SARAWAK
LONG AGO

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CHAPTER 1

FORT MARGHERITA AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS

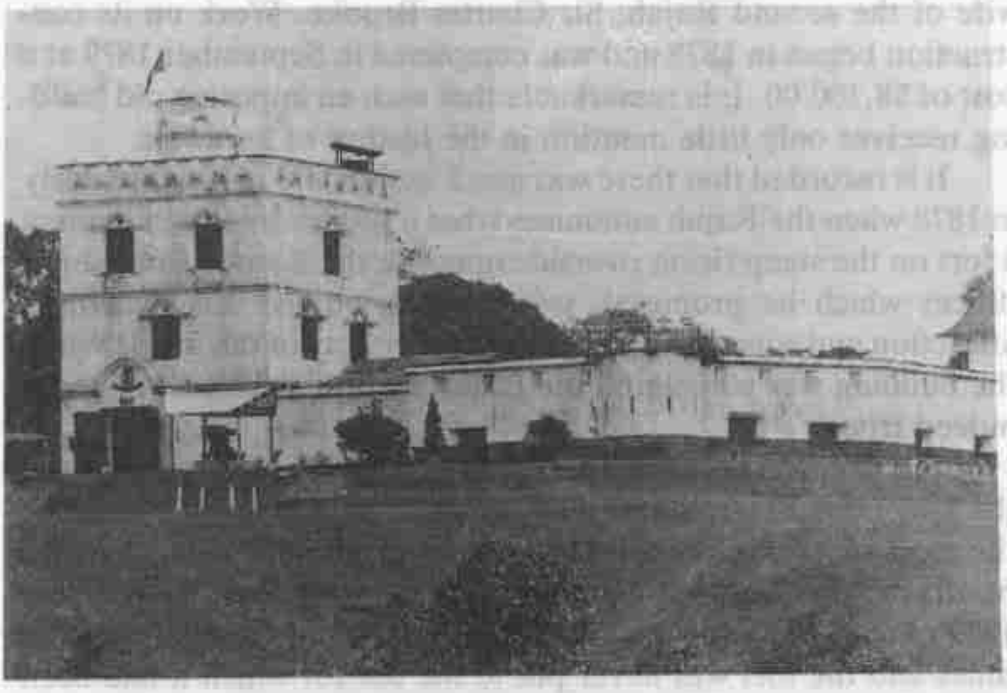
FORT Margherita in Kuching is named after the *Ranee* Margaret, wife of the second Rajah, Sir Charles Brooke. Work on its construction began in 1878 and was completed in September 1879 at a cost of $8,100.00. It is remarkable that such an imposing old building receives only little mention in the history of Sarawak.

It is recorded that there was much excitement in Kuching early in 1878 when the Rajah announced that it was his intention to erect a fort on the steep rising riverside opposite the Borneo Company's offices which he promised, would be an edifice of outstanding attraction and something to enhance the beauty of the town. When the building was completed the Rajah's words were proved to be indeed true.

The position of the fort had been carefully chosen to command the long straight stretch of river approaching the town, this being the most advantageous point from which to defend it from any form of attack, which always came by river in those days. By the year 1879, however, Sarawak was already passing through peaceful times and the fort was never put to the use for which it had been originally intended. This is obviously the reason why there is so little recorded about it.

Strangely enough, the only fear of attack which the second Rajah had after the fort had been built was from Russia in the 1890s, when he seriously considered laying mines in the Sarawak River. Then unexpectedly, the first attack the fort ever had came from the air, unsuccessful though it was, when the Japanese bombed Kuching at midday on Friday, December 19, 1941, and the quiet, peaceful town experienced its saddest day since the Insurrection of June 1857 — eighty-four years before. Japanese Air Force officers who took part in the raid later confirmed that their target had been the fort, but the long stick of anti-personnel bombs, twenty-four in number, dropped in a line from Simpang Tiga across Ban Hock Road, Padungan and the Borneo Company's offices, ended in mid-river. The bad aiming had led to civilian casualties amounting to twenty-six dead and seventy-three badly injured.

Many former residents of Sarawak must have had nostalgic memories of this outstanding old building which in the old days, was the first glimpse which all new arrivals had of Kuching as the ship approached the town. The Rajahs always kept it snow white and



Fort Margherita — an imposing landmark in Kuching.

clear of trees which helped to make its appearance so striking to the eye. Now with the introduction of air services, the thrill of that first glimpse of Kuching is lost to the present generation.

When I last visited the fort some years ago, there were still old cannons and pyramid-shaped piles of cannon balls and grape shot (cannon balls joined together with a chain). There was also a most interesting armoury full of guns, old and new, and of course, the condemned prisoner's cell, used until a new one was built later at an execution yard near the rifle range, nearly a mile away. Right up to the Second World War, there was also the look-out and the sentry who used to pace the ramparts all day and night and who used to call out "All's well!" on the stroke of every hour from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. This call used to be taken up by the sentry at the Astana, then the sentry at the old block of government offices and finally by the sentry at the Treasury. It used to carry a long way in the stillness of the night. There was a good reason for these calls, of course — it was to ensure that the sentries were not asleep since the Treasury had once been robbed at night.

Few people nowadays know that there is a stream running under the Central Padang, the Treasury and the old government offices into the river. Thieves using this knowledge, once burrowed under the Treasury strongroom and were handsomely rewarded for their efforts. The stream was discovered later when the Treasury floor started to collapse.

The reason Fort Margherita was not built until about thirty-nine years after the arrival of the first Rajah was probably because there was an increase of activity further upriver. The first fort was built at Berlidah from *belian* wood, on the opposite side of the river from Siniawan, about halfway between Kuching and Bau. There was much fighting in this area in the early days of the Brooke regime, especially on Serambau Mountain, lying behind Siniawan, which was continuously being attacked from the Sadong direction. Thus, unlike Fort Margherita, the fort at Berlidah came under continuous attacks.

It must also be remembered that Kuching was not always the capital of Sarawak. The old capital was at Lidah Tanah long before the first Chinese settlers arrived in Sarawak and is situated where the Sarawak River branches about twelve miles above Kuching.

This was the home of the Malay nobility. Some of the old *belian* posts can still be located there. Another place which might have had some claim to being the capital of Sarawak was Santubong, where there was a large population of Malay commoners under Pengiran Mahkota, who had been appointed Governor of Sarawak by the Sultan of Brunei. In 1839, when Santubong was attacked and the defenders defeated and routed by the people of Saribas (ten years before the arrival of the first Rajah), Mahkota, finding Santubong too vulnerable from attack from the sea, and Lidah Tanah too vulnerable from attack from the Sadong, decided to settle down in Kuching, where there were by then about eight hundred Malays and a few Chinese traders.

Mahkota was in Kuching when the first Rajah arrived. The Rajah apparently liking the place, settled down there too. At first, old writers used to refer to Kuching (or Sarawak as it was then called) as 'Mr. Brooke's Capital'. Then it became accepted as the capital of Sarawak. Later, the name was changed to Sarawak Proper.Then in August 1872, the second Rajah changed it again to 'Kuching' after the name of a small tidal inlet known as *Sungei Kuching* (Cat River) which used to run from a spot on the riverside between the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce and the Tan Boon Tien Petrol Kiosk, approximately up to the Rex Cinema until it was filled in, in about 1928.

How the stream derived its name has been a source of much argument in the past, but in my opinion the two best claims appear to be firstly, wild cats were frequently seen in the locality and, secondly, it was called after the *mata kucing* (cat's eye) fruit trees which used to be plentiful in that area.

When I first came to Sarawak, the hill now known as Padungan Road used to be called *Bukit Pasu* (Flower Pot Hill) from its shape but, on the other side, where the Borneo Company bungalow once stood, it used to be called *Bukit Mata Kucing* (Cat's Eye Hill), probably called after the fruit or because it commanded such a magnificent view of the river, which was so necessary to guard against enemy attacks in the early days. It is interesting to find in old records that Kuching was in fact, called by that name long before the first Rajah arrived.

And what of the flags which have been flown over the proud

forts of Berlidah and Fort Margherita? The first flag flown over Berlidah was the St. George's Cross (a red cross on a white background), which was the flag used by the first Rajah until the Sarawak flag was hoisted on September 21, 1848. For this purpose the flag was rectangular in shape but all warboats bore pennants. Fort Margherita has flown three different flags under four different administrations. First, there was the Sarawak flag under the Rajahs; then the Rising Sun under the Japanese; later the Union Jack under the British and now a return to the Sarawak flag upon the country's attaining independence.

Have you ever stopped to think how many different forms of execution have been employed in Sarawak since the arrival of the first Rajah until the present time? Well, there have been three — by *keris* (a Malay form of dagger) from 1840 to 1888; by shooting (1889-1946); and last but not least, by hanging from 1946 onwards.

When the first Rajah, Sir James Brooke, arrived in Sarawak, he brought with him on his ship, *The Royalist,* a Malay seaman named Subu, a man described as being much taller than the average Malay and of immense physical strength who was, amongst other things, an expert with the *keris*. It is probably for this reason that the Rajah decided to adopt the *keris* as the official implement for execution in the country.

Following his arrival in Sarawak Subu, owing to his outstanding personality, soon found himself to be someone of importance. He was almost immediately appointed State Executioner and Royal Umbrella Bearer — his duty in the latter appointment being to carry a large, yellow, satin umbrella, the sign of royalty, over the head of the Rajah on all official occasions which it is recorded, he did with much solemnity.

Another important task given to Subu was that of reader of the Rajah's proclamations. This answers the question of how news was disseminated in the early days before the people were burdened with government *Gazettes* and, in any case, at a time when few people in Sarawak could read or write.

Subu used to be transported in a boat bearing the Rajah's flag and manned by twenty paddlers, which travelled up and down the Sarawak River, stopping at each Malay landing place where he would read out the Royal Proclamation.

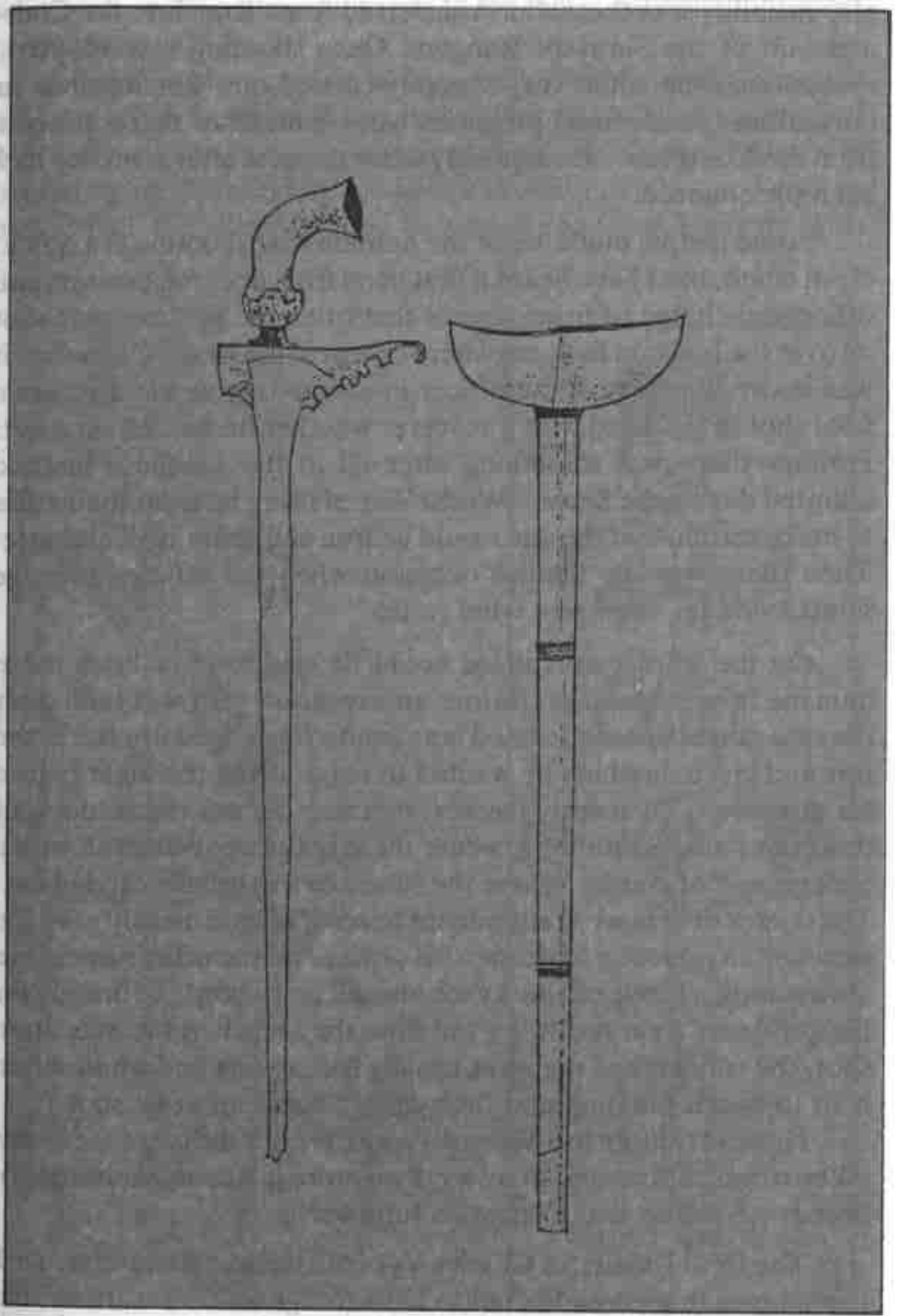
Subu is said to have been a much-liked and picturesque character since he could frequently be seen dressed in one of his two colourful official uniforms. His everyday uniform was a blue jacket embroidered with gold, black trousers with a gold waist band and his head enveloped in a coloured handkerchief tied in a jaunty fashion with two ends standing up over his left ear. His executioner's uniform was green and gold.

The *keris* which Subu used, was not the usual small wavy-bladed type which we see so often today, but it had a flat, straight, double-edged blade eighteen inches in length with a sharp point. It was inserted in the cavity of the condemned man's right shoulder and thrust diagonally across the body through the heart. Subu always declared that few condemned persons ever showed fear, having already resigned themselves to their fate. They would calmly smoke cigarettes or chew betel nut and *sirih* while their graves were being dug. Then, instead of using the normally accepted method of binding their hands behind their backs and making them take up a kneeling position, Subu would simply ask them to sit on the brink of the grave as though sitting on the edge of a bed. The condemned person never quite knew when his last moment was coming because Subu would approach him from behind and with one blow of the *keris* would send him to eternity.

When he was getting on in years, Subu once said to the *Ranee* Margaret, "I am an old man now but I hope that God will allow me to *keris* just ten more before he gathers me up into paradise."

Subu died in February 1873 and was succeeded by his son, Tomah. It is said that once when Subu was sick, Tomah, who had often seen his father carry out executions, offered to take his place. However, his first effort did not prove entirely successful since Tomah started off by plunging the *keris* into the wrong side. Still not to be dismayed, he withdrew it, uttered "*Sorry*" and thrust it into the right side without a murmur from the condemned man!

Tomah conducted the executions until 1888, but in 1889, as a result of a shocking murder trial, six men were sentenced to death. This proved too much for Tomah to cope with by using a *keris*, so the sentences were carried out for the first time by shooting by a firing squad of twenty Rangers under their Commandant, Major Day. This then became the accepted method of execution, and



The execution keris and sheath.

responsibility was thereafter transferred from Tomah to the Commandant of the Sarawak Rangers. Once shooting was adopted, executions were often very speedily carried out. For instance in outstations, condemned prisoners were sometimes taken straight from the Court and executed only a few minutes after sentence had been pronounced.

Some people might be of the opinion that shooting is a quick, clean death, but I have heard it first hand from doctors, dressers and officers-in-charge of firing squads that often the prisoner was shot all over the body; in fact, anywhere except in the heart. Of course, it was always the duty of the officer-in-charge to give the prisoner a final shot in the head with a revolver whether he needed it or not. Perhaps there was something after all in the Japanese method adopted during the Second World War of using rests for their rifles to make certain that the aim would be true and death swift and sure. Then there was the famous occasion when the officer-in-charge fainted and no one knew what to do.

On the whole, executions could be said to have been more humane in pre-war days. Before an execution yard was built near the rifle range, the condemned man used to be lodged in a cell in the fort and given anything he wanted to eat or drink the night before his execution. Then early the next morning, he was taken to a spot downriver near Santubong, where there is a steep river bank with a background of granite, where the sentence was usually carried out. The doctor or dresser in attendance to certify death usually gave the prisoner an injection to deaden his senses and the officer-in-charge always took a bottle of whisky for himself and a bottle of brandy for the prisoner. As a result, by the time they reached the execution spot, the condemned man was usually feeling fine and would often help to beach the boat and then calmly stand up to be shot.

However, after the Second World War, a different view was taken of executions and there were no more injections or bottles of brandy — justice had to take its full course.

The third Rajah, Sir Charles Vyner Brooke, did not agree with capital punishment and hated to have to sign a death warrant, but since the law of the country had to be carried out, he was usually conveniently away in an outstation when anything of this nature had

to be done and the signing was left to the senior government officer in Kuching.

