of money from our former teacher, Mr. Smith. He must be very happy and proud of us, his former students, to have won the competition. It was also a gesture that I never shall forget. Malaysia came about as a concept which eventually materialised into a reality. In an event as historic as the formation of Malaysia, a very unique exercise which brought together four countries to merge to form a nation, a host of things came into play as scenes in a vast theatre where one saw powers, peoples and events at work and shaping up to culminate into a moment in history which saw the birth and proclamation of a new nation and the beginning of an era for the four component countries. Into this theatre walked four young people to take their place as winners of an essay competition that was launched in conjunction with the historic event. An so we walked into the dawn of a new era in a rather privileged way.

Going to West Malaysia required travelling papers and Father Heery went to the length required in order to obtain them for me. It brought him and me to see the Administrative Officer — or was he an Acting District Officer — at the District Office at the Kubu. The Officer was one whom I was later to learn was a Mr. Ignatius Angking, an Iban. He was, as far as I could see, very courteous and obliging. The Father explained to him our purpose for coming to see him and the urgency of the matter. The travel documents were processed and were issued on time. The departure day came and "R. W" and I went in the school speedboat to Sibuluan and from there boarded a plane bound for Kuching. It was my first time to fly in a plane. It was a small aircraft. I was tense and nervous all the way to Kuching. The flight from Sibuluan to Kuching was only a short hop. Upon disembarkation at Kuching I had a curious ear discomfort but which later disappeared. It was the effect of high altitude which had so perplexed me when we were on a mountain top at Quop. There was I back in Kuching and was so near to my home yet there was no question of dropping by. We were received at the Kuching Airport by an official from the State Information Service. We were under his charge and I felt I should not do anything other than what had been arranged for us. We took our accommodation for the night in a hotel. It seemed to me that this officer, a Malay, took charge of us in the best possible way. He appeared to be

long-serving and in all probability he was holding a senior position in the service. This gentleman and the administrative officer at Kanowit both gave me a very good impression of the civil servant. I saw them as courteous and efficient.

Our flight to the western part of Malaysia was scheduled to take place on the evening of the next day. At the Kuching Airport the following day we met the other two winners whom I would name pseudonymously as "E.C" from St. Mary's School and "D.L" from St. Joseph's School. We were introduced to each other. It appeared that except for me the other winners were all Chinese. I had only a somewhat vague impression of "D.L" on this encounter. It seemed that he did not appear to be particularly disposed to talk to me at this first meeting. "E.C" on the other hand seemed inclined to talk to me. It seemed that she had a strange misinformation or notion about me picturing that I was a much bigger person. Nevertheless it would appear that the real person that she saw before her was one whom she felt quite inclined to talk to. I cannot remember now what exactly was on my mind then but it must seem to her that I was somewhat reserved and subdued. Perhaps there was still the primitive child in me who found himself almost all so suddenly thrown into an atmosphere where he would rather not be.

Then we boarded the aircraft and not long after that we flew into the night. To travel in a bigger craft and on a flight of an international status was to travel in a much better style. One felt that one was treated and served as one who had class and sophistication. Our destination was Kuala Lumpur, a name which from henceforth one would hear of very often, for it is the capital of a new nation. But on our way there we made a stopover at Singapore after which we took off again. On our arrival at Kuala Lumpur we were received at the airport by a government official after which we drove to the city and to a hotel. In this hotel we were to have our accommodation during our few days of stay in the capital.

On our very first night there two young men, one of whom was an Iban by the name of Peter Kedit, came to see us. Somehow they had knowledge of our coming and whereabouts. Perhaps Peter Kedit and probably also his friend went to see us as we were the winners of the one and only Malaysia Essay Competition and we all came from Sarawak. I believe they impressed me with their wits, articulation and cultured ways. Better still, perhaps was the fact that it was certainly good to know that he and his friend (assuming that he too is a Sarawakian) came to see us because we were fellow Sarawakians and we met in the capital of what was until recently a foreign country.

The next day was the start of our sight-seeing tour which took us to various places and to see things and sights. We were taken round to a

government department where we heard a short talk by the official there and later we were swamped with souvenirs in the form of literature pertaining to the facts, figures and documents contained in booklets and pamphlets on the newly-formed nation. Then we were taken to the printing press of a national newspaper where we were shown the works and the process involved in the making of the newspaper. We were taken to see places of interest such as the National Zoo, the Batu Caves and a place where there was warm spring water. The following day we were taken to see more places of interest, one of which was a visit to the tin mine.

From Kuala Lumpur we went to Malacca. This place was a very different domain from the capital. It was quieter and I thought Malacca Town seemed quite unusual in at least one respect and one which no outsider would fail to notice. I seem to remember that the walls of the shophouses and perhaps other buildings as well were the coloured or painted deep red and our guide explained the reason for it to us but which I cannot remember precisely. It was probably linked to Malacca's past and thereby giving the town its character. We were taken to see a few nearby Catholic churches which were very possibly the oldest in existence in the peninsula. Although a Catholic a few things that I saw in these churches startled and amazed me. What I saw was a sign of the deep spirituality and faith of the Catholics in Malacca and the Church there had a much longer history and therefore echoing more of the past. The Church in Sarawak by comparison seemed a youth or still a child. We were also led to see a certain historical structure, which I was to learn was a remnant of fortress called the *A Famosa*.

Unlike in Kuala Lumpur our accommodation during our stay in Malacca was in a private residence. This came as a bit of a disappointment to me. Of our stay in this home I had very little to say as virtually all the time I was thinking of getting out of it as soon as possible. There was that primitive child again who was not at ease in an urban society. However by this time "D.L" was communicating with me. "D.L" was a Sixth Former and he appeared to be a very well-bred and disciplined youth. He came from a well-to-do if not wealthy family, a son of a towkay of which there were many in Kuching. He was a devout Catholic or in any case he was a very much more ardent Catholic than I was. Infact there seemed to be a fire in him as could be seen later. While we were sitting in the living room we heard a strain of music from the radio and "D.L" identified it as a classical music. To me it sounded just "instrumental" and I had not an ear for it at this stage in my life. But "D.L" was trying to tell me to the effect that the classical music was an art that speaks of things to the listener, using sounds as its language when in another art from such as the Art the language is in the form of visual images, and in literature the language is in the from of words.



It seems that the last place we visited in our itinerary in Malacca was to a home of a prominent citizen, a doctor, if I remember correctly. I had a somewhat vague notion that our visit to this home was made somewhat arbitrarily. I really did not feel particularly disposed to visiting homes and if I could I would have preferred not to go there. But I had to go along with the group and I was hoping that it would be as brief as possible but which it was not. And so it was that we visited the home of this doctor and we were introduced to members of the family and followed by conversations at the living room. I talked very little. "E.C" told me after the visit to the effect that one who was so frightfully shy and who was tongue-tied was the one who cast the most impression or was the most remembered by someone there. To one who had felt quite miserable during the visit I took this as a consolation.

The last stop in our itinerary was Singapore City. In trying to recollect the memories of this visit I find that some were vivid while others were quite vague and hazy, and perhaps others had gone into oblivion. "D.L" and I were accommodated in a Young Men Hostel and as for "E.C" and "R.W" I knew not where they were accommodated. "D.L" and I shared a room which was a far cry from the room in a hotel in Kuala Lumpur which was opulent by comparison. Soon we noticed that there were pictures pasted on the walls and these were indecent. At once "D.L" ripped them off. I thought "D.L" was an exemplary Catholic in his display of disgust with those pictures, but not just in this particular instance but in others as well as in all the time that we were together. In the light of his faith which shone, I was so surprised and embarrassed to realise that mine was in fact lackadaisical. Perhaps this was the reason he was later to send me a book on the Catholic Faith. It was so good and thoughtful of him to do so. It would please him to know that I did read the book and I could have got much out of it if I had the faith that I was to have only so many years later in the future. The book later disintegrated until it finally went out of existence. It really was indicative of what a lukewarm Catholic I was. This was in contrast to my treatment of Catholic literature in the future when I accorded it with great respect as one would to a thing of great value. How I wish therefore that "D.L's" gift would still survive and how I would treasure it to remind me of how good and concerned he was about the spiritual welfare of another Catholic.