After Fort Margherita had been built the first force to occupy it was that of the Sarawak Rangers, but before I tell you anything of their history, I must start with the earliest armed force which was formed by the first Rajah, Sir James Brooke, in 1846, and also an event which led to his decision to form the Sarawak Rangers. This

Fortman (1846-1879).

Sarawak Ranger (1862-1932).

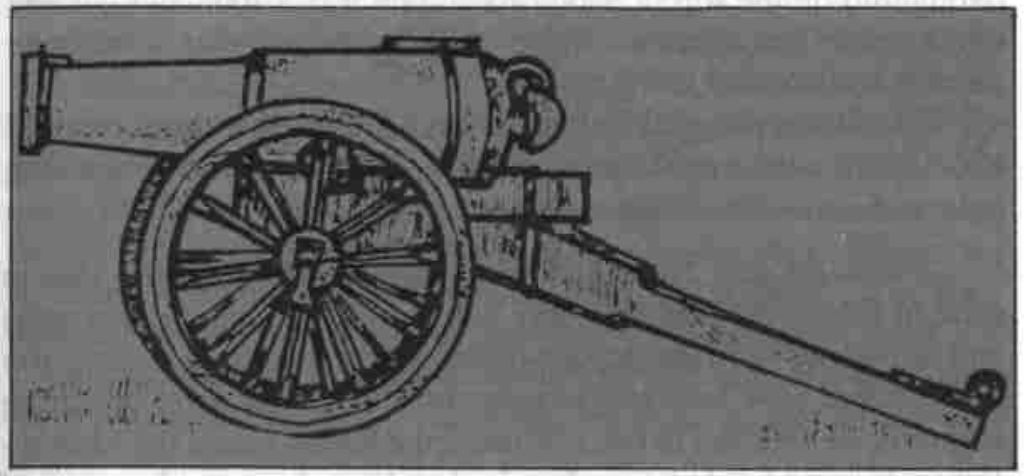
force was the Fortmen, which was made up of about thirty untrained men acting simply as an armed police force who, as their name implies, guarded the forts and the Rajah's residence. They were under the charge of a native who had once served in the Ceylon Rifles. He could very well have been a Malay since there has been a large Malay community in Colombo, Ceylon, for longer than people can remember. In fact, during the Second World War, a Malay Unit was raised in Ceylon; their Commanding Officer being the son of a former Sarawak Rangers drill and gun instructor. He had been born in Kuching and was specially selected for the post because of his knowledge of Malay.

These Fortmen were carefully selected from amongst the sons and nephews of the Malay and Dayak Chiefs and their loyalty was thus unquestionable. Sometimes they were the sons of Dayak Chiefs who had incurred the Rajah's displeasure by carrying out head-hunting raids across, what was then, the Dutch border. They were brought to Kuching as Fortmen at the Rajah's residence, then known as Government House, as guarantee of the future behaviour of their errant fathers.

The Fortmen's uniform consisted of a pale blue jacket with a red sash, white trousers, a red fez as headgear and bare foot.

You might well wonder how the Rajah could keep law and order with such a small force in those turbulent days. The answer is simple. There was a militia of about 25,000 able-bodied men in the Batang Lupar, Saribas and other rivers who, with warfare in their blood for countless generations, were only too eager to answer the Rajah's call, especially with the prospect of acquiring trophies of war, the most prized of which were the heads of the enemy.

All went well for eleven years after the Fortmen had been formed, save for one incident in 1850 at Skrang when Rentap, a rebel Dayak Chief, defeated the government forces under Mr. Brereton, the Resident at Betong, and Mr. Lee, his assistant, was killed. However, the Rajah defeated Rentap four years later and managed to deal with all other internal troubles until a few months after the Insurrection of the Bau Gold Mining *Kongsis* in Kuching in 1857 when Rentap, not satisfied with his defeat, again took arms against the Rajah. This was a senseless war since even had Rentap

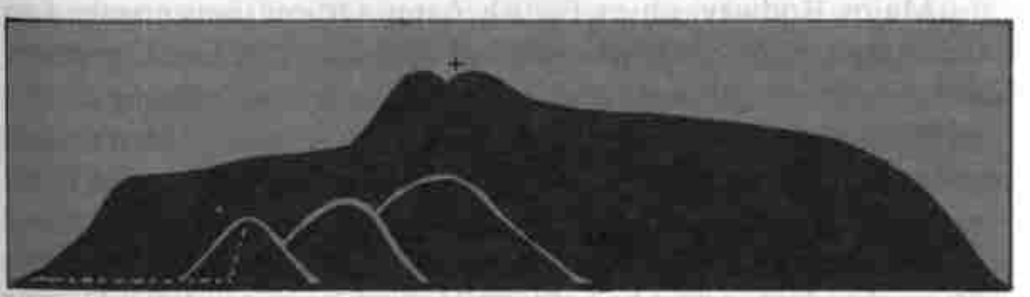


'Bujang Sadok'.

won, he could not possibly have taken over the government of the country. Thus it became, in fact, a mere show of 'face'.

Two expeditions of government forces failed to subdue Rentap after he had set up a stronghold on the top of Sadok Mountain, near Betong. Then, necessity being the mother of invention, the Rajah struck on the idea of casting the first and only gun of its size ever to be made in Sarawak, which was eventually given the name of *Bujang Sadok* ("Bachelor of Sadok"). This put a speedy end to Rentap's defiance in much the same way as the invention of the tank helped to hasten the end of the First World War.

This old brass cannon is a twelve-pounder gun weighing seven hundredweight (eight hundred and forty pounds or about six and a half piculs) which fired cannon balls. In 1861, the Rajah used this gun in his third and successful attempt to defeat Rentap. Rentap's



Sadok Mountain. 'X' marks Rentap's stronghold.

stronghold on the top of Sadok Mountain was 2,700 feet high and the sketch of this mountain will give you an idea of what an achievement it was to haul the gun to the top.

First it was dragged by five hundred Dayaks for about two and a half miles until it could go no further. Then it was slung on a long pole and carried by relays of sixty carriers.

Following this, the Rajah must have begun to realise that in spite of the forces ready to serve him at any time, *parang* (swords) and blowpipes were getting out-of-date and expeditions became too difficult and took long to conclude. In 1862 (a year after defeating Rentap), in addition to the Fortmen, the Rajah raised the Military Force. It comprised about a hundred and twenty men, almost all of whom were Dayaks, drawn from two groups. One was from inland, stationed at Kuching, which the Rajah called the Sarawak Rangers, and the other from the coast. In 1871, the Rajah gave them uniforms of black and white (see illustration on page 9) but, as a distinguishing mark those from the coast wore black head handkerchiefs instead of black caps. Their walking-out dress was their own colourful national dress which of course, included a *parang* (sword). This once led to an unfortunate incident when a party, out for a stroll in Kuching one evening, raided an orchard. When the owner tried to stop them stealing his fruit, they took his head. This immediately led to limits being imposed on the area in which they were allowed to spend their leisure hours and eventually the walking-out dress was changed from national costume to another uniform similar in design to the black and white save that the colour was blue and red. These two sets of uniform were used right up to the time when the Sarawak Rangers were disbanded in 1932.

Major Rodway, an ex-British Army Officer, was engaged to take charge of the new force and was appointed the first Commandant, but the Rajah was quick to recognise his outstanding ability and transferred him to the Administration in 1863. He was succeeded by Major Walter, who was dismissed after only eight months; then by Captain Bacchus, who had to resign after four and a half years. Thus in 1877, Major Rodway found himself back again as Commandant, a post he held until his retirement in 1883. During this period, he personally superintended the building of Fort Mar-

gherita and occupied it with his Military Force when it was completed.

Then in September 1879, the Rajah issued an order combining the two groups of the Military Force and the Fortmen under the style of 'The Sarawak Rangers'. From the beginning until the time when they were disbanded, the Commandant was always an ex-British Army Officer and the instructor an ex-member of either the Army or Navy but usually an ex-Sergeant of the Army. The Rangers were an extremely smart force since the eagle eye of the Rajah was always upon them. Nobody could fool him. His early days in the Navy had taught him too much regarding these matters. They were always seen at their best at the Rajah's birthday parades.

Should you see a photograph of the Rangers, you might wonder why they always had bare foot. There was a very good reason for this: to keep their feet tough for jungle work. They were armed with *Snider* rifles and *Hotchkiss* guns and took part in over twenty expeditions and one riot in Miri in 1923. Their last expedition was against the rebel, Asun, in the Entabai in 1932, when they were led by the *Tuan Muda* in person. However, it was unfortunate that before the Asun affair could be concluded, Sarawak passed through one of the worst slumps in its history and the axe had to fall fast and heavy on expenditure. As a result, the Rangers and the police were disbanded and reformed into a smaller, combined force, under the name of the Sarawak Constabulary. This caused a certain amount of embarrassment to the government since only a handful of Rangers could be persuaded to join the new force. They had previously considered themselves the cream of the Rajah's forces and felt that to join the Constabulary would be lowering their status. Thus, hundreds of young men returned to their longhouses. Trained in the use of arms, with nothing to do and egged on by the womenfolk, many of them threw in their lot with the rebel, Asun.

With the approach of the war with Japan in 1941, those who were on the reserve strength helped to form what was called 'Force B'. Their uniform was simply khaki shirt and shorts and a Dayak-style carrier basket pack on their backs. They gave a very smart turnout at a recruiting parade. Then nothing was heard of them until the evacuation of the Shell Oil Company's personnel from Miri after the latter had carried out a 'denial scheme' by plugging the oil

wells. They left Miri on the Rajah's yacht, the *Maimuna*, and accompanied the *Lipis*, which carried the oilfield's personnel and some Punjabi troops. About halfway to Kuching, the ships were attacked by a Japanese seaplane. The Rangers let it have all they had — rifles and even the four-inch gun on the stern. They succeeded in driving off the plane but it then attacked the *Lipis*. Here, the machine gunner on the bridge was killed. Then the Commanding Officer of the Punjabi troops in Sarawak took over and was in turn killed while trying to fix the jammed machine gun. It was a tragic sight as the two vessels came upriver and rounded the bend near the Borneo Company. The *Maimuna* was practically unscathed but the *Lipis* followed slowly behind, flag at half-mast and sides scarred with bullet marks. She buried six dead at sea and twenty-six wounded, including the captain, were taken off and sent to the General Hospital.

The only other incident affecting 'Force B' was the bombing of Bukit Siol by Japanese planes which were covering the advance of the Japanese troops from their landing point at Sibu Laut to Kuching via the Lundu Road and the Sarawak River. Then, on that fateful Christmas Eve, 1941, when Kuching was officially in Japanese hands at 5 p.m., with all lost and no further hope, they disbanded and slowly and sadly made their way back to their respective homes in the far interior.

An unusual duty which the Rangers were called upon to perform from time to time in the old days, was to keep the guests cool at the Astana dinner parties.

In the days before electric fans, this was done in most houses and offices in the East by means of a *punka*. This was a large fan slung from the ceiling to produce a current of air when moved. The *punka* became a great institution in the East. For instance, the term 'under the *punka*' meant that you were told something in confidence. However, the Astana never used a *punka*. In fact, the only house in Kuching where I ever remember seeing one was in the Borneo Company bungalow at Bukit Mata Kuching, scene of so much social life in the past and second only to the Astana. Here, a Sikh watchman used to sit just outside the door and gently pull a cord to make the *punka* swish. Sometimes when he got tired, he would tie the cord to his big toe and slowly move his foot to and fro,

often falling asleep while doing so. The *punka wallah*'s job was known as the laziest in the East. The Astana, not having a *punka,* had to find other means to keep the guests cool, so a Ranger used to stand at each corner of the table (or more if the party was a large one), wearing his evening uniform of blue and red and slowly swaying a large palm leaf to and fro throughout the meal.

In 1872, the second Rajah, Sir Charles Brooke, had one of his strange ideas. He divided all his European government officers and leading members of the community into three classes and gave each its own special kind of salute.

This caused immense amusement to some and great disappointment to others, especially the ladies, since it fixed once and for all their order of precedence at state and social functions. In fact, it almost led to a sort of caste system among the Europeans as the local people used to refer to them as first, second and third class Europeans instead of government officers. Even one old writer refers to a certain European lady in Kuching at that time as a 'second-class European'.

The salutes, which were given by the Sarawak Rangers sentries were: first class, 'present arms'; second class, arm across body to rifle butt; and third class, simply 'attention'. The Bishop headed the list of those entitled to a first-class salute, followed by European members of the Supreme Council, then senior government officers, the *Datu Bandar* and the Consuls.

Those entitled to second-class salutes were Residents 2nd Class, various lower grade government officers, the Government Chaplain, Native Members of the Supreme Council and Vice-Consuls.

The third-class salute was for all junior officers and cadets.

You might wonder how the sentries remembered which kind of salute to give to whom but this was not really as difficult as you might think since there were only nine European government officers in Kuching and nineteen in outstations at that time; all of whom were well known to the sentries by sight. This system of salutes was dropped in the time of the third Rajah.

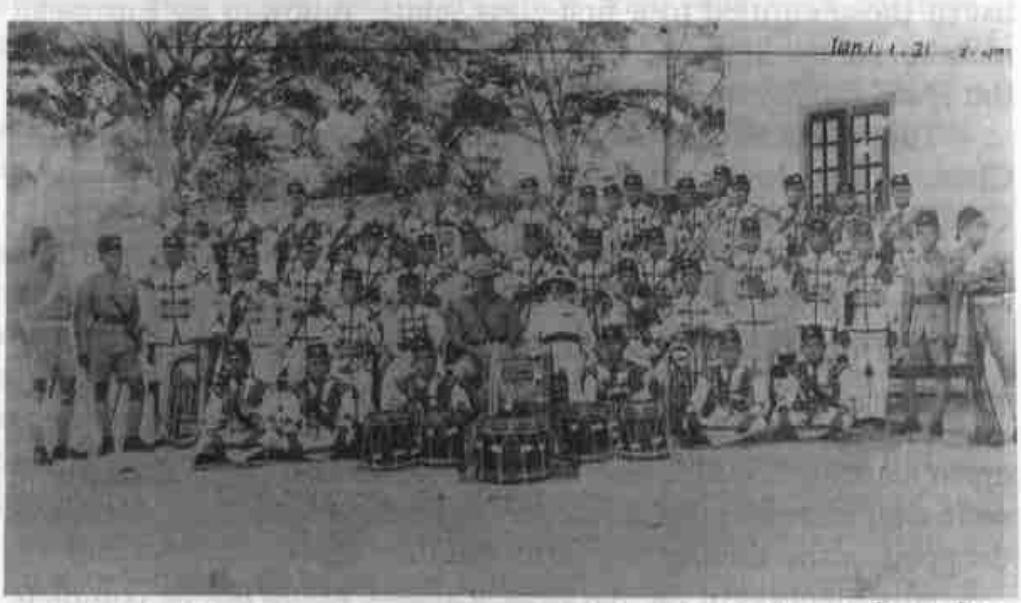
Any mention of the Sarawak Rangers would not be complete without an account of their Filipino band.

There had always been a Rangers' band of sorts but the stand-

ard was not high. Since the second Rajah was very fond of music and the *Ranee*, under her maiden name of Lady de Windt, was recognised as the finest amateur pianist in the whole of France, it was not surprising that in 1888 the Rajah made a special visit to Manila for the sole purpose of engaging a Filipino band.

Going about it in his usual thorough manner, the Rajah auditioned and selected the bandsmen himself. All went well until the bandmaster was enticed away by somebody who offered him better terms. Nevertheless, the band duly arrived in Kuching in May, 1888, accompanied by the first bandmaster, Polycarpo. He was succeeded by Reyas, Labarinto, Julian de Vera and finally, Pedro Salosa, who was the bandmaster when the band was disbanded at the same time as the Rangers in 1932, after forty-four years in existence. The bandsmen were paid $15.00 to $20.00 per month and the bandmaster $20.00 to $25.00. The Rajah ruled that the original band should not exceed twelve but would be increased gradually to twenty.

Upon arrival in Kuching, the bandsmen were ordered to be incorporated into the Military Force, but they were not required to do drill or to keep guard. They had to live in barracks and followed



By Courtesy of Sarawak Museum

The Sarawak Rangers Band.

the same discipline as that of the Rangers. Later, the order was changed and they were expected to know their drill and keep guard when required.

Their first uniform was the same as that of the Rangers except that they wore red caps, with belts and side arms. Later they were given a uniform of their own.

According to the band regulations, the band was required to play for military purposes when needed, practise every morning and play at the Astana and, in addition, at the bandstand two days a week.

The Rajah, the Rangers and the people of Kuching were exceedingly proud of their band, which at that time was considered to be very good indeed but, of course, the standard could not really be compared with that of the present band.

The Rajah took a great personal interest in the band. He insisted that programmes should be carefully selected and if the playing was not up to standard, the bandmaster would receive a stern rebuke. It is recorded that after one public performance, the Rajah called the Commandant, told him that the standard of playing was deteriorating, that he could not stand it any longer and that, as the bandmaster de Vera seemed to be getting too old, to retire him the next day with a pension of $6.00 per month.

The band, after a time, did not remain wholly Filipino, since drummers and buglers were often recruited locally. In 1897 the Rajah enlarged the band by engaging seven bandsmen from Perak, West Malaysia. They had formerly been in the band of the Malay States Guides.

The public band performances used to be given two evenings a week and the Rajah again, in his usual thorough manner, ruled that should it rain, the performance had to be given the following day. They were given at a bandstand in what was then known as the Esplanade (now called the Central *Padang*). It was then an ornamental garden. These band days used to be greatly enjoyed by the old Rajah but were not entirely popular with others. It is said that, as he grew older, the Rajah became more deaf and sometimes hardly knew what music was being played. He used to like to surround himself with the prettiest ladies of all communites and, once the band had started, nobody dared to whisper a word without

receiving his icy stare. For his government officers, attendance at the band was a *must* since, in those day, there was no such thing as annual increments in salaries and the Rajah only gave his officers a raise when he remembered them. So, unless he saw them, he forgot all about them. In other words, no band attendance, no increase in salary.

The crowning glory of the Filipino band came in 1922, when the Borneo-Malaya Exhibition, attended by the Prince of Wales, was held in Singapore. In competition with the army and police bands throughout Singapore and Malaya, they gained the second prize — second only to a British Army band. It was a silver medal, three inches in diameter, bearing the head of the Prince of Wales on one side and suitably inscribed on the other. This medal was always proudly displayed in the office of the Commandant, Sarawak Rangers, and after the Rangers had been disbanded, in the office of the Commissioner of Constabulary until the Japanese Occupation when, like so many other things, it disappeared.

The Filipino band was disbanded for reasons of economy, together with the Rangers, during the disastrous trade slump of 1932. Several of its members returned to their native land but some remained and joined the newly formed Sarawak Constabulary and helped to form the nucleus of a part-time band under the direction of the last bandmaster, Pedro Salosa's son Gregory, who had become an inspector in the Sarawak Constabulary. They carried on until the war broke out with Japan in December 1941.

CHAPTER 2
THE RESIDENCES OF THE RAJAHS

THE Rajahs of Sarawak built three residences in Kuching. The first in 1842, was burnt to the ground in the Insurrection of February 1857, and the second, built almost immediately to replace the first, was demolished after only twelve years in 1869 to make way for the third, which is the present Astana.

All occupied the same site on the hill where the Rajahs of Brunei once lived and where their tombs can still be seen.

2.1 MR. BROOKE'S RESIDENCE

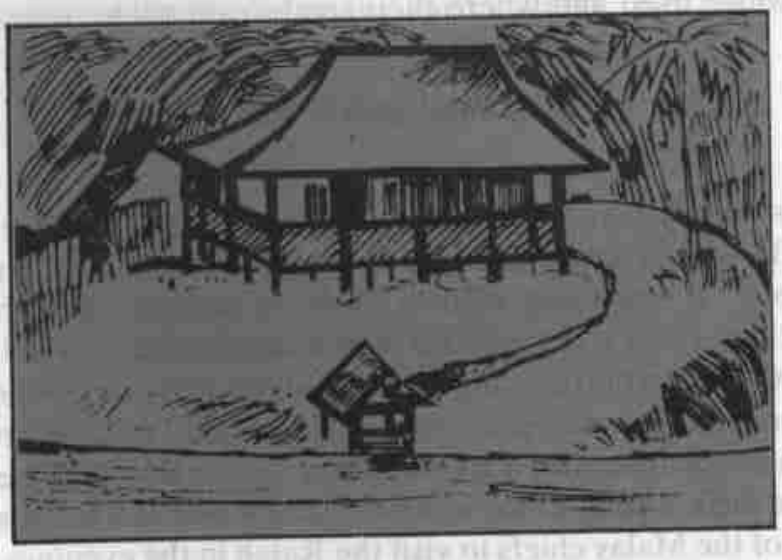
The first residence, which was occupied by the first Rajah, Sir James Brooke, is always referred to by old writers as 'Mr. Brooke's Residence'. It was a very modest structure as can be seen from the illustration, which is reproduced from a sketch made in 1848. It was built entirely of wood on raised posts and was fifty-four feet square. It comprised four bedrooms, one in each corner, and a large sitting room in the centre, with a special room for the Rajah at the back.

The large sitting room was particularly useful since it was the custom of the Malay chiefs to visit the Rajah in the evenings and sit and chat until late into the night. In this way he was kept in touch

with events happening around him, which was so necessary in those early, turbulent days.

It will be noticed that the roof of this building is of the same lofty, airy design as that used for the present Astana. This outstanding feature of all the Rajahs' residence, although perhaps not altogether pleasing to the eye, nevertheless led to cool and comfort inside. It is said that the first Rajah copied it from bungalows he had lived in during his early days with the East India Company.

There was one thing for which this residence was very well known and that was its library. The Rajah, over a number of years, had collected a vast number of books covering a wide range of topics, many of which were not wholly approved by the Bishop. Unfortunately, they were all destroyed when the residence was razed to the ground. This is what Mrs. McDougall, wife of Bishop McDougall, who watched the fire from the Bishop's House had to say, "Alas, the library was burnt by the rebels. It was a treasure indeed in the jungle with books covering all sorts of subjects bound in enticing covers. This library so dear to us all because we were all allowed to see it. I saw the mass of books glowing dull red like a furnace long after the flames had consumed the wooden house. It took two days to burn."



The first residence (1842-1857).

As soon as the news reached England, members of the Rajah's old school subscribed together and sent out a large number of books to replace those destroyed. Cambridge University also contributed some, but the second collection could never replace the first.

The story of the memorable night of February 18, 1857, is too well known for me to go into details here. How, after the residence had been attacked by the rebels, poor Nicholetts, only seventeen years of age, was killed and, being mistaken for the Rajah, his head was cut off and paraded round the town on the end of a long pole. How the Rajah saved his life by swimming across a rivulet beside his bungalow. And then the end when everything went up in flames.

2.2 GOVERNMENT HOUSE

The second residence, built almost immediately to replace the first, was always known as 'Government House'. It was also constructed of wood, but after the experience of the Insurrection, the Rajah took the precaution of erecting, as part of it, a small fort-like structure, known as 'The Tower', where one could take refuge in case of emergency.

There is little recorded regarding this residence beyond the fact that it was considered unfortunate since Captain Brooke Johnson.

By Courtesy of Sarawak Museum

The tower of the second residence (1857-1869).

the *Rajah Muda*, had the misfortune to lose his first wife Annie, his son Francis and his second wife, Julia, all in space of only three-and-a-half years. All died in this house and were buried in the Brooke burial ground on the riverside close by.

Thus, on the death of the first Rajah in 1868, the second Rajah, who was about to go on leave to England with the intention of marrying, decided to dismantle it. Work on a new building commenced in 1869 and by the time the Rajah returned from England with his bride in 1870, there was already waiting for him a more handsome brick structure, more befitting the residence of a Rajah and worthy of the name *Astana* (palace).

2.3 THE ASTANA

This third residence was occupied by the second Rajah for forty-seven years until his death by 1917, and then by the third Rajah for twenty-nine years save during the period of the Japanese Occupation.

When it was first built, it was called Government House, but after a few years, the name was changed to Astana. Although the building had been completed when the Rajah and *Ranee* Margaret arrived in 1870, there was still little furniture, so they had to stay with the Crookshanks in the bungalow near Fort Margherita. This caused much embarrassment to the *Ranee* as the wife of Resident Crookshank had until then, regarded herself as the First Lady in the land and resented the arrival of the 'little convent girl'. The *Ranee* was then twenty years of age; the Rajah forty.

At one time there used to be a plantation of *areca* nut (betel nut) trees behind the Astana. These the Rajah used to grow for the benefit of his Dayak friends who often called on him for supplies of these nuts when they intended holding some big feasts. He would give them the nuts in cheap jars to carry back to their homes. Some of these jars can still be seen in certain Dayak villages and are much prized by their owners. The habit of chewing betel nut now appears to be fast disappearing.

The Astana is built to a peculiar design. It is in fact, built in the form of three complete houses, supported by thick brick pillars

some twenty feet high with an ancient-looking square tower with battlements forming the entrance. As in the case of the second residence, this tower was also built as a place of safety in case of emergency. Although it is put to a different use now, it was not so long ago that rows of rifles could be seen stacked around the walls of the tower.

As soon as the Astana was built, gifts began to pour in from the Chinese traders. The first, a very liberal present of twelve pairs of Chinese lamps, was presented by Mr. Law Kian Huat and his partner, Mr. Sim Ah Nio, of Ghee Soon & Company.

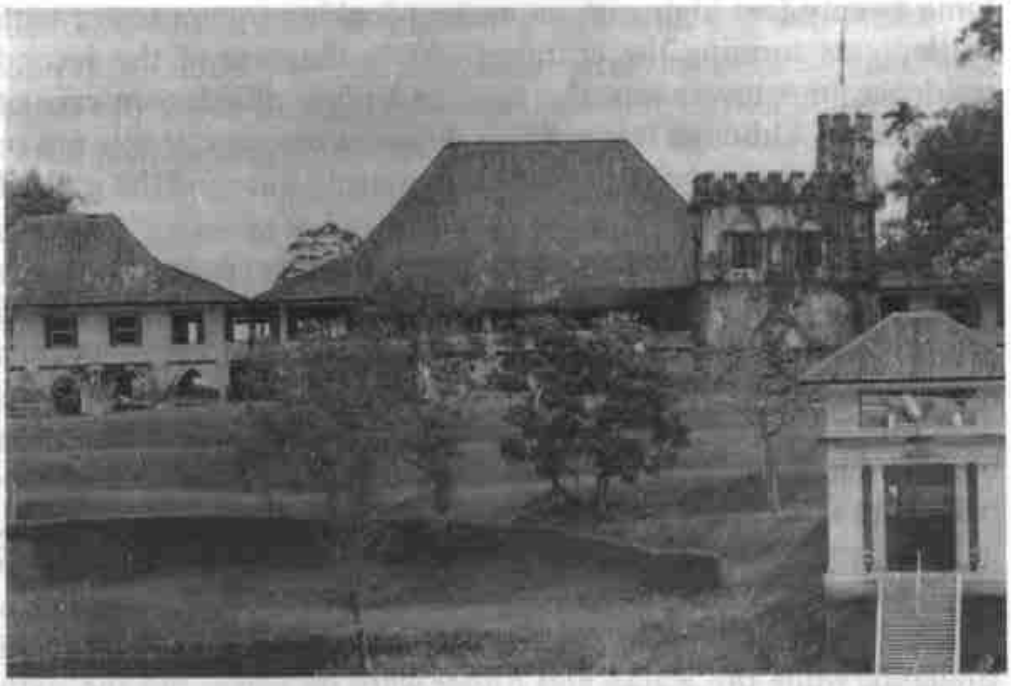
Almost as soon as the *Ranee* entered the Astana, she started to bear her large family. First, there was a girl, Ghita, born in September of the same year, 1870, and then twin sons, James and Charles, in February 1872. All were destined to die on their way home to England in 1873. Then a still-born son followed the *Ranee*'s fall on a steamer. The fifth, who became the third Rajah, was born in England, while the Rajah and *Ranee* were on leave, but the sixth and seventh children, *Tuan Muda* and *Tuan Bunsu*, were born in the Astana. The Malays of Kuching always held the *Tuan Muda* in special esteem as they regarded him a true son of the soil.

The second Rajah, who used to run his country like an English country estate, used to stand on the Astana verandah with a telescope and watch his officers arriving at their respective offices. Should any of them be late, a note would follow a few minutes later, reminding them of the official office hours.

There was one fixed rule which the second Rajah always observed. Everyone in the Astana rose with the sounding of both the five o'clock gun in the morning and dined with the eight o'clock gun in the evening.

The third Rajah and *Ranee* Sylvia, being much younger than the previous Rajah, used to entertain often and lavishly, especially when their three young daughters were in Sarawak. The Rajah built a small swimming pool behind the Astana for their use which was the envy of all for many years.

The interior decoration of the Astana has changed a lot now but at one time it looked almost like a museum. For instance, this is the impression the *Ranee* Sylvia had when she first entered it in 1916. "It is unbelievable in its medley of disappointing beauty. The



The Astana

shell of it was like a lovely cloak upon the shoulders of an ugly woman."

The beautiful decorative designs of the ceiling of the drawing-room were the work of Chinese experts specially brought over from Hong Kong around 1930. It was done while the Rajah was on leave. Upon his return, he did not like the designs initially and poked it all down with a walking stick. Later, he changed his mind and made them do it again.

Dayang Anne, the daughter of the Tuan Muda,' who used to accompany her father on his visits to Sarawak, claimed that she often saw the second Rajah's ghost in the Astana.

The eight Council Negri Meetings which took place between 1873 and 1903, were held in the Astana dining-room as also was the Peace-Making Ceremony between the Muruts of Trusan and the Dayaks of Saribas, Kalaka and Rejang in May 1886.

On New Year's Eve there was always the traditional banquet and ball when about a hundred guests would sit down to a long table with the Rajah at one end and the *Ranee* at the other.

Before the Second World War, the tower was covered with what we used to like to call 'ivy', although it was really a local creeper. However, there was a superstition that the tower should not be white-washed or the 'ivy' removed, otherwise bad luck would follow. During the war, Prince Maeda of Japan occupied the Astana and cut down the 'ivy'. Three days later he was killed when the plane in which he was travelling crashed into the sea off Bintulu.

Nothing has been further written by anyone who had ever resided in the Astana since the *Ranee* Sylvia's biography about forty years ago. So much of its history is now lost. When Cession came in 1946, it was the only property the Rajah kept in Sarawak, but it has since been occupied by Colonial Governors and now, following independence, by Sarawak-born Governors.

CHAPTER 3
THE BROOKE FAMILY BURIAL GROUND

SHOULD you glance at the riverside in Kuching about midway between Fort Margherita and the Astana, you will see a small piece of ground surrounded by a low, white, *belian* fence. Although hundreds, or perhaps even thousands, of people pass it every day, I doubt whether more than a few know what it is and certainly hardly anyone living in Kuching today knows its full history.

It is a small piece of ground which was specially consecrated by Bishop McDougall in the 1850s — over a hundred and forty years ago — to be used as a Christian burial place for members of the Rajah's family. The few records available indicate that it contains four graves and one monument.

The first to be buried there was Anne, wife of the first Rajah's nephew, Captain Brooke. She died on November 25, 1858. Captain Brooke was the nephew who was made the Rajah's heir, first with the title of *Tuan Besar* and then *Rajah Muda,* but he forfeited his title and position later owing to an unfortunate disagreement over his seeking the protection of Sarawak by Belgium without the knowledge of the Rajah. Anne was only twenty-four years of age when she died from fever twelve days after giving birth to her second child. This son Hope Brooke, lived to give the second Rajah considerable trouble by claiming from time to time that he was the

rightful Rajah of Sarawak which of course, he would have been but for the situation related above. Anne, who was on her way to Sarawak when the Insurrection took place in April 1857, had barely been married for two years when she died and her death has been described as "a real calamity to the people of Kuching" (or Sarawak as it was then called). After Anne's death, her grave was always carefully tended by the Brooke family. Flower seeds were regularly ordered from England and planted on her grave and in the little piece of ground surrounding it which was also always kept clean and tidy.

Two years after Anne's death, on October 28, 1860, her eldest son, Francis Basil Brooke, also died. He was only three years old. He was laid to rest in a little grave beside his mother. Captain Brooke then went on leave to England and became engaged to his second wife, Julia, but on returning to Sarawak he did not feel happy with the trouble brewing between himself and his uncle, the Rajah, and wrote to Julia breaking off the engagement. However, the letter did not arrive in time and she was already on her way to Sarawak when it reached her home. Once having arrived in Kuching, she and Captain Brooke were married and she eventually received the letter several months later.

Julia always took a particular interest in tending the graves of Anne and little Francis but it is said that the sight of these lonely graves used to cause her continual fits of intense depression. She seemed to have a premonition that she would join them soon, and so she did. After only two years of married life she died on April 10, 1862, aged twenty-eight, shortly after giving birth to a daughter, Agnes, whom she committed into the care of Harriette, the wife of Bishop McDougall, on her death-bed. Thus she became the third member of the family to be buried there.

Captain Brooke had by now had the misfortune of losing two wives and a son in the space of only three-and-a-half-years. Little wonder that this and the added burden of his dispute with his uncle, the Rajah, broke him both in body and mind. He died in 1868, six years after the death of Julia, at a comparatively early age of forty years — paralysed.