Our sight-seeing tour of the Lion City included a stroll in the Botanical Gardens and a walk at the Tiger Balm Park and Playground and probably to a few other places. It seems that to get to these places and going back to our hostel involved cruising through parts of the city and getting caught in traffic jams and this made me feel wretched. Thus there would be a pleasant car ride as well as an ordeal at a traffic jam.

I seem to remember that a part of our last day in Singapore City was given to us to shop and to see the city on our own. On the last night of our stay "D.L." and I went out to a part of the city and to a famous shopping centre called the Change Alley. I would not dream of going out by myself but "D.L." was there to show the way.

By this time I was thinking very much about going back. The next day I was picked up at the hostel. "D.L." was not going back home with us as he was going to Hong Kong and so the two girls and I bid him goodbye and parted company. I had promised to write to "D.L.". Or was it *vice versa*? The three of us were driven to the airport. It was a fine morning when we boarded the aircraft. In a short while it would be taking off on its flight to Kuching. I strode to the middle part of the plane and seeing two empty seats I stepped in and took the window seat. I cannot remember whether the seats were given or that we could just take any seat but after I seated myself I turned and saw "E.C." who stopped when she saw me. The seat next to mine was still empty and I seem to remember that she asked if she could sit there and I answered her in the affirmative. Shouldn't she be sitting next to "R.W.", I wondered? But I also wondered if she was in fact really intending to sit next to me. I cannot tell whether it was so or just my guess. It struck me that she was a very pretty girl with a mild and amiable countenance. Her face would break into a most unforgettable smile. We both hoped that we would continue Form Six and pursue our higher secondary education until completion. I was saying that how at the next academic year I would be proceeding to the Tanjong Lobang College in Miri, and if I obtained the required grades in the Senior Cambridge Examination I would remain to do my two years in the Sixth Form. And she would proceed to Form Six at St. Mary's School in Kuching. It seemed a perfectly normal thing for "E.C." and I to be having a conversation even if it was one held in a jet plane flying perhaps some 25,000 feet above the South China Sea. Yet for me it was nothing short of extraordinary for as time was to show it was in effect the very first and the last time that I ever had a long talk with her or any girl for that matter, for in all the days of my youth to be able to sit next to a girl and talk to her was something that never happened to me.

**TOWARDS THE END OF AN ERA: 1964-1970**

I have now come to that period in my life which I feel least inclined to recollect for it constitutes what was largely an unhappy time in my life. But it was also that period which underwent a time which, in retrospect, I see as one that made up the final years before an era came to an end in Sarawak. While on the one hand it was mostly a sad period in my own personal life but on the other it was a time when a light was still burning and it was the light of stewardship. I believe it was during this period that a consciousness was born in my mind — a consciousness that was formed by my ideals, principles, values, a sense of direction and destiny and crystallising by a political coup which was to change the meaning of government in my mind and therefore my attitude towards it. While once I saw and had always believed that the government was in the hands of good and wise men and was trustworthy and therefore could do no wrong, but from a certain point after Independence the picture was to change and it was to make me stop and ponder. As I was to see it Independence was not necessarily to mean that things would be getting better. But apart from the necessary burden which all must bear things were not necessarily to be directed towards the highest aim. Indeed it was to be like going to uncharted regions where there would be rivalries, contentions, crisis, coups, shocks and surprises as ideologies, political doctrines and personalities vie for victory and dominance in a new situation. It was to bring about the rise of a new master who to all intents and purposes would not necessarily bind himself to certain consensus which had previously contributed so much towards harmony among the various peoples. It seems to me now that the government was trustworthy and held in high esteem in the past because power must have been used well and wisely. I was born into a world where there was a good government and one that was sympathetic towards the people, especially the backward and less privileged communities and in this atmosphere I was imbued with a sense of deep respect for it. I saw it as the friend and protector of the weak. I developed a tendency of thinking that social, economic and other woes resulting from internal conflicts, instability, oppression and bad governments afflicting not a few other Third World countries would never happen in Sarawak. Sarawak had been so fortunate to have been in such good hands. I was yet to come to the reality of living in a time when, although Independence make the country co-equal in sovereignty with other nations, but it was to be felt and seen that it does not strive

to emulate those nations which enjoy great or greater freedom and enjoy the fruits of the commitments of their governments to the cause of bringing the highest aim to people and country. But when such a time came by attitude towards the government changed from one of deep respect to one of apprehension and doubts. At times I had great doubts about its good intentions.

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I was among those students from Form Five who were recommended by the Principal of the K.G.S.S to proceed to Form Six (Lower) at Tanjong Lobang College in Miri. Together with some schoolmates I sailed from Kuching in the "Auby" for Miri. It so happened that on this voyage the ship was carrying recruits who were returning to Sabah after having completed their military training. Added to their number were Ibans who were migrating to I know not where\*. Judging by their number it seemed that all the male people of an entire longhouse or more had uprooted themselves to settle elsewhere. Thus they took virtually all the space on the deck. I was appalled to realise that I could find no where that could serve as a resting place and where I could lie down. It was only out of sheer desperation during the voyage that I lay down at a spot which was partially exposed, wet and dirty. Never in my life have I experienced such discomfort, torture and degradation. I was so seasick during the voyage that the food I ate was all vomitted out. I never felt so miserable. I was more dead than alive when the "Auby" dropped anchor off the coast of Miri. We were brought ashore in a ferry. In order to get our luggage on to the boat they had to be thrown down and to be caught by one or two people in the boat after which we jumped on to it, choosing the moment when a rising wave heaved the boat to do so. From start to finish the voyage was nightmarish. The worst voyage in the "M.V. Rejang" never made me feel as wretched as I did in the "Auby". From Miri Town we went by bus to the College.

For the next few months I was to live my life as student in a place yet further still from my home. But whether or not I could remain there to complete my higher secondary education would depend on the result of the Senior Cambridge Certificate examination. When the results appeared I found that I obtained only a Division Three and this disqualified me to continue as a selected student. But I believe that in the period that I attended the Form Six (Lower) I was doing as well as I possibly could. The essays that I did and a short story that I wrote in the General Paper class were cited as

\* When I casually mention about the matter to an Iban friend at the time of writing I am told that these Ibans were going to the Fourth Division to settle there. From him I learn that many of them later returned to the Second Division where they came from.

among the best. If this was any indication that I was actually material for Form Six, despite my examination result, there would appear to be a strong possibility that I could do just as well as I had done in the short time as a student in Form Six (Lower) if only I was given a special dispensation to continue. It never occurred to me to plead with the Principal to contact Father Heery at Kanowit or Father Rawlins who was in the Education Department in Kuching that they might somehow still be able to recommend me to stay even with conditions. In retrospect I see that I had not taken my faith seriously enough and consequently lacking in my spiritual life and perhaps because of this there was no light in me to enable me to think in that way. Therefore no help came and no interference occurred against the fate that awaited me. I did not dare to ask in prayer and therefore I could not know whether or not I could be given a special dispensation. So it was that I tearfully had to leave school.