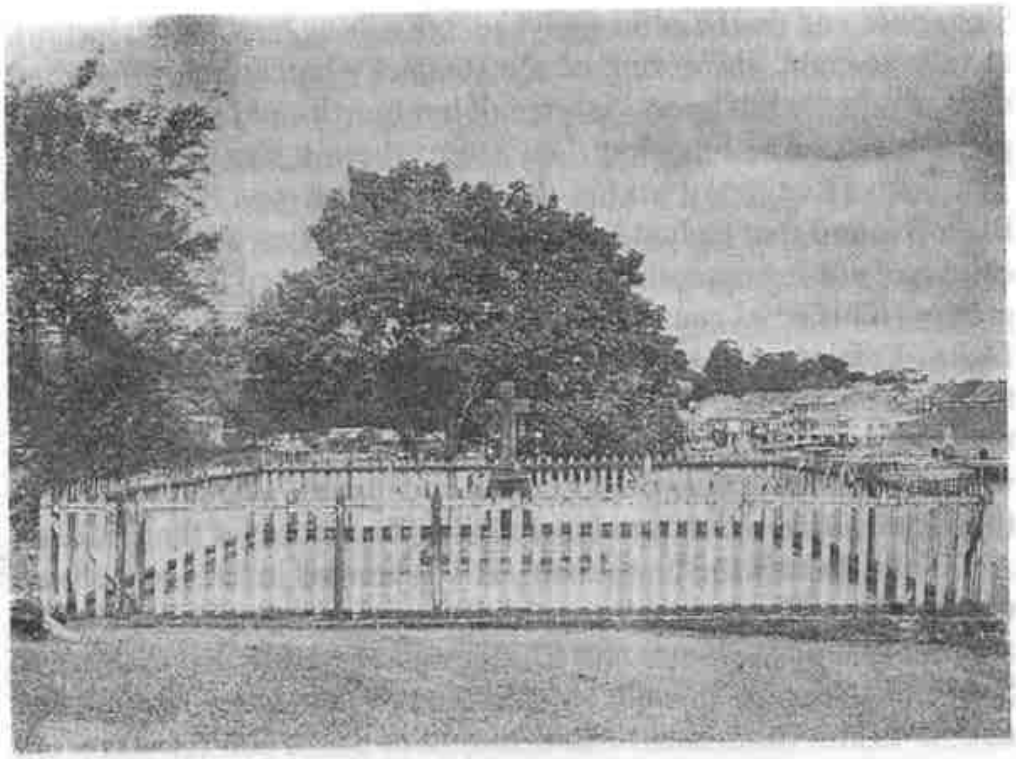
The last member of the Brooke family to be buried there was the *Ranee* Margaret's fourth child. The *Ranee* had been on a trip to

Singapore and on the return voyage to Kuching had the misfortune to fall, at night, down one of the steamer's hatchways which had been carelessly left open. As a result her fourth child was born dead prematurely. The question then arose where it should be buried. The doctor suggested asking the Bishop. This was done, but the Bishop found that he had reluctantly to decide that as the still-born child had not been baptised, it should not be buried in consecrated ground. This news caused the Ranee much distress, but the Malay *Datus*, hearing of it, took matters into their own hands. They went to the Astana, laid the poor little mite in a small coffin and carried it themselves to the little cemetery where, to use the Ranee's own words, "they buried it with affection and dignity". Needless to say, this is one burial which is not included in the records of the Diocese.

Then there is the monument. It was erected in 1874 in memory of the Ranee Margaret's three children — Ghita, a girl, the eldest; and her twin sons, James and Charles, all of whom died in the Red Sea in October 1873, while on their way to England. Their mother and several writers record that they died from cholera but their father, the second Rajah, Sir Charles Brooke, supports the writers of the book *The Two White Rajah*, who say that they died from "heat apoplexy".

Ghita was only three years old and the boys nearly two. Ghita was a great pet among the Malays. From the time that she was born in 1871 until the present day, numerous boats and launches have been given this name. It also became a very popular name for girls in Kuching for many years. It is possible that Kampung Gita, just across Satok Suspension Bridge, where the Malays from Kampung Jawa was now re-settled, is also named after her. Some people are of the opinion that the launches and boats are really named after the *Ranee* Margaret but others do not support their view since, in none of the numerous books about Sarawak, is she ever referred to as "Ghita". However, it must be remembered that "Ghita" was the Rajah's pet name for the *Ranee* Margaret and others were not allowed to use it.

Some people believe that the four Europeans killed in the Insurrection of 1857 are also buried in this little plot of ground. They were Henry Nicholetts, only seventeen years of age, who was killed and his body mistaken for that of the Rajah. He was be-



The Brooke family burial ground.

headed, his head fixed atop a long pole, and displayed in the town. Then, Richard Wellington, twenty-one-year-old member of the Borneo Company, who was living with the Middletons (Joseph Middleton was the Chief Constable or Chief Police Officer), was killed while trying to defend Mrs. Middleton and her two children with only a sword in his hand. Lastly, the two Middleton children, John aged six and Charles aged four, who were forced by the insurgents to show them where their father was hiding. But their father had already escaped through the bathroom at the back of the house. Their mother, thinking she had no means of escape, hid in a large jar. Failing to catch the father, the insurgents became furious. They cut off the elder boy's head and kicked it around with fiendish laughter. Mrs. Middleton peeped from above the jar and saw it happened. Not contented with this, they then set fire to the house and threw the younger boy into the flames. Mrs. Middleton was found later almost dead on the lawn, but she eventually recovered.

In view of the fact that the old Christian cemetery was opened in 1848, nine years before the Insurrection, I cannot support the belief that these victims of the Insurrection were buried in the Brooke family cemetery. The register of burials for the Diocese of Kuching records that all four were buried on 21 April 1857, about two days after they were killed. But the register only records burials in the Diocese and does not state the exact places. For instance, some of the burials recorded are known to have taken place at sea. Thus I am not able to prove conclusively that the burials did not take place in the Brooke family cemetery.

And now, what of the graves? Should you care to visit this spot, you will find that they are carefully cared for — probably by persons who do not know what they are, or who they belong to. But you will not find any tombstone; they have all crumbled away many years ago and as a result there is nothing to mark the actual position of the respective graves. Only the monument remains. Of course, there are no more flowers and the graves are unvisited but at least it is nice to know that they are not entirely neglected and forgotten.

CHAPTER 4

FORT ALICE, SIMANGGANG (1864)

FORT Alice, Simanggang, attained its centenary on March 24, 1964, but most of the structure is much older since it was first erected at Skrang, about five miles further up-river, in 1849 where it was known as Fort James after the first Rajah, Sir James Brooke.

In 1864, Fort James was dismantled and a good deal of the material was transferred to Simanggang, where it was re-erected and remained unnamed for some years until after the arrival of the *Ranee* Margaret in Sarawak in 1870, when it was eventually called Fort Alice, after her second Christian name.

Fort Margherita in Kuching, built in 1879, and Fort Lili in Betong, built in 1858, are called after the *Ranee*'s first and third Christian names.

Fort Alice is the only fort of its kind in the country. It is built entirely of *belian* (ironwood) timber and is square in shape with a small tower at each inland corner. Its peculiar features are an open courtyard in the centre, a type of draw-bridge or steps, which could at one time be drawn up in case of attack or which in any case, were drawn up each night, and a spiked iron defence running round the outside.

In the early days Fort Alice mounted some guns and the Rajah garrisoned it with a strong detachment of Sarawak Rangers.

The first Rajah had a very good reason for building a fort at Skrang, which was in a strategic position to prevent the powerful Skrang Dayaks from passing down-river to the sea to join their strong partners, the Saribas Dayaks, in their piratical attacks on coastal shipping and also from head-hunting expeditions against their weaker neighbours, the Balau and Sebuyau Dayaks of the lower Batang Lupar.

It was also the same site as that taken by Captain Keppel of the *Dido,* in his expedition against the Skrang pirates in 1844. Some of his Redcoat British soldiers were killed there. This later led to a belief among the Dayaks that the long-nosed monkeys (*rasong,* or *orang Belanda* meaning "Dutchman") are the spirits of these soldiers.

It took the Rajah a great deal of trouble to subdue the strong Skrang and Saribas pirate hordes and he was determined that he would not allow them to get out of hand again. On July 31, 1849, with the help of three British warships, he launched an attack against them at dead of night at Beting Maru, a sand spit lying between the mouths of the Saribas and Kalaka Rivers, and thus put an end to their piratical power. The fact that British warships had been used caused a great uproar in the British Parliament.

Immediately after this, Mr. Crookshank was sent to build the fort at Skrang which he did with the help of friendly tribes in the district, and it was put under the charge of Sherip Matusain, an old Malay trusted by the Rajah. But the local tribes did not have confidence in him and so Mr. Brereton, only twenty years of age, was sent to take charge. He was later assisted by Mr. Alan Lee.

In 1853 Rentap, a notorious Skrang Dayak Chief who was fond of piracy, became restless at the presence of the fort, which prevented him from moving down to the sea to continue his old practices, and decided to attack it. Before he could do so, Mr. Brereton, supported by Mr. Lee, who had brought up a strong force of Balau Dayaks from the Lingga River, went upriver to meet him. Unfortunately, Mr. Lee was killed, but the fort remained intact. From that day to this, there has never been any fear of attack on the fort. It took three expeditions to defeat Rentap, after which all was peaceful in the district once more.

Mr. Brereton died in 1854 from dysentery and the *Tuan Muda,* who later became the second Rajah, was sent to replace him. He was followed by Mr. Watson, who was in charge when the move to Simanggang took place.

Having built the fort at Skrang, it was thought that a town would in time develop around it but it was found that the site was unsuitable since it was too low-lying and liable to flood. This led to the decision to move the fort to Simanggang, where it was re-erected on a small hill rising from the river bank but sufficiently high to afford a view over a wide expanse of country, which is one of the most populous centres of the Sea Dayaks. It also commanded a long stretch of river on either side, which was so necessary for the position of a fort in the old days.

It is said that the second Rajah had a particular affection for this part of the country and sent all his best officers there. He directed it personally from 1854 to 1916 (sixty-two years) when he handed over its affairs to his son, who later became the third Rajah. For this reason there was no first-class Resident in the Second Division during the time of the second Rajah.

From 1864 to 1869, Fort Alice came under the *Tuan Bunsu,* Mr. Henry Stuart Johnson, the younger brother of the second Rajah, who was Resident of Batang Lupar and Saribas, based at Fort Lili, Betong, until Mr. James Brooke Crookshank was appointed the first Resident of Simanggang. But Fort Alice had always been fortunate in having an extremely efficient Native Officer, Abang Aing, grandfather of Datu Abang Haji Zin, who was quite capable of taking charge when necessary. Mr. Crookshank created a great impression on the Dayaks in the district and when he was later transferred to Sibu, many of them used to try to take their court cases to him there. His name is still perpetuated by them in their songs in which he is referred to as a man of noble birth. Other well-known Residents who followed him, viz., Maxwell, Deshon, Bailey, Page-Turner and Archer, are also remembered in their songs, but Deshon and Bailey more than the others as their names rhyme more easily with most Dayak words.

The *Ranee* Margaret was never to forget her first visit to Fort Alice. During a Dayak dance put on in the fort in her honour, she saw real heads being used for the first time. She immediately rushed

Fort Alice

to her room, where she collapsed, and had to be excused for the rest of the evening.

Fort Alice was the first station in which the third Rajah served his cadetship at the age of seventeen under Mr. Bailey in 1892. The disastrous Cholera Expedition started from Fort Alice in 1902, when two thousand men out of a force of twelve thousand died without even coming within sight of the enemy.

The famous writer, Somerset Maugham, spent some days in Simanggang in 1921 and used it as the scene for some of his short stories; amusing, but of course, not entirely true. For instance, there was the Resident who, although living on his own, insisted on dressing for dinner every evening. He also had his *London Times* carefully laid out on his breakfast table every morning, although they used to arrive in fortnightly batches and were about two months old by the time he received them. He would not read any until the correct day of the week had arrived.

It used to be said that those who were mentioned in Somerset Maugham's book, pretended they were angry, and those who were not mentioned were extremely jealous. Nevertheless, when Somerset Maugham notified the Rajah a few years later that he intended

paying a second visit to Sarawak, he received a polite reply informing him that it would not be convenient.

Many years ago, the fort represented a complete station. Besides serving as a fort, it was also the Officers' Quarters, the Government Offices, the Court House and the Police Station. Following the rapid expansion of government departments, new buildings sprang up to fulfil these requirements and the fort gradually became deserted.

There was an old tradition in Fort Alice, which was observed for a hundred years until 1964. This was the evening call at eight o'clock, when the Resident used to have his dinner and the drawbridge was drawn up for the night. It was a call made by a policeman after he had struck the eight o'clock gong.

The original call was changed slightly twice over the years but its meaning remained almost the same.

The Call (in Iban)

Oh Ha! Oh Ha! Oh Ha!
Jam diatu pukol lapan,
Tangga udah di-tarit,
Pintu udah di-tambit,
Orang ari ulu,
Orang ari ili,
Nadai tahu niki kubu agi.

Translation

Oh Ha! Oh Ha! Oh Ha!
The time is now eight o'clock,
The steps have been drawn up,
The door is closed.
People from up-river,
People from down-river,
Are not allowed to come up to the fort any more.

CHAPTER 5
THE TWO GREAT FIRES OF SIBU

SIBU Bazaar has been devastated by fire twice, first in 1889 and then again in 1928 and it might have suffered a similar fate in 1902 had it not been for the prompt action of a twenty-year-old Cadet, Hugh Lewis Owen, who strangely enough, was Resident, Third Division, and stationed at Sibu twenty-six years later when the 1928 conflagration took place.

5.1 THE 1889 FIRE

Sibu, founded in 1862, had become a prosperous little town of scattered wooden houses by the 1880s, but this was no longer good enough. Thus, in 1884, representatives from the government and the elders of the Chinese community met together and the result was a decision to build a bazaar, both for the future improvement of the town and the eventual benefit of all. And so it came about that the construction of Sibu's first bazaar was commenced in 1885 and was completed in 1887. This pride of the townspeople consisted of a single row of sixty shophouses standing where Channel Road is today. They were built almost entirely of *belian* (ironwood) and strongly put together; in fact, too strongly, as events were later to prove.

On the night of February 10, during the *landas* (rainy season) in

was being brought to hospital from upriver, plunged into the red hot ashes before his friends could prevent him.

Wireless messages were immediately sent to all stations nearby to collect all available *attap* (palm leaf roofing) and *kajang* (palm leaf walling). A large quantity of these arrived the same afternoon. Dayaks worked hard and brought over wood so that by evening a number of temporary sheds were erected and occupied. Those rendered homeless were also transferred to gardening areas located downriver.

But the destruction wrought by the two great fires could have been so much worse. A total of two hundred and ninety shophouses had been completely destroyed without the loss of a single life.

CHAPTER 6
THE GREAT FIRE OF KUCHING (1884)

SHORTLY after one o'clock on the morning of Sunday, 20 January, 1884, the whole of Kuching town was awakened by the alarm that a house at the corner of Carpenter and China Street was discovered to be on fire. The fire engine manned by the police, was on the scene only a few minutes after the alarm had been given, but by then the flames had already burst through the roof of the house and, fanned by a strong breeze, started to spread down one side of China Street towards Main Bazaar with almost unbelievable rapidity. On the opposite side of China Street stood the gambling houses which were built of wood. These were easily reached by the huge flames which stretched across the narrow street and thus both sides were soon engulfed in flames.

The Europeans, including members of the Christian mission; hundreds of Malays, under the leadership of their datus and the Chinese shopkeepers, soon started to help the fire engine by passing buckets of water.

It appeared that nothing could stop the spread of the fire as the flames made their way towards Main Bazaar which, unlike the wooden houses which were burning, consisted of large, comparatively new brick shophouses built only twelve years before,

in 1872, and which were the fist shophouses in Kuching to have five-foot ways. Here, wealthy shopkeepers and traders flung their goods into the street by the riverside and, as can well be imagined, looting commenced almost immediately. The looters' method was to offer to carry goods and valuables from the burning houses and those which were seriously threatened by fire, then quickly rushed off with them to their boats and paddled away as fast-as they could.

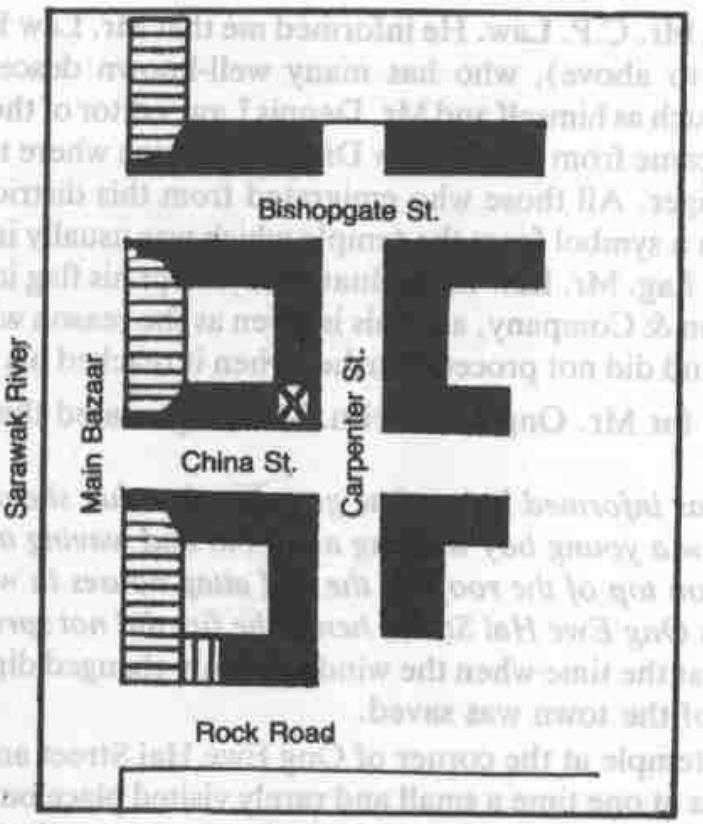
Suddenly, the wind changed and the fire spread back towards Carpenter Street. There, it spread along both sides to Rock Road and in the other direction to Bishopsgate Street. On the left hand side, entering Carpenter Street from Rock Road end, several brick buildings had just been erected by Mr. Law Kian Huat, a leading businessman, who came to Kuching in 1852 and was one of the founders of Ghee Soon & Company. These were chiefly billiard saloons and restaurants. The fact that the fire raged beyond these brick houses made the position look much more serious. Then it spread down Rock Road, facing the government offices. Here the shop of Messrs. Ghee Soon & Company, the largest Chinese firm in Kuching and holders of the opium, *arrack* (spirit) and gambling farm monopolies without break since 1867, was reached. From this house poured forth a strange assortment of goods and valuables: balls of opium, cases of champagne, chests of money (there were no banks in those days) and numerous other things. These were placed alongside the Steamship Company godown, which was more or less where it is today.

For a time the raging fire gained control. It was suggested that one house be blown up to make a gap in the line, but this did not prove necessary since suddenly, rain fell in torrents, beating down the flames. The danger was over in Rock Road. But in the houses situated at the junctions of China Street and Main Bazaar, Bishopsgate Street and Main Bazaar (Ong Ewe Hai Street had not yet been built), the fire still raged fiercely. It now seemed that the whole of Main Bazaar must catch fire when another sudden change in the wind occurred and the rain continued to fall so heavily that the fire gradually subsided. The time was now 6 a.m. Thus in only five hours, the raging fire had reduced nearly the whole of Kuching town to ashes; almost all the buildings destroyed being of wood. At the

final count, the official damage was a hundred and ninety shophouses totally destroyed and six partly destroyed.

The shophouses which had been destroyed were gradually rebuilt over the next two years — seventy in 1885 and the rest in 1886. In the meantime, the government built temporary *attap* houses for those who were homeless. Ong Ewe Hai Street was built in 1885, a year after the fire, and comprised forty shophouses.

Following the fire, the police spent much time catching the looters and many were brought to justice. A clever capture took place on the *S.S. Ranee,* ten days after the fire. The pawnbroker reported to the government that he was ruined as everything in his shop had been lost in the flames. However, the lifestyle in which he and his partners had been living since the fire aroused suspicion. When it was found that they intended leaving for Singapore by the



Plan of Kuching. X marks spot where fire started. Black portion shows the parts destroyed.

S.S. Ranee, about twenty policemen hid inside the ship until it departed from the wharf at 5.30 a.m. When they finally emerged and searched the boat, they found gold, silver and jewellery hidden in boxes and bundles at the bottom of a bag full of durians. A launch which had already been arranged, brought the pawnbroker and his partners back to Kuching from the mouth of the river and they were appropriately dealt with.

Following this disastrous fire, shophouses in the town were no longer allowed to be built of wood. The second Rajah, Sir Charles Brooke then issued his famous order: "In future, all wooden shophouses shall be built of bricks."

There is an interesting sequel to the above story. For the information I am now going to impart, I am indebted to two very remarkable and well-known personalities of Kuching, Mr. C.P. Law and Mr. Ong Kwan Hin.

First, Mr. C.P. Law. He informed me that Mr. Law Kian Huat (referred to above), who has many well-known descendants in Kuching such as himself and Mr. Dennis Law, editor of the *Sarawak Tribune,* came from the Swatow District in China where the temple god is a tiger. All those who emigrated from this district brought with them a symbol from the temple which was usually in the form of a black flag. Mr. Law Kian Huat always kept his flag in his shop, Ghee Soon & Company, and this is given as the reason why the fire stopped and did not proceed further when it reached his premises.

Now for Mr. Ong Kwan Hin. Mr. Ong related the following story:

"I was informed by my late grandmother that she and several people saw a young boy wearing a red bib and waving a black flag standing on top of the roofs of the leaf attap houses in what is now known as Ong Ewe Hai Street; hence the fire did not spread there." This was at the time when the wind suddenly changed direction and the rest of the town was saved.

The temple at the corner of Ong Ewe Hai Street and Wayang Street was at one time a small and rarely visited place but, after the boy god had supposedly saved the houses along that area, the people wishing to encourage him to remain and further protect them, rebuilt the temple in 1897 and made the boy god the principal

god of the temple. There is also a secondary god, the goddess of births and deaths. Her idol is always clothed in black.

The boy god's name is Kuek Seng Ong. There are two temple festivals each year celebrated in his honour. One is on his birthday and the other on his 'day of enlightenment' (the day he returned to heaven).

CHAPTER 7
LEGENDS

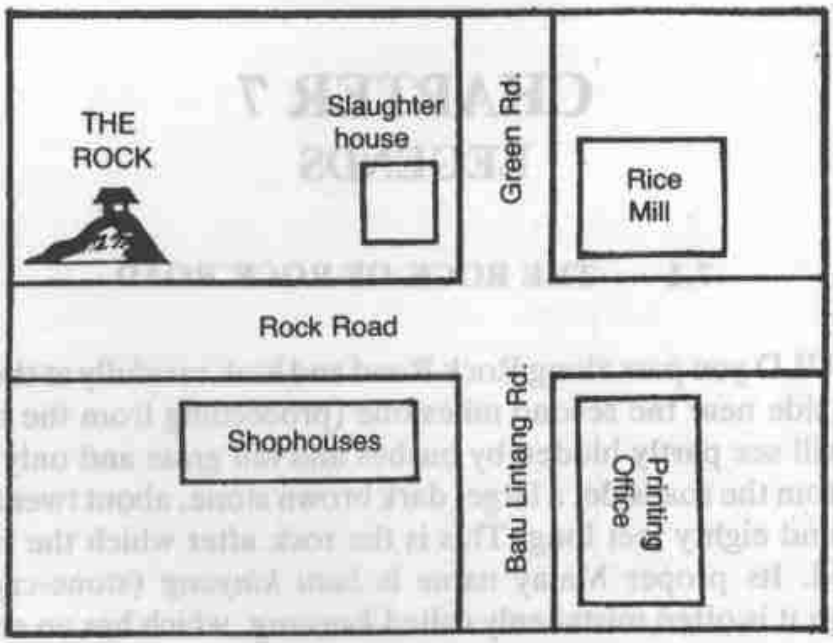
7.1 THE ROCK OF ROCK ROAD

SHOULD you pass along Rock Road and look carefully at the right hand side near the second milestone (proceeding from the town), you will see partly hidden by bushes and tall grass and only a few feet from the roadside, a large, dark brown stone, about twenty feet high and eighty feet long. This is the rock after which the road is named. Its proper Malay name is *batu kinyang* (stone-crystal), though it is often mistakenly called *kenyang*, which has an entirely different meaning, that is, "to be full" (of food), or "appetite satisfied". Some people also say that *kinyang* means "sacred". However, I think I can safely say that it is a sandstone outcrop; but it is peculiar in that it appears to be covered with a kind of 'skin' about one-inch thick, which peels or flakes off. There are two more of these stones in Kuching; one on the site of the swimming pool and the other on the hill at the entrance to William Tan Road, near the racecourse.

This kind of stone is usually regarded as *keramat* (holy, miraculous) by non-Christian peoples of all races in Sarawak. The Malays in particular, who are said to have been in Sarawak for over twenty-five generations or about six hundred years, used to regard this

stone as a possessor of miraculous powers for countless years that nobody knows when it started.

When the first Rajah arrived in Sarawak in 1839 there were only eight hundred Malays and twenty Chinese in Kuching. The whole town consisted of only a single row of leaf *attap* houses stretching from about halfway down what we now call "Main Bazaar" to about halfway down Gambier Road, but there was already a jungle path leading from the town past the rock to the Dayak villages further away.



Named Jalan Batu Kinyang, when it was translated into English instead of being called "Stone-crystal Road", it was simply called "Rock Road"

There is a belief among the peoples of Sarawak that this kind of stone can grow. Although science might say *No*, generations of observers say *Yes!*

To support the belief that the stone grows, many people have pointed out the case of the Kuching swimming pool. Before the Second World War, the site of the pool was that occupied by the Sarawak Turf Club grandstand, which was built on rock similar to

the rock of Rock Road. I often used to see it covered with lighted candles and sometimes offerings of food placed below. This rock was blasted away to level the site for the new swimming pool. But what happened? After only a few weeks, the bottom of the pool was found to be breaking up and had to be relaid. In other words, the *batu kinyang* had grown and pushed its way through the tiles at the bottom of the pool. Many people are convinced that this will happen repeatedly, so if it does happen again, do not say that I have not recorded the bizarre occurrence here.

Recently, a report appeared in the Singapore newspapers that an outcrop of granite had suddenly grown on the top of Mount Kinabalu in Sabah, but 'suddenly' to a geologist might mean a million years. Nevertheless, it does seem to show that stones *do* grow.

As regards the rock at Rock Road, I have sometimes suggested that perhaps the earth surrounding it had been washed away over the years, thus exposing more stone making it to appear as though the stone had actually grown. I have not yet met any of my Asian

The shed on top of the stone.

friends who will support my views. I have heard it suggested that the rock being sandstone is porous and absorbent and when saturated with water swells like a sponge and in this way 'grows'. But what happens when it dries out during the dry spells?

The small shed erected on top of the stone was originally built around 1897 by the mother of Mr. Ong Kwan Hin as a form of thanksgiving after he had recovered from a serious illness when he was young. The purpose was to give shelter to those who went there to pray.

During the Japanese Occupation the shed, which was by then nearly fifty years old, started to tumble down. Then a strange thing happened. One day Mr. Ong who was riding a bicycle, was knocked down by a Japanese officer's car, which was being driven at a terrific speed and was attempting to overtake a lorry only a short distance from the stone. Mr. Ong was picked up and taken to the General Hospital, where he was thought to be dead upon admission but fortunately survived. Then people suggested to him that perhaps the cause of the accident was because the stone was angry as the shed was in such a bad condition. He then rebuilt it and this is the shed which you can see there today.

Executions by using the *keris* (Malay dagger) were carried out near the rock in the old days. As the town of Kuching began to develop during the era of the second Rajah, it became necessary to find suitable stone for road-making. The Rajah suggested blasting the rock for that purpose but it so happened that a cholera epidemic struck Kuching at that particular period and the Malays successfully pleaded with him to change his mind.

The only other source of stone supply was at Sijingkat, near the mouth of the Sarawak River, which was eventually used. The stone was brought up to Kuching in *tongkangs* (barges) and crushed by a stone crusher by the riverside on the site now occupied by the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce.

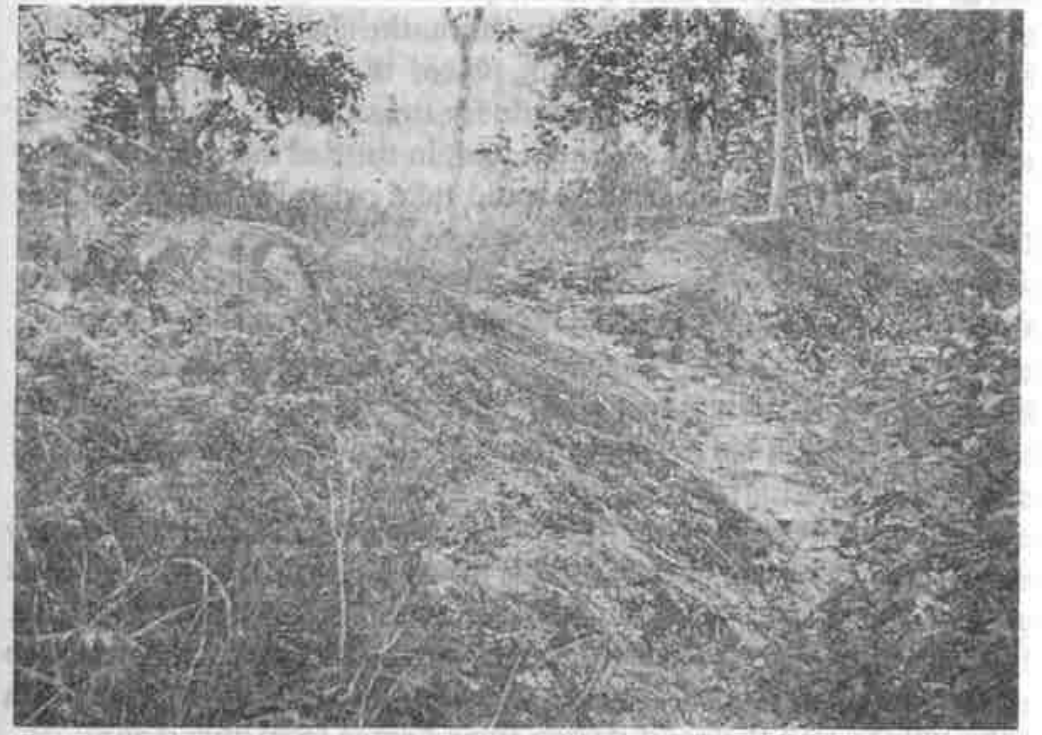
In 1912, an awful blunder was made when the government built the present slaughter house, which is quite close to the stone. As pigs were being slaughtered there, such distress was caused to the Malay community who immediately declared that all sacredness had left the stone and that they could no longer regard it as *keramat*. Nevertheless, I find that the Malays do still visit it. Should you care

to take a look at it now, you will find the remains of candles, flowers and food there, and words painted and scratched on the stone surface in Chinese and Malay, including such pathetic requests as *"Please help Bujang who is suffering from tuberculosis"*.

7.2 THE SISTER STONE

There is another *keramat* or sacred stone in Kuching. It is regarded as the sister stone of the stone at Mile 2, Rock Road. Both are the same kind of stone known as *batu kinyang* (stone-crystal) which has always been regarded by many people as a stone which is capable of growing.

This stone is much smaller in size than that found at Rock Road, but it can easily be seen as it is only about twenty yards off the left-hand side of Ong Kee Hui Road, close to the fence which divides the Radio Sarawak land from a rubber garden. Like all stones of this nature, it has a crystal clear pool of water beside it.



The Sister Stone.

When I visited it, I found three offerings which had obviously been placed there only about an hour before I arrived as some of the candles and joss sticks were still burning. I did not find any written requests as I did on the stone at Rock Road. Except for a small iron plate recording that it was once used as a survey base, there is no writing on it at all.

I walked to the top of the stone but my Indian frjend, who had taken me there, was very careful that I should not walk right across it out of respect for its sacredness. I do not think that this is a stone which is frequented by gamblers and the sick as its special power is to make barren women bear children. I am told that it rarely fails.

Here are some of the items I found among the offerings. There were candles, small bundles of *sirih* all ready to chew, bundles of *daun rokok* (a straw-like wrapping for native cigarettes), joss sticks, several different kinds of flowers and, in one case, two one-cent copper coins bearing the image of the third Rajah.

During the Second World War, Ong Kee Hui Road was not yet constructed and was still part of the railway line. One of the railway engines had been left on the line quite close to this stone and was repeatedly machine-gunned by both the Japanese and Allied planes. When the attacks took place, the people living in the neighbourhood immediately made for the stone. Here, they would either sit on top of it or around it and, in spite of the fact that there was nowhere else where they could take cover, nobody was ever injured.

7.3 THE LEGEND OF BATU KAWA

The legend of Batu Kawa is one of the oldest in the history of the Sarawak Malays but perhaps, many people are not familiar with the details.

It is a story of a stone or stones. I have already related the story of the *batu kinyang* (stone crystal) located at the second mile, Rock Road in Kuching. Now this is about another stone, the *batu kawa*. For this, one must move about another six miles in a direct line up Rock Road and Batu Kawa Road to the village of Batu Kawa. Both the village and the road derive their names from this stone.

I shall have to divide my story into two parts — first, how Batu

Kawa derived its name and secondly, the legend of how the circle of stones on the riverside below the village came to be there.

The word *kawa,* or more correctly spelt *kawah,* according to the accepted modern method of spelling, means a cauldron or large cooking pot in which rice is cooked for a large number of people. A *kawa batu* would mean a 'stone cauldron', but in this case the word *batu* comes first. Thus, a *batu kawa* means the stone from which the cauldron is made.