To digress. There was to come a time in the future when I found myself in a somewhat similar situation but how differently things were to work out. I was awarded a Colombo Plan scholarship to take up an in-service training course to study art and graphic design in England. I was suffering from bad health and I feared I suffered from a serious illness. When I was in England I went to see the doctor a few times. This happened after I was in the country for a few months. The doctor, a general practitioner, concluded that the best thing for me to do was to return to Sarawak. It was an extremely discouraging conclusion. I felt the doctor was making the wrong recommendation. If I could not be cured in England I could not be cured in Sarawak. I was determined to stay on in England and complete my study course. Since coming to England it seemed that for some reasons my Christian faith was rekindled. For the first time in my life I had bought a Bible which I read avidly. I learned to be like a child who asked and relied on God. I prayed that I would not be sent home so soon. The very next day - or was it the day after? - I received the news that the doctor had decided to refer my case to a specialist. In the end my trouble was diagnosed. I was given treatment and I believe my health was restored. I bloomed again with health. There was no question of returning home. But this was not all. It turned out to be that when my original one-year course was nearing an end, and upon the suggestion of the College authority I applied to the British Council for an extension of my study course for a further one year so as to enable me to study for a diploma. The British Council approved my application. The Training Branch of the Sarawak Civil Service also approved my extended stay. Thus was I to have the double joy of getting back my health and a further one-year stay in England and which I really looked forward to. It proved to be a stay that I thoroughly enjoyed. What favours were showered upon me.

But to return to where I left off. Together with the other school leavers, numbering but a handful, we returned to Kuching in a coastal vessel. The landas season being over we sailed in fair weather. I cannot remember now what time of the day we departed from Miri but on the evening of the same day the vessel called at Tatau, a tiny town situated along the Batang Tatau, and there it loaded its cargo of belian wood to be used as pepper poles and building materials. The coaster berthed there overnight. It so happened that K... was stationed at this place. He had already left the Medical Department and was now serving in the Agriculture Department. By this time he was already a married man. I spent the night at his quarters. The next day we went to the town before departing. Looking at the tiny town was like going back in time for the shophouses looked primitive, old and in rather poor shape. Then we boarded the vessel to resume our journey. For the whole day and into the night we sailed on. Sarawak was still threatened by external aggression and internal subversion. I believe it was some time in the early hours of the morning that the vessel was spotted by a plane of the Security Forces and the pilot radioed the patrol boat of the Royal Navy to check on it. It seems that in a short while after the plane flew over the vessel a patrol boat came in sight and soon moved abreast of the vessel. It shone its powerful searchlight on it and I heard a voice speaking in English over a loudspeaker challenging the skipper. A reply came stating that it was a cargo vessel. The pilot of the plane must have been suspicious of it. However after some scrutiny the Security Force was satisfied that the coaster that travelled in the ghostly hours of the morning was only a cargo vessel and the patrol boat swung away and left. We arrived at Kuching the next day.

In the Sixties a holder of a Senior Cambridge Certificate had very little difficulty in securing a job in the public sector. I took a job as an untrained school teacher in the Kuching Rural District Council (K.R.D.C) school. It was one in a Malay *kampung* across the river from Kuching town. So far as my work was concerned during those several months that I was engaged as an untrained school teacher there I believe I did as well as I could. I was happy to note that the pupils who were really attentive did catch up with the lessons and the bright ones followed me all the way. There was very little that I could do with the very slow pupils. I made the class sing a song that I partly invented being one that I contrived from a hit song that I heard over the radio. The pupils never knew and never asked what those strange words meant and if any of them did I could not know them myself.

Not being able to go higher in my education had closed one door. Whatever path in my life that was charted for me had I succeeded in going higher was lost forever. The foibles of my days at the K.G.S.S had brought about a failure in this sense. Although I was sad at having to leave school I did

not realise, as I do now, what a great opportunity I had lost. When I started my life as a wage earner it was not so much the loss of such opportunity as my bad health that made me sad and bitter. It must have started earlier but I only began to be aware of it by this time. It vexed me but I was hoping that it would be temporary but as days turned into weeks and weeks into months it persisted. I believe it was the continuing bad health that was the principal cause of the change in me. Gone was the animated youth and the happy face and in its place was a quiet young man with a pensive look. It was possible that my bad health was perpetuated by my sadness and bitterness thus one affecting the other in a vicious circle. It was possible that it was also brought about by circumstances but somehow I never blamed myself for it. I never suspected that I was myself partly responsible for it. Therefore I began to perceive that life was unfair to me because my bad health had changed me and in my mind had thus caged me. I visualised myself as having mutated. At about this time I heard a song by a famous singing group called the Beatles and it was called "Yesterday" and for me a line in the song applied only too aptly for me for I did feel that "I was not half the man I used to be". Perhaps because of this state of mind and body I had a vague notion, which later proved to be illusory, that a change of job and thus atmosphere might bring about an improvement in or a restoration of my health. I could serve as a school teacher for the next few years but I perceived I would be the same unhappy person. Thus I resigned from my job as an untrained school teacher.

At about this time English was becoming something that I cherished even more. I took pride in having a command of it. If I had made the wrong step in life or that better things were denied me because of my own follies, at least my education had given me a command of the language. It was my treasure. Thus I had very little ear for people who advised me to learn Malay, or *Bahasa Kebangsaan* as it was called at that time, as its time had come. When I was still teaching a colleague did speak to me on the matter to this effect. He was of course advising me to be prudent and thus to be prepared for the future. But I found it so hard to disassociate myself, let alone to belittle, or treat lightly a factor that was so much a part of my upbringing in order to embrace another. I argued in my mind that since the use of English as a medium of instruction in the school and as an official language had made things worked so well, if not excellently, in Sarawak then why should there be any need to change it. It was a feature of Sarawak that I have grown up with and that strongly appealed to me. The call to learn Malay, so that we become a nation with its own language, simply made very little or no impression on me. In this respect the stand I took was quite in disregard to a nationalistic thinking of a certain quarter which would brand one such as me as a little oriental Britisher. Today I am only a tiny fish in the ocean of national policies

and my life is affected, whether I like it or not and in one way or another, even against my own will and inspite of my stand, inspite of my values, ideals and norms, inspite of the things that I honour and inspite of my aspirations for I exist in the same ocean. But for me this does not change the meaning of English in my life. For English is very much tied to my ideals and quest in life insofar as it is a vehicle that takes me on a journey in life and makes me learn to cherish, value and honour what is noble and beautiful in the human spirit.

After having left my job as an untrained school teacher I applied for the post of a clerk in the Sarawak Civil Service. In due course I was interviewed at the Public Service Commission Office and later I was informed that I was accepted for the post. I entered the Civil Service on 5th November 1964 and was posted to serve in the Divisional Development Office in Kuching. It seems that though I applied for the job and secured it I could not say that I was really very enthusiastic to begin my life as a civil servant or that I felt most fortunate to get a government job. Neither did I stop to think if I took the right job or that there could be another which offered better prospect. But I certainly must be doing something that befitted an educated person. I did not see myself as making a start in life as a wage earner and to do what every prudent employee should do which is to be prepared for any eventuality in the future and whatever they might be that would depend on financial means. In short I should therefore start to build a foundation principally in the form of a saving. But my thinking did not work in this line. My attitude towards money was most dismaying and how I spent my money could not be indicative of a prudent person with an eye to the future. Indeed I was very often to be in an impecunious state and the resultant inconveniences and difficulties that I had to undergo. But although I suffered from the natural result of being imprudent I found it so difficult to amend my ways with regard to my spending habits. Somehow I was never mindful about the economics of living and the importance of money in one's life. Thus I derived no financial benefits from my employment. However my performance in my job was unaffected by all this. In spite of my personal problems I discharged my duties in the spirit of discipline, obedience and perseverance. I believe that my formation in the government secondary school combined with the deep respect for authority and certain characteristics that are inherent in my nature had given me an excellent preparation to serve in the Civil Service. Being once a child of the public school seemed to give me an added advantage when becoming a public servant having to serve in an esteemed institution which functioned as a government machinery and as such putting one at the forefront in serving the public. Discipline, obedience and honesty are among the prerequisites that a civil servant must have and which were virtues which were inculcated into the child of the public school.