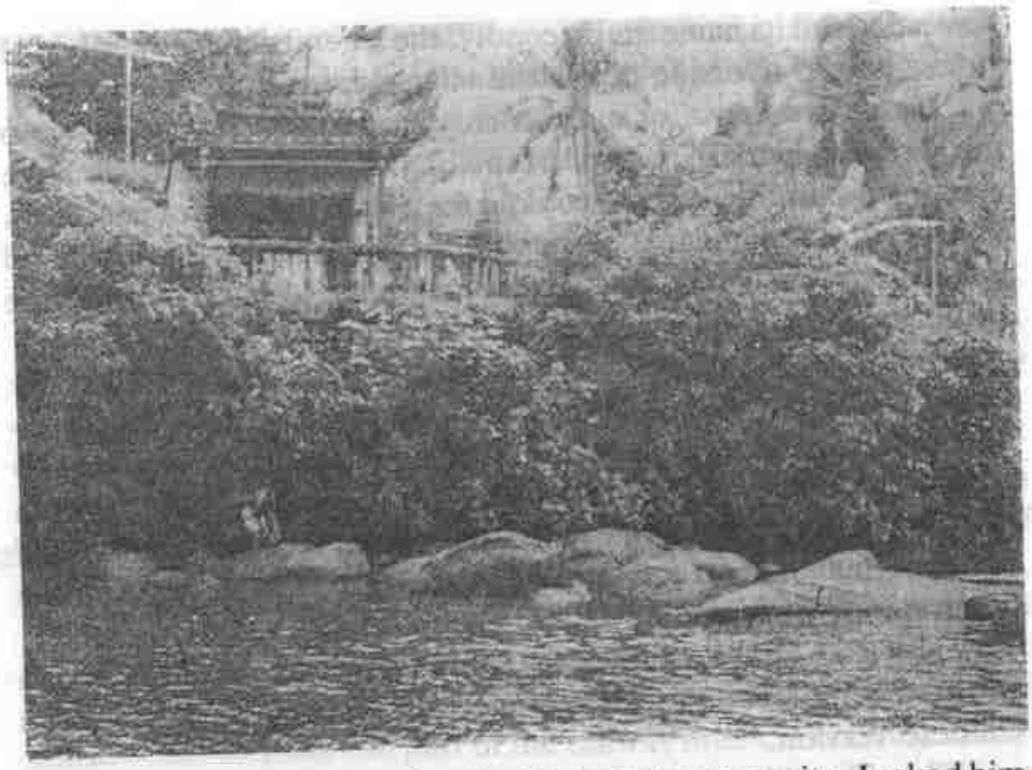
When I made enquiries about this many years ago I was told by an old man that it was quite true; it was the custom in the neighourhood to use the stones on the riverside to make cauldrons by hollowing them out. These were always used on big occasions such as marriage feasts when rice had to be cooked for a large number of people. Hence, from this peculiar custom the village derived the name *Batu Kawa.*

This is a Malay version of the legend of the stones. As there is a Chinese temple built over the stones, perhaps there is also a Chinese version.

Should you go to Batu Kawa and look across the river in the direction of the village, you will see a circle of stones on the riverside with a Chinese temple built just above it. The circle of stones comprises the stones I am referring to, and my story will also explain why Malays are basically always kind to cats and will never harm them.

In my early days in Sarawak, I was once given a kitten which I took home and placed in the care of my Malay 'boy'. He immediately asked me whether it was a male or female. On being told that it was the latter, he again asked me what I intended doing with the kittens when they were duly born. I replied that I thought it was still rather early to think about that matter and tried to assure him that there was no need to worry as I would no doubt find a solution to the problem. But he was not satisfied with my reply and seemed to be worried as to the method of disposal of the kittens. When he discovered that what I meant to say was that I would probably drown them, a look of horror spread over his face as he said, "What! Drown the kittens? You cannot do that! If the worst comes to the worst, we shall have to build a small house in the garden for them."

At the time I thought little of the matter but his concern later



struck me as being unusual and, at the next opportunity, I asked him why he was so terrified at the idea that I would harm a cat. In reply, he asked me whether I had ever heard the story of Batu Kawa and, after a little encouragement, I persuaded him to tell me the following story.

Many years ago, a wedding feast was arranged between the son and daughter of two of the most influential families in the district of Batu Kawa. The wedding day eventually arrived and the occasion being an important one, numerous guests were invited and assembled to witness the ceremony. The proceeding commenced with the bride and bridegroom seated together on a dais and a large company of friends and relatives squatting on the floor around them.

After a while a cat found its way into the room and was immediately pounced upon by one of the guests, who thrust its tail into the fire. The poor, terror-stricken animal wriggled itself free of its captor and proceeded to run round and round the room, shrieking with pain, but laughter and kicks were all the sympathy it received.

Then an old man rose to his feet and with upraised arms, quietened those present and begged them to be careful as only

calamity would come to them should they continue to torment the poor, defenceless creature, but his words were only received with further outbursts of laughter as they continued in their cruel treatment of the wretched cat.

However, it was not long before there were signs of the old man's words being fulfilled since, within only a few minutes, a strong wind began to blow. It increased in force until it was impossible to keep the doors and windows closed and nothing could be heard above the terrifying roar it made. This was followed by a sudden deafening clap of thunder immediately overhead and at that very instant the entire group of people assembled there turned into stones exactly where they sat. That is why the formation of the stones is like a circle, with two larger stones representing the bride and bridegroom in the centre.

7.4 THE LEGENDS OF BATU KITANG, LANDEH AND TANJONG DATU

It is common among Eastern races that a legend passed down from father to son for many generations eventually attains the dignity of a fact and is accepted by all. This is so with the legends of the Kuching Malays. Unfortunately, many of these have now become confusing, with more than one version of each. Soon these will be entirely lost as little has been recorded of them.

When I first came to Sarawak very few Malays could read or write and in the days before electricity was installed in the *kampung* (villages), it was customary for them to gather together in the evenings and relate old stories. But when they became educated enough to write, they did not record the old legends, the reason no doubt being the same as that we hear so often in the past: "Everybody knows that." As such, only very little is remembered now.

From the legend of Batu Kawa I shall now take you a little further up, on the left hand branch of the Sarawak River to Batu Kitang.

Batu Kitang has a legend, a very old one, which apparently is almost forgotten. Although some of my old Malay friends have promised to help me, I have no yet been able to unearth the full

story. However, I can tell you that it is the story of an attack by fish on the people of that place.

Batu Kitang is said to have derived its name from *batu* (rock or stone) and *kitang* or *ikan kitang* (spotted butterfish), hence the name seems to mean the 'rock where the butterfish live'. There might even have been a rock or stone there at one time which resembled a butterfish in shape similar to the *Batu Buaya* (Crocodile Rock) on the beach at Santubong, so called because it is thought to resemble the shape of a crocodile's head. The word *batu* could also mean a milestone but it would not apply in this case as there were no milestones in Sarawak when the place derived its name.

The spotted butterfish has poisonous dorsal fins and is therefore, dangerous to barefooted bathers. Usually it lives in water hollows, hence the Malays have a saying, "In the water hollow, the butterfish has lordship", meaning "Everyone has a sphere of his own".

In view of the fact that butterfish are not normally found in rivers, it is extraordinary that they should have come all the way up from the sea to attack the people of Batu Kitang. How the attack was warded off, I still have not been able to discover but I am told that the story is very much the same as the famous legend of the attack by swordfish on Singapore. When all seemed lost, a young boy advised the Rajah of Singapore to cut down banana stems and throw them into the water. This the Rajah did and when the swordfish next attacked, their 'swords' became stuck in the soft banana stems and thereby rendered helpless. Sad to relate the Rajah, then thinking that the boy would grow up to be too clever for him and become a possible rival to his throne, promptly put him to death.

When twenty-four Japanese bomber aircraft suddenly appeared over Kuching exactly at noon on Friday, December 19, 1941, a mad rush then began as everything on wheels seemed to make its way up Rock Road to anywhere as far as possible from the town. But many Malays including most of the *Datus*, who feared for their safety simply got into their boats and paddled slowly upriver to Landeh, a place known to the Malays as *keramat* (sacred or hal-

lowed) where there is a hallowed tomb and where they knew they would be safe from further enemy bombing.

I will further relate the legend of how the tomb came to be there and how Tanjong Datu derived its name.

Very many years ago *Datu* Landi, a great Malay chief, lived near Landeh about five miles upriver from Batu Kitang. One morning when he was about to pray, a Dayak paddled along-side the landing place and in his *sampan* was the body of a *krah* monkey which he had just speared. The *Datu* seeing the animal bleeding, asked Dayak not to bring it near his house and told him to keep it tied up in the boat. "But it is dead," the Dayak answered. However, the *Datu* was determined that he was not going to have his landing place stained with the blood of the monkey. He was standing in the water bathing before praying, and as his order was not obeyed, he splashed water from his wet hand over the monkey which immediately came to life, jumped out of the boat and bounded into the jungle as fast as it could go, followed in vain by the Dayak.

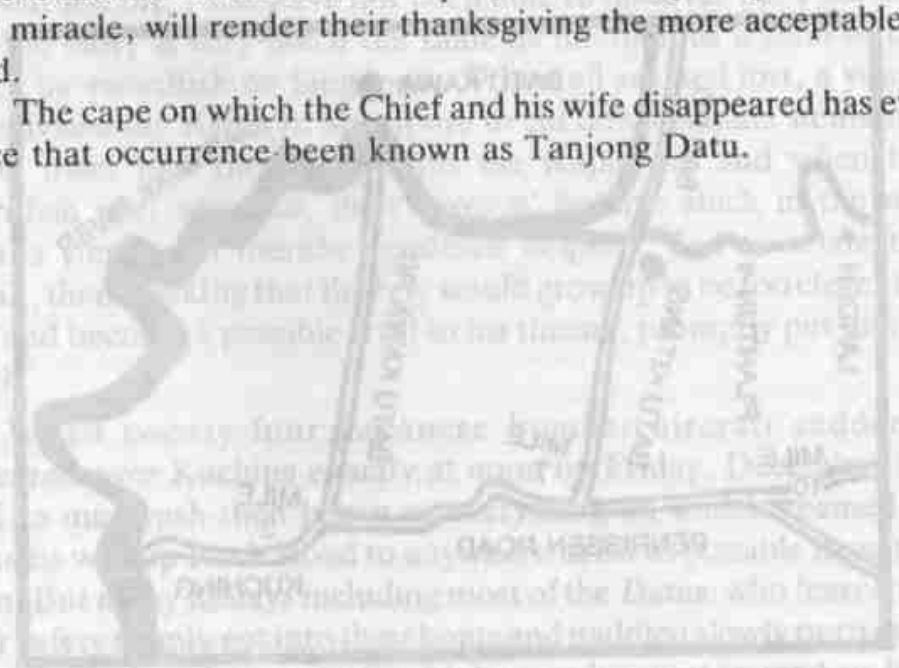
Some time after this strange affair, *Datu* Landi and his wife went to Sambas, in what is now Indonesian Borneo about one

hundred and fifty miles down the coast from Kuching, in their *perahu* (sailing vessel). On the border between Sarawak and Indonesia in that direction, lies what we now call Tanjong (Cape) Datu. All ships coming from Singapore must round this cape, which is consequently a well-known landmark. The story goes that on their return journey, *Datu* Landi and his wife stopped at this *tanjong* — a bluff headland, the termination of a long range of hills — where they went ashore and at four o'clock in the afternoon (it being prayer time) placed their prayer mats on the beach. While the *Datu* and his wife were engaged in prayer, the people in the *perahu* called to them to return, as it was time to continue on the journey; but while they called, *Datu* Landi and his wife vanished from their sight and it was supposed, taken up to heaven.

'Some time later the mat on which the *Datu* had been kneeling when he disappeared and his *kopiah* (hat) drifted up the Sarawak River to Landeh, the scene where the monkey had been brought back to life and, being found by some of the people there, they were buried and tombstones placed over them.

To the present day, many Malays visit Landeh after recovering from sickness or escaping from danger, to return thanks as they believe that the choice of such a spot, hallowed by the performance of a miracle, will render their thanksgiving the more acceptable to God.

The cape on which the Chief and his wife disappeared has ever since that occurrence been known as Tanjong Datu.



CHAPTER 8
THE MASJID BESAR, KUCHING

IT is said that when James Brooke first arrived in Sarawak in 1839, there was only a small mosque situated by the riverside at the foot of the hill on which the present *Masjid Besar* now stands.

This was because at that time, the number of Malays dwelling in Kuching, or Sarawak, as it was then called, totalled only a few hundred. The Malay nobility were still living at the old capital of *Lidah Tanah* (Tongue of Land) at the point where the Sarawak River branches about ten miles above Kuching, and the commoners still had their homes at Santubong at the mouth of the Sarawak River, and about thirty miles in the opposite direction. Then, after James Brooke had been installed Governor of Sarawak in 1841 and taken up his residence in Kuching, many of these Malays decided to move closer to him for protection against attacks from the powerful Saribas and Skrang Dayaks, and in this way helped to form the town of Kuching.

Thus, the population of the town rose rapidly and a rough census taken in 1847 revealed that it had reached the surprisingly high figure of 8,000. This then brought about a situation which the Kuching Malays have had to face from time to time, and which they are facing again today — the mosque had become too small to

A sketch of Kuching town looking towards the first Masjid Besar from the Court House made by Mrs. McDougall, wife of Bishop McDougall, in 1852.

accommodate all those devout followers of Islam who wished to pray there.

8.1 THE FAMILY OF DATU PATINGGI ALI

The Kuching Malays owe their first *Masjid Besar* almost entirely to the efforts of the family of *Datu Patinggi* Ali. They were his three sons, Mohammed Lana, Bua Hassan and Mohammed Aim (also known as Mataim); his son-in-law, Haji Abdul Gapor, who married the *Datu*'s second daughter, Dayang Inda; and another relative, Haji Abdul Karim.

8.2 DATU BANDAR MOHAMMED LANA

The first person to attempt to overcome the difficulty of building a larger mosque in Kuching, was the *Datu Patinggi*'s eldest son, *Datu Bandar* Mohammed Lana. He is said to have been a man of quiet disposition and always in ill-health, but one who showed great courage in war. It was he who rallied the Kuching Malays during the Insurrection of 1857 and helped to chase the insurgents back to Upper Sarawak and across the Dutch border to Sambas.

In 1848, *Datu Bandar* Mohammed Lana started his appeal for funds, not only for a small mosque to replace that on the riverside, but for a large mosque to be built on the top of the hill above the small mosque which would be a landmark and, at the same time, an outward symbol of Islam in Sarawak that all might see. But times were hard and money was scarce and so it was not until four years later, 1852, that sufficient funds had been raised and the building of the first *Masjid Besar* was completed.

It was built entirely of wood which was inevitable at that time since bricks and many other building materials did not become readily available in Kuching until about 1868. The new mosque's most distinguishing feature was a large, gold-coloured dome on the top (see illustration).

8.3 HAJI ABDUL GAPOR (1852-1854)

When the brave *Datu Patinggi* Ali and Mr. George Steward fell, fighting valiantly side by side at Patusan in 1844, the *Datu* was

succeeded by his son-in-law, Haji Abdul Gapor who, in addition to receiving the title of *Datu Patinggi,* also became the first *Imam* of the new *Masjid Besar* and held this latter office from 1852 until 1854, when he was dismissed by the Rajah for plotting against him. Haji Abdul Gapor's reason for his action was that as the British Government would not recognise James Brooke as Rajah of Sarawak, the Malays should not recognise him either. He was sent on a pilgrimage to Mecca with the hope that he would eventually change his mind, but finding that he still held the same view upon his return to Kuching, the Rajah banished him to Malacca, where he ended his final days.

8.4 HAJI BUA HASSAN (1854-1865)

After Haji Abdul Gapor had been banished from Sarawak by the Rajah in 1854, he was succeeded as *Imam* of the *Masjid Besar* by Haji Bua Hassan, second son of *Datu Patinggi* Ali. He, however, relinquished this office nine years later on the death of his brother, *Datu Bandar* Lana in 1865, when he himself inherited the title of *Datu Bandar.* He was one of the most trustworthy and faithful chiefs the government had ever had and by his long and faithful service of over fifty years, he won an honoured place among those who so nobly assisted in laying the foundation of law and order in Sarawak. He was held in high esteem and great respect by all the people and died in 1906 at the age of over one hundred years old.

8.5 HAJI ABDUL KARIM (1865-1877)

After Haji Bua Hassan had relinquished the office of *Imam* on inheriting the title of *Datu Bandar,* he was succeeded by a relative, Haji Abdul Karim, who became the third *Imam* of the *Masjid Besar.*

There is little recorded of Haji Abdul Karim save that he held the office of *Imam* for twelve years until his death in 1877.

8.6 HAJI MOHAMMED AIM (1877-1898)

The fourth *Imam* of the *Masjid Besar* was *Datu Patinggi* Ali's fourth son, Haji Mohammed Ali, more commonly known to the Malays of

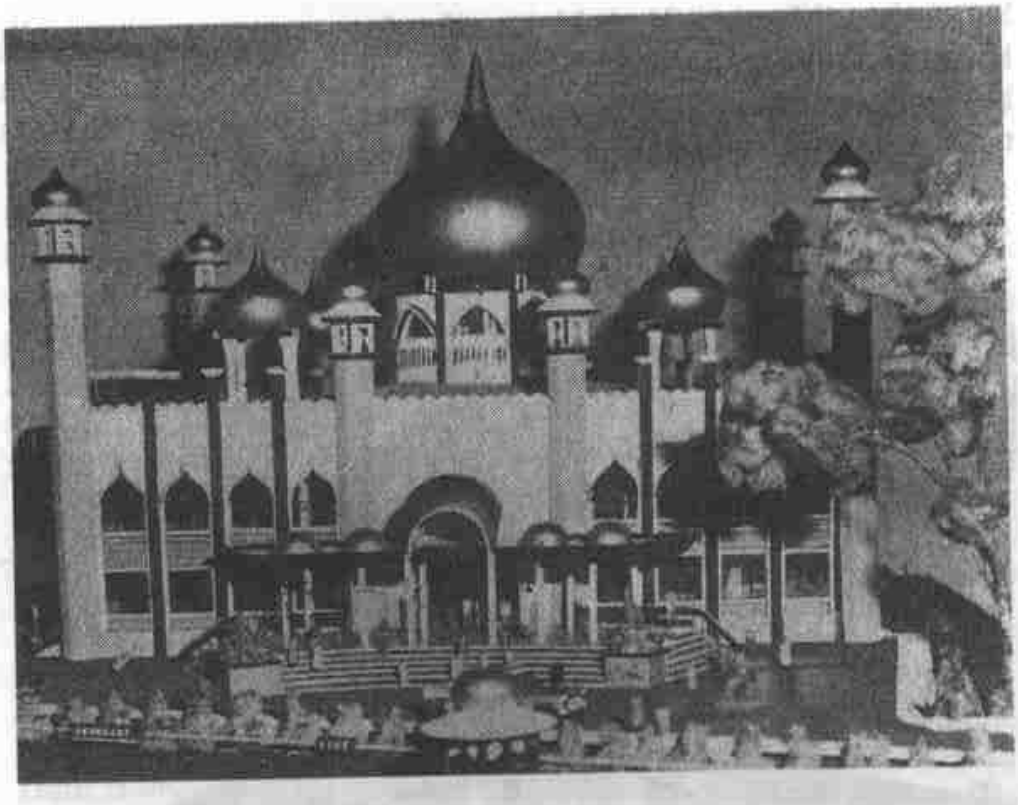
Sarawak as 'Mataim'. He held the office for twenty-one years until his death in 1898. It is recorded that he was "justly loved by all for his kindly nature and strict uprightness and honesty"; and, "No truer nor more courteous gentleman could be found".