But the young man who performed his duties so conscientiously was still not a happy person. My bad health still cleaved to me and I resented it and was feeling increasingly bitter. I was a young man and I should be bouncing with health and vitality and enjoying life. The feeling of being caged by my bad health was gaining dominance. I said I was suffering but my medical certificate stated that I was medically fit to serve in the Civil Service. But there were things that I really should have known and mindful about such as diet, exercise, good habits and more importantly having a spiritual life and as the result and in all probability my health would be as it should. It would seem that my unhappiness and suffering had diminished my faith. I had stopped going to the church. I seldom prayed or perhaps ceased to altogether. I lived in a kind of limbo watching at life as from a dungeon. I was separated from life by a barrier but one which, in retrospect, was more in the mind than real. But if it was partly real the barrier was self-created and therefore I was suffering its consequence. I saw myself as one who was denied my right to savour life as I thought I should. Such was how I looked at life and because of such a mistaken view I grew more bitter and unhappy. I did not see that life is a gift and is lived in an imperfect world that can bring both misfortune and happiness, sorrow and joy. But my own bitterness and despair kept me in that prison and there my soul languished because although I sought for help I was cut off from the only place where such help came from. Given the state of mind that I was in therefore what I needed was a deep interior healing. I was spiritually and psychologically sick yet in my blindness I refused to go to a place where I could find the cure. I could not humble myself and so I could not free myself from a state of mind which made me the living dead. In the light of the many blessings that I received as the result of living my faith now little did I know therefore that I had allowed moroseness and bitterness to rule my life and I had done so because looking from the spiritual dimension I was living outside the Church, never realising that it was there that I could receive the help and the light which would have made me see the cause of my problems. The sulky child was still in me. I brooded and became bitter. It was a sign of what little faith I had. I could not think more positively. Little did I know, as I do now, that one has to go down humbly on one's knees and ask for help and persist in doing so.

Whatever blessings that would have come to me in my days of youth if I had been devout in the practice of my faith was in all probability missed. But yet I never ceased to believe in God but I had yet to understand that he loves me. I had not yet really understood what this means as I did later in my life. He was there to help me but I had such an unworthy idea of Him. In my life it seems that before one can get well or better physically one must have a deep interior peace in his innermost self and such state that comes to one as the

result of one's complete trust and confidence in God. Then would one have some understanding of the cause of one's illness or condition. I was probably not as ill as I believed myself to be or that my physical self changed beyond recognition although as before I was suffering from the natural result of ignorance and bad habits. But I had the notion that I had been struck by some incurable disease and only a miracle could make me well again.

The Civil Service was an institution that was largely enshrouded in mystery to me. I had no inkling about its structures, functions and operations. All that I was equipped with when I entered it was my Senior Cambridge qualification. When I had first reported for duty I was presented to the man who was to be my superior officer, the Divisional Development Officer. He appeared to be a very stern person. I could not tell whether or not I gave him a good first impression but I did feel a little discouraged for I thought for a moment that he did seem to appear to be a little cold and aloof but in the months that followed I saw his warm and gentler side. Actually my first posting in the Civil Service had made me a subordinate to a superior who was eventually to rise to the pinnacle of civil administration as the State Secretary and became one name in the annals of the Civil Service of independent Sarawak which conjured an image of a stern disciplinarian. The handing-over of duties was done by an officer and he did so most satisfactorily that I was able to carry out my duties fairly well when I was left on my own. As I got on with the work I began to know those things which make the wheel of civil administration turn. They are in the forms of voteheads, memorandum, minute sheet, file, payment voucher, service order, local purchase order, the Treasury, audit queries *et cetera*, apart from the most important factor which is the human element. I began to have some knowledge of the civil administration as it functions on the state, divisional and district level. In short my position as a clerk in a government department began to make me see and understand something of the government machinery and how it functions of which I was so ignorant of before. The clouds of mystery surrounding the Civil Service and to an extent the government was beginning to clear a little. I saw also the place of the clerk in the Civil Service or for that matter anywhere in an institution or organisation.

When I entered the Civil Service Sarawak was going through a time as an independent state within a federation for more than a year. The Ningkan\* Administration still saw the expatriate officers serving the State Government and this indicated that there was graciousness and good sense in the government in a period of transition. As I was seated in the Resident and District Office (R & D.O) I saw Mr. H.A.R. Harlow and at another time Mr. A.R.F.

\* The First Chief Minister of Sarawak.

Griffen, the former passing through the R & D.O and the latter passing by. I recognised the former because he was the District Officer at Kanowit in my days at the K.G.S.S and the latter because I was later to see his photograph and an article on him in the "Sarawak Gazette". I had earlier on in my reminiscences described the thoughts they evoked in me. It was only a matter of time when they would be leaving Sarawak and in my life they formed an image of British departure from Sarawak.

I believe that my bad health also worsened the complex that I was suffering from causing an abnormality in my behaviour as a social creature for I exhibited traits of reclusiveness and introversion. The latter two was not a choice but an abnormal consequence of one whose ignorance and bitterness developed the absurdity of blaming nature for the apparent loss of his natural endowments. For accommodation I had rented a room in a private house and shared its facilities with the other tenants. It was an environment that was not agreeable to me but which I must endure. To be thus compelled to take up such an accommodation was a social reality in the town that I did not suspect would befall me. But such indeed was the fate that awaited one who could not go higher in the social ladder which he otherwise could had he completed his education to the tertiary stage and thus a complete education and the resultant privileges. It came as a big disappointment and gave me further occasion for despondency. My life since being a wage-earner was a lonely one. By this time I was financing the schooling of my brother Pengos and he was living with me but inspite of the fraternity the feeling of loneliness still pervaded my being. Yet I did not seek for companionship. One who wanted to hide himself from the world looked not for companionship. Perhaps there would come a time and opportunity for that and again there would not be any such time or opportunity for me. But deep in my heart I wished to savour life to the full. Thus it would seem that I entered into a paradox. It was people that I needed to talk to but at the same time my behaviour was as one who was running away from people.

I had developed an instinct with regard to good reading. One evening after works I went into a bookstore and browsed through the paperbacks. Then something made me picked one that was entitled "Tales of Mystery and Imagination" by Edgar Allan Poe. In my life Edgar Allan Poe is one name in the literary world who first gave me such an appetite for reading in my days after I had left school. Just as I was startled by the story of Romeo and Juliet in the comic book in my boyhood days at Batu Lintang so I was utterly astounded in my adulthood by the "Tales of Mystery and Imagination". I was completely stupefied and amazed by the stories in the volume. Feeling as one who had left the academic world of the school I felt that Poe was a friend who sought me out, so to speak, in my loneliness and dejection when I was cast out

into the world. But one door had closed and another opened. Up to this day I treat this volume as a very special possession. It is a kind of landmark in my life. It marked the beginning of my reading habit and what I gained as the result. The academic world of the school was lost to me but there was still a great deal to learn and gain from reading books. Edgar Allan Poe certainly made me want to read more books. So I ventured from Poe to Daphne du Maurier, Guy de Maupassant, G.K. Chesterton, P.G. Wodehouse, Somerset Maugham and others. And so over the years I watched as my collection of paperbacks grew and I took much delight in this. I might speak of my accumulation of paperbacks as a wealth of knowledge and experiences that I culled through reading. I took pains at looking up at the meanings of new words, or those whose meanings I had forgotten and doing so was not without its reward. Being out of school I had one academic subject which I could still preoccupy myself with diligence and enthusiasm and that was to maintain my English and to acquire more proficiency in the language, and in my adult life I would say that these are mainly achieved as the result of a good deal of reading.