By Courtesy of Sarawak Museum

The Masjid Besar after the second renovation, with dome as it was until 1967.

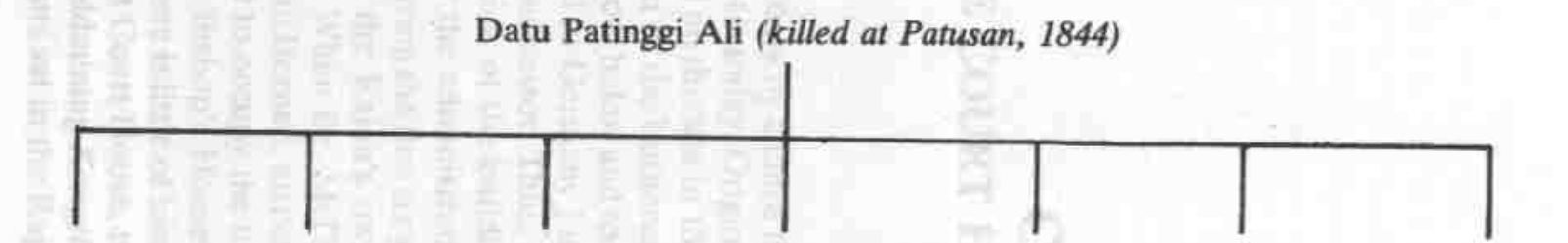
8.7 RENOVATIONS AND ALTERATIONS

The first renovation of the *Masjid Besar* was made in about 1880, when bricks and cement became readily available in Kuching. A new roof was constructed and much of the woodwork around the sides was replaced with bricks. In 1932 the roof was replaced with a dome, which is as it appeared until 1967. Soon the new mosque will be completed, incorporating part of the present mosque as shown in the illustration.



Model of the new Masjid Besar.

THE FAMILY OF DATU PATINGGI ALI



CHAPTER 9
THE COURT HOUSE AND THE RAJAH'S MEMORIAL

IT was only by chance that the present Court House came to stand where it is today. Originally a two-storey wooden building had been erected on this site in 1847 by a German missionary named Rupe, a member of the Lutheran Mission. In this he had intended to hold a day school below and to live in the upper storey but he was suddenly recalled to Germany just as the building had been completed, and left no successor. Thus, it came about that the first Rajah then took possession of the building and converted the school rooms into a hall for the administration of justice.

During the first six years of Brooke rule, court had always been held in the Rajah's own residence, then known as Government House. When Dr. McDougall, later to become the first Anglican Bishop in Borneo, arrived here in June 1848, he and his family were allowed to occupy the upper portion of the Court House until the present Bishop's House was completed in 1849.

There is little of historical interest recorded in connection with this first Court House, beyond the event of the Insurrection of the Bau Goldmining *Kongsis* in 1857. It was here that the leader of the insurgents sat in the Rajah's chair on February 21 of that year and

became 'Rajah for a day'. Here he summoned the Bishop; Mr. Helms, Manager of the Borneo Company; Mr. Rupell, a merchant; and the *Datu Bandar* to appear before him, and issued the historic, but unacceptable, orders that Mr. Helms and Mr. Rupell should from henceforth rule the foreign portion of the town, and the *Datu Bandar* the Malays, under the *Kongsis* as supreme rulers.

A year later in 1858, this Court House was demolished and a second erected under the direction of the *Tuan Muda,* later to become second Rajah. This was during the absence in England of the eldest brother the *Rajah Muda,* where he was visiting the Rajah who was ill.

Then in 1868, after Charles Brooke had been proclaimed second Rajah of Sarawak, he decided that a better Court House and new government offices should be built to bring all government departments under one roof. This had become possible owing to improved building materials becoming available, but they were still in short supply and for that reason it eventually took seven years to carry out the plan. And so, it was not until June 3, 1874, the second Rajah's birthday, and only four months before the birth of the third Rajah, that the new Court House was officially opened. Owing to the Rajah's absence in England, Capital W.H. Rodway officiated at the inaugural ceremony which took place at 11 a.m. after the Rangers, first having marched through the town headed by their band, formed a Guard of Honour. The Clock Tower was added in 1883.

Since the completion of this Court House, all Council Negri Meetings, commencing with the fifth in 1876, have been held there and it has been the scene of many historic occasions.

However, when the proposed new Council Negri Chamber is built in another part of the town, its use as the scene of historic occasions will probably come to an end.

When Sir Charles Brooke, second Rajah of Sarawak, died in May 1917, just one month short of his 88th birthday, he had devoted sixty-five years of his life to the peoples of Sarawak — forty-nine of them as Rajah. In appreciation of this great service to the State, it was decided that a fund should be raised for the purpose of erecting some form of lasting personal memorial to him in this country. This was largely because although the old Rajah had often expressed a

wish to be buried in Sarawak, fate decreed otherwise since he died in England during the First World War. Despite the fact that his body was embalmed and placed in a vault with the intention of sending it to Sarawak for interment as soon as the opportunity arose, after a wait of just over two years, it was finally decided to lay him to rest beside his uncle, the first Rajah, in the little country churchyard of Sheepstor, Devon.

By the time this fund was closed in 1924 it had reached the substantial sum of $76,000. It was then decided that of this amount, $25,000 should be spent on a personal memorial and the balance, $51,000, on a Leper Settlement. The latter, originally located on Satang Island near Santubong, was moved a year later to Mile 13, Penrissen Road owing to the difficulty of delivering supplies during the *landas* season. It is now known as "Rajah Charles Brooke Memorial Hospital".

By Courtesy of Sarawak Museum

The Court House and Second Rajah's Memorial.

The Rajah's personal memorial was designed by a Mr. Denis Santry of Messrs. Swan & Maclaren, Architects Singapore, who later also designed several public buildings in Sarawak, including the present General Post Office. It is in the form of a granite obelisk about twenty feet high with a bronze panel sunk into the stone on each corner on which are raised figures of a Malay, a Dayak, a Chinese and a Kayan. On the front side which faces the Astana, there is a *bas* relief of Sir Charles Brooke in marble, while below on a bronze tablet, is an inscription giving the principal dates of his life and reign. Above are the old Crest and Arms of Sarawak.

The unveiling ceremony took place on October 16, 1924. It had been arranged to coincide with the Meeting of Council Negri and the second meeting of the newly-founded Sarawak Turf Club, when a large number of people would be present in Kuching. At 8 a.m., the third Rajah, Sir Charles Vyner Brooke, arrived at *Pangkalan Batu* from the Astana where a Guard of Honour was drawn up. In a pavilion specially erected for the occasion in front of the Court House, officials and representatives of all communities waited. As soon as the Rajah was seated and numerous addresses had been read, the moving ceremony of the unveiling took place. An aged Iban *penghulu* named Biju had been specially selected for the honour of performing this ceremony. He was an old friend of the third Rajah and being eighty-nine years of age was one of the oldest Dayaks in the country. For many years he had also been a friend of the second Rajah and served with him in the Second Division in the early days of the Brooke era, and he was also one who had personally served the first Rajah, Sir James Brooke.

The Rajah proceeded to the steps of the memorial. Following him was Biju, bent with age and walking only with the help of a large stick. The Rajah put the cord into the old man's hand, but his strength was not sufficient so together they pulled it and the covering flag fell to the ground.

To the amazement of all a sea-plane then suddenly appeared overhead — the first ever to have been seen in Kuching. It came from a passing warship proceeding to Miri from Singapore. To many it symbolished the return of the spirit of the old Rajah.

CHAPTER 10
SATOK SUSPENSION BRIDGE, KUCHING

SATOK Suspension Bridge was opened towards the end of 1926. Although it cannot really be called old, plans for a bridge were prepared as long ago as 1902 when work was first started on the Matang Reservoir for the new Kuching water supply. The main reason for the proposed bridge was to carry the pipe-line across the river.

When the second Rajah suggested a bridge, he had his own ideas. Without any technical knowledge his intention was to bring stones from Sajingkat, near the mouth of the Sarawak River, which was the only source of supply in those days, and to pile it up over five marks until it reached a height of about eight feet above high water level. He thought that after heaping the stones on the five marks, he would then build huge brick columns on top of them to support the bridge, the framework of which would be of iron with a wooden footway (see illustration).

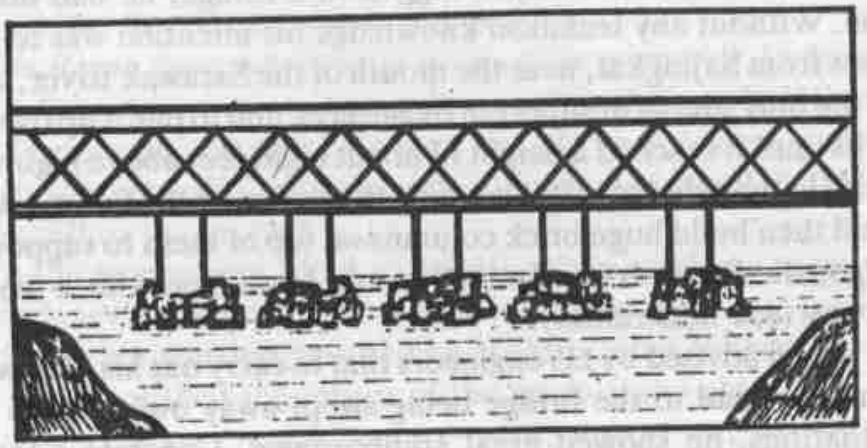
When advised by his engineers that to carry out his plan would eventually lead to the bridge being swept away owing to its poor foundations, he showed great stubbornness. Concrete piles had only just come into use at that time and in the Rajah's opinion,

although they were all right on land they would be of no use in water.

His engineers had an extremely difficult time trying to persuade him that his plan was not feasible and suggested a suspension bridge. But the Rajah objected as he was convinced that a suspension bridge would sway and the joints of the pipes would break. As his engineers would not agree to the kind of bridge he wanted, and as he would not agree to a suspension bridge, the pipes were laid under the water on the bed of the river. A bridge was eventually built twenty-four years later — nine years after the old Rajah's death.

In order to tell you about the *penyamun* (head hunting) scare, I must first tell you something of Dayak custom and tradition.

Until the time when slavery was abolished in Sarawak in 1886, a Dayak custom known as *genselan* (blood offering to the spirits) existed whereby when a new longhouse or bridge was to be built, the spirits had first to be appeased with the blood of a slave, who was usually thrown into a hole alive and the main post rammed in on top. However, when slavery was abolished and there were no more slaves to sacrifice, other means had to be found for appeasing the spirits. This usually led to the young men forming themselves into bands and turning *penyamun* (head hunters). They would wander into the forest far away from their own people and watch out for strangers from other tribes hunting in the jungle. They would then killed them but, being unable to carry the whole bodies, would



The kind of bridge the second Rajah wanted.

simply cut off the heads which were easy to conceal since they also feared the wrath of the Rajah. These they would throw into the hole for the main post.

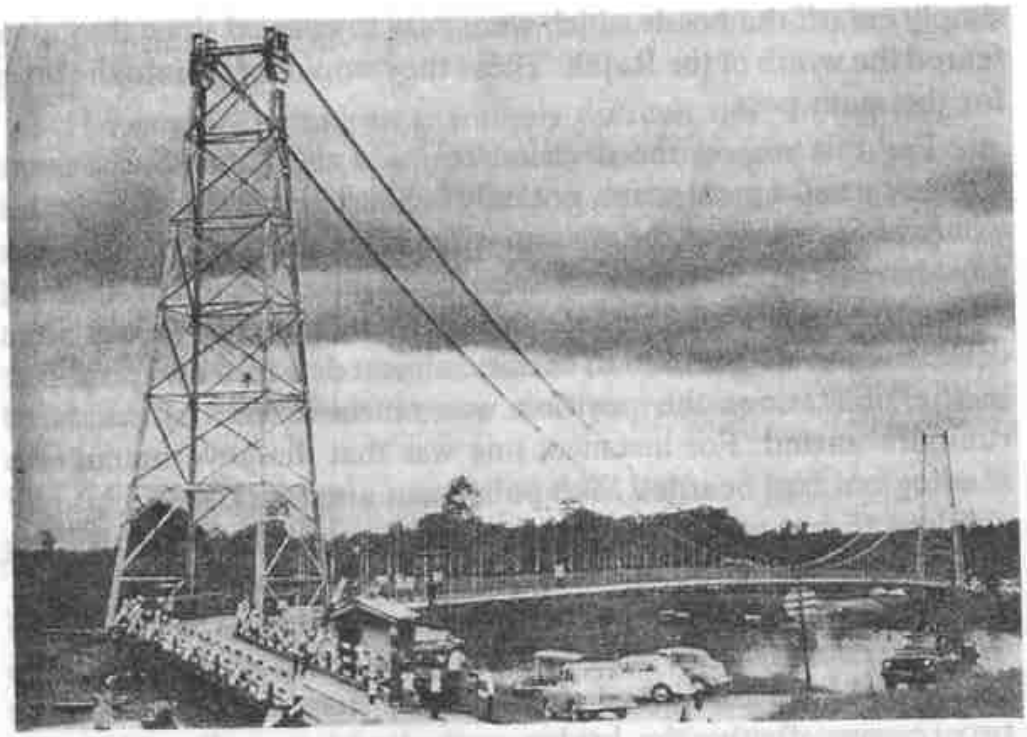
For this reason the decision to build the Satok Suspension Bridge caused a great scare, not only in Kuching but throughout the whole of Sarawak, as the rumour quickly spread that "The Bridge must have its heads to put under the foundations!" Even in Kuching where the people were more educated, few cared to go out after dark, and the streets used to become almost deserted by 6 p.m. But in the outstations the position was much worse. All kinds of rumours started. For instance, one was that the government was sending out big, bearded Sikh policemen after dark to catch small children to put under the foundations of the bridge.

Then it is said, something suddenly happened. A labourer, who was working on the foundations, was drowned. The bridge had therefore obtained its head and the tension eased. But after the bridge had been completed another scare started. This was due to two reasons: firstly, the bridge swayed and secondly, when the mains were filled with water, the towers started to move out of their upright positions, the weight apparently being too much. Thus another rumour started to spread: "The bridge is not satisfied. It wants more heads!"

The people of Kuching were extremely proud of their suspension bridge after its official opening and this "great modern structure", as it was considered in pre-war days, was the first sight that any visitor to Kuching was taken to see. It used to be a source of awe and marvel to visitors from outstations.

At one time it held a great attraction especially on moonlit nights, when a large number of people could often be seen there, particularly in the days of the old Kuching minstrel bands (which unfortunately is heard no more). The strains of the melodious music and singing used to sound so pleasant in the stillness of the night. It was also much favoured by those young people inclined to romance. But all this is now gone. With the passing of time the bridge has lost its appeal.

Owing to its height above the river, the suspension bridge has had a peculiar effect on some people, such as those who sometimes found it difficult to resist an urge to leap over the side. In fact,



The Satok Suspension Bridge.

people have been known to have jumped off the bridge but they were never seen again; their bodies probably became stuck in the soft mud of the river bed.

In the old days although quiet at night the same could not be said of it during the daytime as it was the place to which the old police buglers were banished to practise their noisy bugle calls.

For those who like facts and figures, the following might be of interest.

The bridge was designed and constructed by a Mr. A.S. Lowe, a Public Works Department engineer, who was a younger brother of the Director, Mr. C.P. Lowe.

It was primarily intended to carry two twelve-inch rising mains with a roadway for pedestrians and vehicles up to thirty hundred weight but after the water started to flow through the pipes, there was immediate concern since the weight proved too much and the towers began to be drawn out of their upright positions. This meant continual heaping of stones to the anchorages at each end until the enormous piles seen today rectified matters.

The bridge has a span of seven hundred feet (just over one-eight of a mile) and a roadway of seven feet. Excavations were started in 1923. The steel work was completed in 1924 and in 1925 the duplicate twelve-inch mains were completed and put into service. The timber decking of *cengal* planks was also completed in 1925 and the bridge was put to use at the end of 1926.