In this period of my life when I was generally so sad and bitter I suffered the grief of the untimely death of my mother. She was only in her forties. For a few years already I had noticed signs of her ill health. In her illness her appearance had undergone a slow transformation. Her light-coloured skin had become pallid and as her condition deteriorated there would seem to be hardly any trace of colour on her lips. I beheld the change with silent grief and her visits to the government clinic did not seem to do her much good. As I watched her I knew she was very sick but I refused to think that she was dying. She must not leave us. She still had children who needed a mother. I still had a kid brother and his two younger sisters one of whom was only a toddler. But this was only wishful thinking. She was finally admitted to the General Hospital in Kuching and her condition steadily worsened. She had been a pagan but she had often talked about how good the Reverend Father Welling was. The Father was blazing like a fire through our part of the Bidayuh land and he was held in great affection and many remembered him long after he had left the country. In her life and in his remarkable priest she saw the light of Christianity and she was attracted to it. When she prepared herself for Baptism she was already sick but the religious instruction she had received was sufficient for her understanding of the Catholic Faith, and thus she was baptised at our home in Mundai by the Reverend Father Harry van Erp. But she was not to live long to practise her faith. Then one day in the hospital we looked as life was slipping away from her until she expired. Her mouth had been moving as if she was trying to speak but became still and a darkish red fluid slipped out and dripped from the corner of her mouth. I

heard my father say, "Your mother is dead". She died in pregnancy and a brother or a sister whom we would never see died with her.

I would sometimes pass by the Roman Catholic Mission precinct along Rock Road in Kuching in a bus and I would espy a European priest walking on the path there. A thought occurred to me. With Independence there was a change of hands in the government as power was transferred from the British Government to the Government of an Independent Sarawak and the expatriate officers were leaving after seventeen years of the Government of the British Crown. But the Church was existing in the spiritual order and was unaffected by the change of hands in the civil order. The European missionary priests remained in Sarawak when their fellow Europeans in the government had left or were to leave in due course. It would seem that as many as there were priests who could come to Sarawak could do so freely as they had done so in the past decades. But what was happening to me or where was I at the time when the West was giving and making the Church in Sarawak so flowing with spiritual riches? I had so little faith and had no share in the life of the Church and I had taken these riches for granted.

A time was to come when it seemed that a new chapter in the history and life of the Roman Catholic Church in Sarawak had ended and a new one had begun. The past government namely the Brooke Government, the British Government and the Ningkan and Tawi Sli\* Administrations had valued and recognised the roles of the Christian missions in the field of education and human development. But since the nationalists took over power, sovereignty and nationhood were in practice reinterpreted, resulting, among other things, in missionary expulsions and the Mission almost bereft of its other arm as educator.

It would be curious of someone of the generation if I omit, in my reminiscences, to mention the event that occurred on the 9th of August 1965, for on that day Singapore separated from Malaysia after being a partner in the Federation for more than a year. I knew nothing about politics then but an impression was beginning to form in my mind and in the years to come I was to pick more impressions and slowly these began to take shape. Certain ideals, values and norms began to matter to me. More than two decades into the future in November 1986 His Holiness Pope John Paul II visited Singapore. If Singapore is still in Malaysia would the Holy Father be allowed entry? The Pope had yet to visit Malaysia but a Singapore out of Malaysia had apparently made it possible for His Holiness to come so close to Malaysia.

\* Sarawak's second Chief Minister.

I served in the Divisional Development Office for barely a year when I was transferred to the Education Department. I reported to the Education Department Headquarters in Kuching to receive a briefing on my duties before proceeding to the Divisional Office in Limbang in the Fifth Division. I was flung to a faraway part of Sarawak. I wondered why was I being transferred after being barely a year in one station.

In order to get to Limbang I had first to fly to Brunei and from there I boarded a motor-launch bound for Limbang. I arrived at Limbang in the evening. From a distance Limbang appeared as a cluster of shophouses, other buildings and the appurtenances of the town lying between the Limbang River and a range of hill, looking dark green under the evening sky, which formed the town's backdrop. It turned out to be a small town consisting perhaps upwards of eighty shophouses. The streets were paved but the longest stretch of sealed road that it could boast of proceeded from the town for a distance of about only a mile. There were few vehicles about. It was a peaceful town.

I found that my accommodation had either not yet been arranged or not yet been finalised and thus I took accommodation with other bachelor civil servants in a quarters. In due course my proper accommodation was finalised and I occupied a living quarters together with another bachelor civil servant. While in Kuching I could only rent a room in a private house as my junior and unmarried status did not warrant me to be accorded with a government accommodation. My possessions were probably far below as expected of a civil servant. Among them were my books but I had only few clothes. I felt poor and was made poorer still when half of my take-home pay had to be deducted monthly to finance the education and the cost of the upkeep of Pengos, who went to a private secondary school in Kuching. He had to remain in Kuching because there was no private secondary school in Limbang. I had to make ends meet on a budget of about ninety dollars a month.

The Education Office in Limbang was housed together with other government departments at Fort Limbang, built in 1897. The Education Office occupied a section of the ground floor and I must say the atmosphere was drab. The staff of the Education Office in Limbang consisted of the head of the divisional office, the Divisional Education Officer, a Group Supervisor and a clerk who must also function as a typist and office boy. When I was serving there two Peace Corps volunteers, a young lady and a young man, were attached to the Department, the former serving in the Limbang District and the latter in the Lawas District as Primary English Medium Scheme (P.E.M.S) supervisors. The outgoing clerk handed over duties. By now I was already familiar with the day to day office practice and duties of a clerk. He later sold his mattress to me since I did not have one. I believe he left

Limbang a few days later. It seemed that when I came to serve in Limbang there was already a plan to move the office to its new home. The new building was only a short distance away from Fort Limbang and it stood just by the road side. The road ran alongside the river bank for a distance of probably several hundred yards. And so it was that in due course we the staff of the Limbang office moved to this building. The transport of the office equipment, furniture *et cetera* was done by the prisoners from the Prison Department. Later in the year there was a minor expansion to the administrative machinery with the appointment of an office boy.

The Civil Service had taken me to Limbang. As was at the Divisional Development Office in Kuching my working life was one in which I discharged my duties as a clerk obediently and conscientiously. I consider that my attitude as a civil servant was correct. One could not be other than to be well-disciplined and efficient. But here in Limbang also I continued my lonely and still largely introverted existence, but perhaps in a way it was just as well for being left with a take-home pay of just ninety dollars a month my main concern was survival. However this very slim budget and the fact that I continued to an unmindful about the economics of living despite so low an income often brought me to a state of near-starvation. But this only added to my unhappiness. My bad health and complex continued to make me a sad and bitter person.

I continued to read a great deal and the books that I read included low-priced educational books bought from a book store in the town. Very often my reasoning and thought process was done in English. It seemed a most natural thing to do as an English educated person. Limbang was one point in my life when I had such an enthusiasm for learning beyond the school. My mind was like the keen mind of a student. This resulted in self-improvement in terms of vocabulary and in written form. I had started to keep a diary when I was in Kuching but I was even more keen in doing so when I was in Limbang. As I did so it quite surprised myself to realise that the diary somehow opened a new world to me which is that of observation, reflection and meditation. I wrote about the grasses that were still wet with the dew, which glistened, in the morning and which were caressed by the breeze. Somehow the sight made me pause and reflect. It seemed so insignificant because it happened everywhere and everyday yet it was no less a phenomenon than the very universe itself. It called to mind that this occurred because it was caused. I wrote about the wisps of smoke emitting from a house which stood against a backdrop of a forested hill which was darkening and looking gloomy and mysterious as the sun was setting, and the sight evoked thoughts of the littleness and frailty of man's life in this awesome universe. Then I wrote about another sight. The shafts of sunlight breaking

through some foliage on a bright sunny morning was nothing new but for me it was a phenomenon that speaks of the unseen power behind creation. It is the power that brings into existence the world which never ceases to astound. Everyday there are many astounding sights to behold as there are such possibilities if only one is aware. I wrote about the eclipse of the sun that occurred when I was at Limbang and it was the very first time in my life that I beheld one. The eclipse of the sun is as normal and natural as the day and night but that it is precisely so because it speaks of the Mind of the Designer. He designs everything in existence so that there is the universe, the galaxies, the stars and all possible things. While it is a natural phenomenon the eclipse tells of the supernatural power behind the universe. It is the Power that could change day into night.

Although I went to the Mass often — something that I rarely did since beginning my life as a wage-earner — it could hardly be said that I had a spiritual life. Mass was said at St. Edmund's School, situated along Kabong Road and outside of the town, for there was no church. But I went to the Mass not with the frame of mind of one who had faith. For me one Mass was like the other and I was no different being no better and no happier. The frustration of continued bad health and suffering remained. I simply could not or did not respond to the spiritual riches that were so abound, and were meant to fill one's spiritual needs but I was so wrapped up inside myself that they could not pierce the armour of my self-centredness and bitterness. My presence at the Mass brought about no interior conversion and no spiritual growth. I was only present during the Mass but when it was over nothing changed. I was so burdened with my unhappiness and it just seemed that what I did ask for in prayer was not given. But in retrospect little did I know that God had loved me in all my suffering, anguish, perplexity and frustrations and knew as only He could a future that was still hidden from me. I might say that in that future I was actually to be given something a great deal more than what I asked for then. But it was required of me to trust Him in everything and in every circumstance. He answered my prayer not by giving me what I cried out for but by asking me to trust in Him. What I had asked for was so very little or actually a source of more future unhappiness but God wanted to make me truly happy with the happiness and the joy which the world cannot give but which only He can. He wanted to give all that I really needed and so much more in order to make me find motivation and fulfilment and therefore why must I settle for less when He wanted to give me so much if only I trusted Him. When I came to Limbang I had no idea how I would fare with life or how long I would remain there. But it was to turn out that I was to be in Limbang for only more than a year and I wonder now if this did not come about as the answer to my prayer although I did not see it at the time,



for in my prayer I had asked for other things and favours which seemed to matter so much.

My coming to St. Edmund's School for the Mass would sometimes make me see a European and whom I believe to be one of the parish priests there. There was something child-like about him in his manifest humility. I thought that at times he looked somewhat unkempt but in my mind I took this to be because he had chosen to become guileless. In my mind he gave an image of a soul who had so surrendered himself to God so that he looked so humble, gentle and quite unmindful about his appearance. But his exterior was only a disguise of his interior beauty and strength. This might not be the case but on the other hand why should it not be so.

I was in Limbang when Sarawak had its post-Independent political crisis. There had appeared to be a preamble to this crisis when I was in Kuching but apparently it had become serious by the time I was serving in Limbang after several months. It was the year 1966. It appeared that there was an anti-Ningkan faction in the ruling Sarawak Alliance with the result that Ningkan had lost the support of the majority of the Alliance members in the Council Negri and this led to his eventual removal from office. Yet earlier on there was such a splendored show of unity among the Dayak Iban faction in the Alliance as demonstrated in a photograph in the "Sarawak Tribune", showing Dato Ningkan, Temenggong Jugah and Pengarah Banyang holding hands to symbolise Dayak Iban solidarity. But evidently the unity and solidarity was only ephemeral. Dato Ningkan was dismissed from office and the picture of him and his deputy, Dato James Wong, leaving the Secretariat Building (now the State Treasury Headquarters) somehow imprinted itself in my mind. Dato Ningkan looked sombre but dignified in the picture and there seemed even to be a look of determination and not shame in his visage. He exhausted all legal avenues to attempt to get himself reinstated but political manoeuvres made by his political opponents proved the stronger force and in the final analysis he failed to. Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan, Sarawak's first Chief Minister, fell in the first post-Independent political coup. His fall really signalled what was to lead to the beginning of an era when the nationalists eventually took the rein of power but whether for better, for worse or both and whether those responsible for it are praiseworthy or blameworthy only time can tell.

Dato Ningkan pulled out with his own faction from the Sarawak Alliance and as the Sarawak National Party (SNAP), the faction that he led, took its position side by side with the Sarawak United Peoples' Party (SUPP) in the Opposition. Penghulu Tawi Sli was chosen to replace Dato Ningkan and to become the Second Chief Minister. But it would seem the people had yet to speak their mind. So far it was a crisis staged by politicians. Did the new

Administration hold the support of the majority of the people? This could only be determined by a general election.

I was still in my last year at the K.G.S.S when Sarawak was given her Independence and became a state in the Federation of Malaysia. Mr. Stephen Kalong Ningkan (later Dato Stephen Kalong Ningkan), a Dayak, was made the first Chief Minister of Sarawak. He was still in office after I left school. To my mind Ningkan projected a fitting image of a chief minister in a troubled time being one in which there was a guerilla war and the threat to the internal security from the subversive elements. His characteristically grave and stern visage seemed to me to give him the look of a leader who was dauntless and strong in a situation when the State was facing external aggression and internal subversion and the head of the State Government must need, in the public mind, to stand tall and strong. This was my thought at the time even if this might not be what the man was in reality. That he was to be removed from office never occurred to me and showed how little I understood the implications of being an independent country and of a factor called politics. I had no idea yet how people came to power or fell from it. But I believe that my political consciousness began from the fall of Dato Ningkan. Somehow I began to take sides and I was on his side. He had epitomised, in my mind, the proud and indomitable spirit of Sarawak and I had admired him. I see his fall now as a sign that such dauntless spirit was abhorrent to the Federal Government which saw that it was not likely to bring Sarawak into closer conformance with the Federal will. In retrospect one can form an opinion that the Federal Government represented a force that saw Dato Ningkan as an embodiment of British accretion and which was not compatible with its independent status and which it therefore sought to remove. One might picture that as a result a coup was mounted against Ningkan which effectively removed him from office. The man who replaced him was thus born of a political coup and whatever role the Centre played in was reflected in its strong disapproval of Ningkan.

The separation of Singapore from Malaysia and the dismissal of Dato Ningkan as Chief Minister made me cynical and resentful towards the government. A political belief was forming in me. I would make my comments and opinions on political matters with a like-minded civil servant. My working life as a civil servant was only part of my life as an individual. I criticised as an individual and not as a civil servant who must serve the government of the day. I did feel however that in spite of intrigues in high places I would say that at the time the government still ran true to the precept, whether by design or accident, that "A government governs best when it governs least". As if in keeping with its image of a humble stewardship the State Government displayed little pomposity and extravagance such

as one sometimes saw during later administrations. For me I was living in an era for which my English education prepared me well for official Sarawak was an English-speaking community and to use English was only natural. The status of English as an official language still remained. I did not feel estranged as I was to feel in the future. Thus it was that though on the one hand I was cynical and resentful of the government in my attitude and conversations, I did not become one to the extent of preceiving it as a treat to my aspirations and the values, norms and ideals that I cherish.

Did I really intend to take the clerical line as my career? I believe I did not. Possibly I was ambitious, restless and having an urge to express my potentials more fully. I felt that at my age and with my qualification at the time I still had the option to go to other fields. So the idea of looking for another post dawned in my mind. Daily I perused the vacancies column in the "Sarawak Tribune" hoping to see a suitable post that I could apply for. I did not have any particular post in mind but one vacancy showed up and I felt that it was the one that was more like what I was hoping for. The post was that of an Assistant Artist in the Borneo Literature Bureau in Kuching. I applied for the post and submitted my application through the Division Education Officer. In a fairly short time I received a letter from the Public Service Commission in Kuching inviting me to attend an interview and the department had also arranged and paid for my air passage to Kuching and my return flight to Brunei. It also arranged for my accommodation in Kuching and which was to be at the Government Rest House. Then I proceeded to Brunei in a government outboard and from there took a flight to Kuching. I was glad enough to see Kuching again but I was still very much the unhappy and bitter man who left it more than a year ago.

The following day I presented myself at the Public Service Commission at the appointed time. The P.S.C office was housed at a building called the Aurora Chambers. I found that there were seven candidates for the post including myself. The somewhat dour-looking official, a Chinese, who attended to us impressed upon us the cold fact that we might as well get ourselves acquainted with the fact that only one of us would get the job. But I had an intuition from the very fact that I was called for the interview. Things had worked in my life largely because of what I am and it was going to work again. I had the same intuition when I entered and won the essay competition and somehow I was confident of securing the post in the same way that I had won that competition. Before we were to appear before the interview board it was required of us to undergo a test in order to assess our artistic ability and this was done that morning at the Maderasah Melayu Building. Each of us was given two passages from some story books, one of which was actually an extract from the Borneo Literature Bureau's own publication and we were to

illustrate these passages within a set time. The media used were pen, brush and ink. The illustrations involved drawing human and animal figures. I did my drawings within the allocated time at the end of which all submitted their works. The interview was held in the afternoon of the same day. I wish that I can remember more vividly what were said during the interview, but what I felt to be of significance was when I was tested on my spoken Iban. It was one of the languages that I stated in my application form that I could speak fluently. This fact was fully verified and I have every reason to believe that my interviewers were fully satisfied on this. It would seem that having been sent to Kanowit had equipped me in this respect for I could not have spoken Iban as well as I could if I had not been there. If I remember rightly there was no Iban candidate among the seven finalists. The Borneo Literature Bureau published Iban books among its publications and it certainly seemed that a candidate who could speak and read Iban gave him an edge over the others. I emerged from the interview room actually feeling very pleased. I felt that I had conducted myself well before half a dozen or more gentlemen in the interview room.

I returned to Limbang. In due course I received a letter from the Public Service Commission, through the Divisional Education Officer, that I had been selected for the post of Assistant Artist and that I was to report for duty at the Borneo Literature Bureau on 1st November. The Education Department Headquarters in Kuching had officially granted my transfer on promotion to another post in another government department. Then I left Limbang, a place where I had my first and last outstation posting as a civil servant.

The period of about four years which began when I entered the service of the Borneo Literature Bureau on 1st November 1966 till my departure for England in September 1970 to take up a training course was one which constituted my working life in a new field; a continuation of my unhappy personal life; a spiritual life that was almost dead; an unexpected respite from my suffering and what followed; a relapse of my suffering and when I was beginning to be aware of a voice in the political arena which, to one to whom the ideals of universality had such a strong appeal, sounded like a discordant note.

In the Borneo Literature Bureau I found that I was serving in a highly-disciplined and much-esteemed organization. In a period of over a year that I was serving there the department was headed by an expatriate officer, a Mr. Douglas Pearce, who was the Bureau's first Director, and who must be a major contributing factor in making it into an efficient and much-esteemed organization. As far as my own performance was concerned I made a steady progress from being a new hand in the job to one who could work almost independently, and perhaps my superiors saw that I had poten-

tial and was well-motivated and when I was sent two years later to attend a course in Children's Book Illustration in Kuala Lumpur they were not disappointed for the knowledge acquired and the exposure contributed to further improvement in my performance. Later the post of Director was Borneonised and which eventually resulted in the promotion of a Mr. Edward Enggu, an Iban, as Director. About two years after the course in Kuala Lumpur I was awarded a Colombo Plan Scholarship to take up a training course in Art and Graphic Design at Ravensbourne College in England. By contrast, in my life as a civil servant during the period after the Borneo Literature Bureau was abolished and when its staff including myself, was absorbed into the service of a Federal agency called the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Malaysia (Malaysian Language and Literary Agency) no offer to go higher still in terms of qualification in the field was ever given to me. In my life this is indicative of the new era that I live in. It occurs to me that the very abolition of the Borneo Literature Bureau was a sign that an era had ended.

Looking back at myself during those four years in my life as a member of the staff of the Bureau I see that I was a very quiet young man and one with a deep respect for his superiors. I was one who was hard-working, not prone to making friends or overly anxious to seeking acquaintanceship of my colleagues, having a sensitive nature, one who often appeared to keep to himself, looking usually preoccupied with his own thoughts and was conscientious. But to the very few that I did fall into conversations with, I was one who was quite capable of being witty and having a flair for words. To those whom I never or very rarely spoke to I must have appeared to them as a little strange.

For accommodation I once again had to rent a room in a private house and this depressed me. My attitude to money and my almost complete disregard in the matter of the economics of living resulted, as before, in my often impecunious state even before the next pay day. There was thus very little change in me in this respect. It was also the reason why I could not continue to finance Pengos' education and he had to leave school. My own personal life could be said to be even more disconsolate than it was before. To live in a big town like Kuching meant seeing a good deal of illusions and the result was more misery. They came in the form of faces, pictures and movies but the more I saw or caught sight of them the more unhappy I become. While at Limbang I had the outward appearance of living my Catholic faith; at Kuching even such outward expression was very nearly gone. If my half a decade or so of suffering was taken as a time of trial it would seem that it was a period that I had gone through with a mixture of patience, hope, bitterness and frustrations. I had no idea and spirit anymore as to what to do to restore my health. The notion that only a miracle could cure me was my hope and I never gave up that hope.

I had not neglected my health altogether because I had made frequent visits to the government clinic. But inspite of these visits and prescriptions given and taken my health had become none the better and every visit ended in disappointment. I had imagined that if only I had been admitted to the hospital I would be cured of my illness. I had no more fear of the hospital. I had dearly hoped to be admitted but this did not happen and I had wondered just how sick must one get in order to be admitted. There had been times when I had felt so out of sorts and looked not at all well, and I had been certain when I visited the clinic that my condition would merit hospitalisation but I had never been recommended for admission, but instead had been given vitamins and stomach tablets. Although I had perceived myself to be a physical wreck and had felt like one the dresser or the hospital assistant at the clinic decided, after diagnosing, that all I needed were just vitamins and stomach tablets to put me right again. Perhaps I had only imagined that there was something wrong with my health or I had been too impatient, hoping for a quick cure. But while this could have been the case at the same time if a person was always feeling out of sorts there must be something the matter with his health. The tablets which I had obediently swallowed had made me none the better making me later to lose faith in them. I then had grown quite weary of visiting the clinic, including private ones. That there was nothing that could be done about my health had seemed not altogether improbable.

The year 1968 ushered in and went its course and somehow during this period I decided to end my sojourn in Kuching, a place where I had lived such an unhappy life, and to move to live at my village at Mundai. I cannot recall what made me decide to do so but it was probably linked to my unhappiness but I did so not in the hope to find happiness there. Having made up my mind I discovered that I could commute by bus and the first Kuching-bound bus could arrive before office hours commenced at 8.30 in the morning. And so it was that I packed up my belongings which, by this time, included more books and went to live in the country. What was to happen as a result was totally unexpected. It was like one who had been so weary and dispirited, burdened and frustrated by bad health an who feel with sheer exhaustion under their crushing weight and went to a deep sleep, so to speak. He woke up to another day expecting to live his life of suffering and bitterness as it had always been for the past many years. But wait! He felt different. It was a feeling that he had almost forgotten. He felt just a wee bit bouncy. And was that not a good colour on his face? And look at the face. It was not so drawn and dry anymore. While he was asleep, so to speak, health so steadily returned to his body. At first it was barely perceptible. It could even be his fancy. But he really felt better now. His cheeks were fuller, his face more rounded and his skin became clearer. Lo and behold! What had drooped for so long bloomed

once more. There was no mistaking it. Health was entering into me, suffusing into me and filling me up with buoyancy and coursing through my body which had been so much like a dried-up river, but which was now flowing with the water of health and vitality. I could not understand what caused it at first but I believe it would never have happened if I had not decided to move away to the country. I have every reason to believe that it must have been the daily exercise which came about by manual works and the daily walks to the bus stop which was more than half a mile away, the country air, a change of environment and atmosphere, a change in diet and the removal of an insidious habit that brought it about. I was truly overjoyed by the unsuspecting restoration of my health.

But the restoration of my health did not bring about the rekindling of my faith. I did not go to the church and therefore I still had no spiritual life. I was so embittered as a result of my health, yet now that it was restored I did not run to thank God for it and to worship Him. I was so much like the ungrateful lepers. The return of my health was an act of God's love for me, His blind, foolish and faithless creature, in my life. He brought it about in a way that only He could have done. It was as if He had led me to a place, which was no other than our very own home and village and there He worked a miracle insofar as it was a discovery of the way to good health which I never even suspected. Yet while I marvelled at how it came about I had thought so little about Him who healed me. Neither did I pray to ask him to keep me in good health from henceforth. How devoid of faith was I.

I had grown to appreciate even more a compound that was kept not only clean and orderly but also one that was adorned with ornamental shrubs and flowers. The compounds of so many homes in Kuching that I had daily seen made me keen to fashion the compound of our *kampung* home, so that though it could not look quite so splendid it could be pleasing and delightful enough to behold. I had already planted a row of gardenias when I returned from Kanowit for the last time and planted an additional row before I left for Limbang and by this time they had grown to form hedges. Scattering about were other ornamental shrubs and flowers. But the grasses were long and the compound was hardly clean and tidy. I set to work to improve it. On weekends and in the evenings of the weekdays would find me hard at work in the compound with the result that the rows of gardenias were made into well-trimmed and pruned hedges that were pleasing to see, the grasses always well cut and the flowers well nourished and all their dead and fallen leaves removed. All refuse was collected and the compound looked decent, clean, tidy and pleasant to look at just as I wanted it to be. If I was not busy tending to the compound I would be about there in the evening simply enjoying my simple horticultural handiwork and landscaping.

One evening as I was about in the compound doing either of the two, I chanced to look up the road and saw two girls approaching from the direction of Kuching. I recognised one of them but I was not sure who the other was but almost at once I was struck by her beauty. As they were passing by our house they looked momentarily in my direction and for a brief moment the beautiful girl and I saw each other. I assumed they were on their way to Simpok which was where the girl I recognised came from and also where I assumed the other came from and they were going on foot which was not unusual. Perhaps they went on foot on purpose or they had missed the bus. After looking at her I found that I could not forget her. I later came to know who she was. That evening was the very first time that I saw Kinyan as a grown-up girl. I believe I had some hazy pictures of her in my mind but I was so surprised to see that she had transformed. Such was the encounter which eventually was to lead to our marriage which, however, was to take place a few years later upon my return from England in 1972. Our marriage was solemnised on Christmas Eve at the old St. Peter's Chapel at Simpok by the Reverend Father James Meehan.

The fact that the office hours commenced at 8.30 in the morning had made it possible for me to go to work by commuting. But more than a year later the commencement of the office hours was changed from 8.30 to 8 o'clock. Because I was utterly convinced that country living had resulted in the restoration of my health the very thought of ever returning to live in the town brought much apprehension and anxiety. I was so convinced that town living had been the cause of my bad health and therefore to return there was liable to go back to my days of bad health and suffering. But with the change in office hours there were just no way that I could arrive on time by commuting in a bus. The first Kuching-bound bus could arrive at my destination half an hour later. I had no choice but to go back and live again in the town. The result was devastating. Almost at once my health vanished. I could feel bad health assailing my body again. On looking back the bad health came about this time more psychologically and less by other factors. My days of good health was only a respite. The decision made by the authority to change the office hours brought about my unhappy days once more.

It was the year 1970. I was offered a scholarship to take up a study course in Art and Graphic Design at Ravensbourne College in England as was noted earlier and it was a study course that I eagerly looked forward to. The formalities pertaining to my admission to the College were duly processed and finalised and all my travel documents were made. My departure was to be in September. I looked forward to my sojourn in the United Kingdom with hope - the hope of somehow regaining my health there. I believed so strongly in this and as I have mentioned elsewhere in my story I was indeed to regain



my health in England.

I continued to be critical of the government, that is, the executive branch of it although as a civil servant I had the same deep respect for my superiors in the administrative branch that I always had. I was critical and resentful of the government insofar as I perceived it to have gone against the principles and practices of stewardship. I could choose to live in a state of blissful ignorance or with relaxed and snug indifference. I could choose not to know or understand anything about or take any interest in the government, the political and economic realities prevailing in the country, the world about me, about powers, peoples, events and life itself but that would mean I also have no aspirations, no ideals, no sense of direction and purpose and nothing to live and care for. I would only be breathing but my soul is dead.

At about this time Sarawak held its first direct elections. But the result was such that the formation of the next State Government could only come about by a coalition and the partners were Parti Bumiputera, the Sarawak Chinese Association (SCA), Parti Pesaka and SUPP. The 1970 Election saw Parti Pesaka's seats in the State Legislative Assembly (the Council Negeri) reduced from 15 to 8 as against 12 seats scored by Parti Bumiputera. Prior to the 1970 Election Parti Pesaka had the biggest representation in the Sarawak Alliance and on that strength the Chief Minister was chosen from this party. But within the coalition the question of the choice of the next Chief Minister now rested with Parti Bumiputera which together with the SCA, which won 3 seats largely due to Parti Bumiputera voters commanded the biggest number of seats in the Coalition. But there was another factor which seemed to work strongly in favour of Parti Bumiputera in this respect and that was the fact that the party had someone who had a close link<sup>\*</sup> with the Federal Government. This man, while serving as an assistant and then a full federal minister, while playing an important role in West Malaysian politics, a nationalist and an aspirant to become the first Chief Minister, had been a vocal critic and ideological opponent of the Ningkan Administration. Insofar as my own ideal and political perception put me on the side of Ningkan and therefore with what I perceived he symbolised and stood for, and insofar as I perceived that this man who had opposed Ningkan in this sense and therefore seeming to advocate a Sarawak to be moulded in another image his voice was therefore discordant. So it was that this man was made the new Chief Minister. He finally won the office that was denied him for an attempt to make him the first Chief Minister was aborted<sup>\*\*</sup>. His accession to power marked the end of an era and the beginning of another.

<sup>\*</sup> Micheal Leigh: *The Rising Moon*

<sup>\*\*</sup> *ibid*

With the change in the State Government I have now come to the end of my story because it was also the end of an age. In my life the curtain of this age closed as I departed for England.

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By way of closing I shall go back to a remark that I just made. I had perceived that Sarawak was to be moulded in another image. Thinking about it now the apprehension was one that was perceived by one who took sides. But today in a certain way and to an extent I see that Sarawak is being moulded in an image — born of the working of a resurgent political doctrine — that I did not see in my time at least within the context of where life had taken me in this country. This I see especially in the generation born after Independence, and also in the country's deviations from certain international practices in certain aspects or areas of its national life and I see it too in its other manifestations. My ideals and outlook, moulded as they were in another time, often make me feel like an anachronism. At times I feel like one who walks in the new era as a creature from another time, a relic of the past. But life must be lived whatever the future may hold. Sarawak may continue to change even more and perhaps beyond recognition in the future as she is moulded more and more in the new image. But I shall look to the future remembering the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth' (Mathew 28:18). Therefore to a believer no matter what changes the future may bring ultimately all things are in God's hands. The One who says that all authority (power) in heaven and on earth is given to Him is God Himself.

— T H E E N D —

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## **BIODATA**

Justin Kirim is the Assistant Art and Design Officer attached with the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Cawangan Sarawak, Kuching. He joined the Sarawak Civil Service as a clerk in the Divisional Development Office, Kuching in 1964 and later posted to the Divisional Education Office in Limbang. In 1966 he was transferred to the Borneo Literature Bureau (now Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka) as Assistant Artist. He is married with nine children.