The total cost was $52,000 and of course, the life of the labourer said to have been taken by the spirits of the bridge.

CHAPTER 11
HOW THE CHINESE LABOURERS CAME TO SARAWAK

IN the days of the Rajahs the Chinese labourers (or coolies as they were then called) came to Sarawak mainly in three ways. First, overland from Sambas in what was then known as Dutch Borneo and later from Singapore, and direct by junks from China.

It might be as well to mention here that the word 'coolie' was changed to 'labourer' in the laws of Sarawak during the time of Mr. T.P. Cromwell, Secretary for Chinese affairs, in about 1952 as 'coolie' was considered a degrading name which you might well realise later. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether the labourers of today would be prepared to undertake the hard manual labour of the coolies in the early days of Sarawak's history.

It must be remembered that at that time, there were no such things as passports and people could enter and leave Sarawak as they pleased. Thus, the first uncontrolled entry of Chinese labourers took place from Sambas just across the border to the Bau district of Upper Sarawak in the search for gold in what was probably the 1830s, since some of their descendants have been in Sarawak for five generations. These labourers usually worked in *kongsis*

(partnerships) and shared the profits, but those who worked for pay received only eighteen cents a day.

There were no European employers of labour in the Bau district until the Borneo Company opened up their gold works there in 1890 except for one or two European prospectors who searched for gold and other minerals without much success.

Work in the goldfields was extremely hard. The labourers toiled and sweated from dawn till dusk day after day, bodies aching with fever, digging earth, carrying earth, tons and tons of earth, in order to obtain the few specks of gold which they could expect from each ton as a reward for their labour.

Thus, it is understandable that even the first Rajah, Sir James Brooke, is recorded as saying: "Every Bau Goldfield coolie is entitled to his pipe of opium to ease his tired, aching body after the toil and sweat of the day." Their only other pleasure was gambling.

In those far-off days before the pain relieving drugs which we are so lucky to have today became available, opium was the only relief for pain and moderate opium smoking was considered no worse than pipe or cigarette smoking of today. This opium smoking gradually led to the tax on opium becoming the main source of revenue for the first Rajah and it was in protest against this tax that the Bau gold-mining *kongsis* rebelled against him. It has been mentioned in a book recently published for schools that they rebelled because they wanted to take over the government of the country, which might be misleading. They did not care who ruled the country as long as the tax on opium was taken off. For this reason their aim was only to get rid of the Rajah who had levied the tax. In fact, they invited Mr. Helms, Manager of the Borneo Company, to become Rajah which he declined.

Few of these Chinese labourers could afford to bring their wives from China and so they used to marry the Dayak maidens from Serambau Mountain which lies behind Siniawan and is only few miles from Bau. In this way Chinese families in Sarawak who are descended from the early goldfield labourers, are said to have a little Dayak blood in their veins, perhaps through great-grandmothers or even great-great-grandmothers. This led to a strange belief in Singapore that the Singapore Chinese men were scared to

marry the Sarawak Chinese girls as they were afraid that their heads might be chopped off while they were asleep at night.

From the year 1880, Sarawak started to pass through a period of great prosperity which it maintained for the next thirty years even in spite of the great fire of Kuching in 1884. *Gambier* (a substance procured from the leaves of a shrub used in tanning and dyeing) and pepper had been introduced into Sarawak by Mr. William Maunder Crocker, who first arrived in Kuching in 1864, and whose son, Mr. H.B. Crocker, became a Chief Secretary in the time of the third Rajah and whose descendants still live in Sarawak.

The first rubber trees to arrive in the country in 1900 had been planted by Bishop Hose, one in the Rest House grounds and two in the garden of the Bishop's House. The Bishop's nephew, Mr. Ernest Hose, had persuaded the Borneo Company to open up Dahan Rubber Estate and later Sungei Tengah, of which he became the first manager. His brother, Mr. Charles Hose, a government officer, famous naturalist and writer of books on Sarawak, discovered oil in Miri. The government opened up rubber nurseries and issued the seedlings free at all district offices and gave land also free, as much as any person could plant up and later turned the land into tanah *pesaka* (hereditary land which could not be sold) to prevent speculators from buying it. Pepper reached its peak price of $46.00 in 1903. Thus there came about a great shortage of labour in Sarawak. The Sarawak Steamship Company formed in August 1875, in a desperate bid to ease the labour shortage, started to offer free passages in 1882 to labourers to come from Singapore to Sarawak. As a result hundreds arrived by each trip on their mail steamers, the *Royalist* (purchased from the government) and the *Rajah Brooke.*

In this way, the second wave of labourers arrived from Singapore.

Then followed the Foochows, who started to arrive in Sibu in 1902. It should be pointed out however, that they arrived in Sibu as settlers and not as labourers. They did not expect to work for anybody but to cultivate their own land. It is recorded that they were brought over to Sibu by Mr. Wong Nai Siong, with the help of the government, but even with their organised passages from China, thirty-nine of the first six hundred died almost immediately on

Watching for the arrival of the junks.

arrival in Sibu from hardships incurred during the journey. It is recorded that they were all Methodists and members of the American Mission but there appears to be little mention of "another man behind the scenes", the Reverend J.M. Hoover, said to have been a brother of a former President of the United States of the same name, who arrived in the East in 1899 and died suddenly in Kuching from malaria in 1935.

While all this was happening slowly, but in large numbers, labourers were arriving direct from China by junks, usually about a hundred in each. These were the real coolies or *singkehs* (newcomers) as they were called.

The junks always came during the time of the north east monsoon (or what is called the *landas*) when the wind was in their favour. The cargoes they carried usually consisted of salt, salted eggs, silk and jars, the last-named being in great demand by the Dayaks. The decks however, were always crowded with coolies especially after the great flood of the Yellow River in 1889 when disaster swept over a large part of China. A few who had been fortunate enough to make money in Sarawak returned to their

native land and rumours soon spread: "Sarawak, the land of gold".

The life of a coolie in China at that time was a constant struggle to earn enough to eat and so it is easy to understand why they were ready to undertake the hardship of a journey by a small junk to Sarawak. The junks tossed about like corks in the rough sea and the passengers were packed so closely on deck that they could hardly move. They were seasick and unable to eat a ration which in any case, only consisted of one bowl of rice a day and one teaspoonful of water three times a day (any extra being caught from the rain), and it did not take long before corpses were being thrown into the sea each day. It is recorded that on one junk a hundred and five coolies left China and only sixty-one arrived in Kuching.

It was never known for certain how long a journey would take since, being entirely dependent on sail, it mostly depended on the sea and wind, but normally it took about a month. Usually the only thing to brighten the passengers were the words of one of their countrymen, who had already visited Sarawak and was now their broker for the trip. The "Land of Promise" which he guaranteed was obviously only going to be a 'land of promise' for himself since for every coolie he delivered safely to Sarawak, he received a substantial commission. The men, some more dead than alive, were engaged even before the junk bringing them had dropped anchor.

Lookouts were posted at the mouth of the Sarawak River and as soon as the junks were sighted, a mad scramble started to board them as quickly as possible and press a half-year's advance salary of $30.00 into each man's hand, thus buying him almost body and soul at the rate of eighteen cents a day. Most of it went to the broker. These coolies were much sought after as physically they were much stronger than those who arrived from Singapore. After about thirty or forty years they would return to die in their native land China, with a lifetime savings of about $500.00 to $1,000.00.

In those days few Chinese ever expected to die in Sarawak, which is the reason why it took the Rajahs a long time before they could regard them as Sarawak subjects. Who could realise at that time the extent of prosperity the descendants of these humble coolies would bring to Sarawak — shopkeepers, businessmen, doctors, lawyers and now politicians — and to think that it all started with at eighteen cents a day.

CHAPTER 12
THE SIEW SAN TENG TEMPLE, KUCHING

By Courtesy of Sarawak Museum

THE Siew San Teng Temple, which stands at the foot of Bukit Pasu (Flower-pot Hill) at the junction of Main Bazaar and Temple

Street, Kuching, is the oldest Chinese temple in Sarawak, but that does not mean to say that all of its present structure is of a great age.

Its position shows that it was carefully chosen by geomancy, a custom observed by the Chinese for thousands of years, since it is built with a hill at its back which can be compared with the support of an armchair. It faces a 'great mountain' (Matang Range) in the distance, overlooks a 'big river' and once had a rivulet, the Sungei Kuching, flowing at its feet. When this rivulet was filled in, in 1928, it was said that half the good luck 'left' the temple. Chinese of all communities worship there.

On a sign just inside the entrance, immediately below the name of the temple are written the words *Hock Teck Sie,* meaning 'Small Temple', thus signifying that it has always been a small temple and probably always will be.

Writers of as long as eighty years ago referred to it as "very old" but more recently, Mr. J.B. Archer writing in 1946, gave the opinion that this temple was first built over two hundred years ago. Its exact age, however, is never likely to be learnt.

When renovation work commenced at the end of 1964, the first for eighty-four years, it was hoped that the date of the original structure would be found recorded somewhere on a beam in the roof, as is customary in all Chinese temples. A triangular-shaped beam was found on which were recorded three dates in the classical Chinese manner according to the sixty year cycles which, when compared with the European calendar, gave the three years 1856, 1863 and 1880. But these are believed to be only the dates when the temple was partly rebuilt, extended or renovated since it is known that there was a small wooden temple there for many years before 1856. Furthermore, it would be absurd to suggest that the oldest Chinese temple in Sarawak was not built before the first Christian church in Kuching, St. Thomas's old Pro-Cathedral, completed in 1851.

It was the custom many years ago that when Chinese arrived in a foreign land the first thing they did was to build a small temple. This served the two-fold purpose of thanking the god for a safe delivery from what was often a perilous journey, and to record the date of their arrival in the country.

Records show that there have been Chinese in Borneo for

hundreds of years but few cared to penetrate inland. Thus, little is known of those who first came to Kuching. However, when James Brooke first came to Sarawak in 1839, he found only about twenty Chinese. But it is also mentioned in Sarawak's history that amongst those who helped James Brooke and *Pengiran* Badrudin to quell the rebellion against Brunei oppression about a year later was a small band of Chinese. It is assumed that it was these early arrivals or their immediate predecessors who built the first temple on this site some time between 1750 and 1800.

The date of the first recorded renovation of 1856 (probably started in 1856 and completed in 1857) is confirmed in the history of the Insurrection of the Bau gold-mining *kongsis* in February 1857, as when it was discovered that they were making preparations to come to Kuching (or Sarawak as it was then called). In order to cover up their real intentions, they let it be known that they were coming to take part in the celebrations of the opening of the new temple to which they had probably subscribed funds.

The renovation of the temple coincided with the time when various building materials became available in Kuching. The first temple would of necessity have been built of wood but there is still evidence in Kuching to show that by 1856 clay, lime and sand were being used. By the time of the 1863 renovation, bricks in small quantities were becoming available but not cement. However, by 1870 bricks and cement could be procured which probably meant that most of the brick work and the surrounding walls were built in the 1880 renovation.

Unlike most temples, this temple has only one god. His name is *Loh Hong Pek* and he was born in Canton. He is also referred to as *Tua Pek Kong* but this is only an honour which has been bestowed upon him and simply means 'Grand Uncle'. It is said that he can be likened to a district officer and treasurer since it is his duty to look after the people in the district and he has the power to decide who will be rich and who will be poor. For his reason, it is quite common for those who have gained wealth, especially through lotteries, to make donations to the temple.

This god has two birthdays. His real birthday is on the second day of the second moon and is usually celebrated with a grand procession. His second birthday, which is really his day of enlighten-

ment or the day when he rose up to heaven, is on the fifteenth day of the eighth moon.

One thing which displeased the god for many years was an iron decoration, not unlike a weather vane, on the roof of the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce building. This building, which stands on the riverside below and immediately in front of the temple was originally erected as a Chinese Court in 1912 and this decorated sign simply records this date.

However, it obstructed the temple view of the 'great mountain'. But the god's displeasure was only revealed in 1965 by a devotee in a trance during celebrations at the Wayang Street temple nearby. To appease the temple god, as this decoration was on government property and could not be removed, something similar was erected above the temple before renovation work was completed.

When renovation began, it was revealed that there was the idol of a strange god in the temple. It is not known how it came to be placed there but it was obviously from another temple because this was the idol of a vegetarian god whereas the real god of the temple was not. This led to an unusual situation so it was decided that the strange god's wishes be sought as to whether he desired to remain or to be removed to another temple. This was done in the usual manner by tossing two coins after first having paid obeisance to the god. Should the coins show two heads, the god was angry and wanted to be moved. Two tails denoted that he was smiling, and his wishes were neutral. But in this case they came down, one head and one tail which meant that he did not wish to be removed. Now being a vegetarian god, a special place had to be located for him in the temple, some distance from the other god.

It is the practice for the trustees of the temple to draw up each month, a list of names of persons whom they considered suitable, and cast lots to see who would supervise the care of the temple for that month. But during the month when the decision was made to begin renovation work, the lot fell on Mr. Ho Ah Chon, a well-known Kuching businessman, who was then regarded as having been honoured by the god to take charge of this important work.

It was anticipated that when completed, the cost of the entire renovations would total about $35,000. This was due mainly to the

fact that all gilded areas in the decorations would be done with real gold leaf since gold paint would discolour very soon. Owing to the intricate designs of the decorations the work took some time to complete.

As regards the recording of the date of the last renovation work, when I suggested that perhaps this time it might be easier for future generations if the year "1964" was inscribed on the beam, I was told, "No. We shall stick to our centuries-old custom of recording it only according to the sixty-year cycles."

CHAPTER 13
THE OLD KUCHING *CHINGAY* PROCESSIONS

IN the old days it used to be the custom to hold a *Chingay* procession in Kuching once every ten years. They were always held during the eighth moon. I was lucky enough to witness the last before they were discontinued in 1928. The purpose of these processions was to ward off cholera, of which there were frequent outbreaks in Kuching before the days of piped water supply, and to bring peace and prosperity to the country, especially to the traders. After the cholera epidemics ceased, it was considered unnecessary to spend the huge sums of money which were necessary to pay for the cost of these processions, which explains why they were discontinued. I doubt whether another will ever be held unless Sarawak is struck again by another severe epidemic of some kind.

The *Chingay* processions which were always produced on a very lavish scale, used to cost what was then considered enormous sums of money. In 1898 and 1908, they cost $20,000; by 1928 the sum had risen to $30,000. Although the amount of money required was large, it was always readily donated by shopkeepers from all over Sarawak since the purpose appealed to them.

The *Chingay* procession custom is of Hokkien (Chinese) in origin, being brought over by this community in the early days of

The Chingay procession.

their emigration from China to Sarawak, principally between the years 1850 to 1860. The organisation of such a procession was mostly done by this section of the community although great support was also received from the Foochow, Hockchew, Chawan and Henghua communities who, like the Hokkiens, also came from the Fukien Province of China.

Usually, after permission had first been obtained from the government, a committee of twelve to fourteen persons was

formed. For many years the chairman was that grand old gentleman of Kuching, Mr. Ong Tiang Swee. These processions were always nearly a mile long and took two months of practice and preparation before the actual day. Temporary theatres were built in the town to add to the festivities of the great occasion.

To give a complete description of the procession would be almost impossible since owing to its length, it included hundreds of items, many of which were changed from time to time over the years. Nevertheless, these events used to eclipse any other forms of procession in their grandeur and magnificence and the following are some of the main points you might expect to see should there ever be another *Chingay* procession in Kuching.

It would consist of banners of various colours and sizes, decorated canopies, bands of musicians, hundreds of fantastically dressed young men on all kinds of artificial animals, triumphal cars and stages on which ride beautiful girls poised in graceful positions, all representing characters in Chinese history. A huge paper dragon with jaws wide open, snapping at a beautiful golden ball which repeatedly exudes its terrible teeth. Each object in the procession has its own legendary significance. And somewhere in the middle you would see the inevitable man with pierced tongue deep in a trance.

The two most essential parts of the procession are the *Chai-lians* and the mystic junk, known to the Chinese as a *wangkang*. Towering above the heads of the moving throng you would see the purple banners from under which the shrill voices of young boys would rise above the beating of drums and gongs. The standard bearer would be a strong, muscular man and on either side of him would walk two assistants beating drums.

The *Chai-lians* would comprise a number of boys between the ages of ten and eighteen. They would be dressed in richly embroidered tunics and purple pants with brightly coloured head-dresses. Each carrying a short paddle, they marched along chanting some kind of prayer, in the singing of which they had been specially trained for, invoking the Great One to bring peace and plenty to the people of Sarawak. The *Chai-lians* signify the beautiful young girls who used to row some rich lord of ancient China on a pleasure boat trip around a peaceful lotus pond.

When the procession rounded a corner or passed a temple, it would stop, while the standard bearer circle the holy banner overhead twice. This is supposed to have the effect of luring all evil spirits that may be hovering in the vicinity, into the magic junk which is dragged along on four wheels.

In construction, this miniature junk is an exact replica of the junks which used to come from China but at the same time, it was too large to pass along some of the narrow streets in the town. In the junk would be found everything that the entrapped spirits or *hantus* (ghosts) would be likely to require on their long voyage to the land of their exile. Attracted by the magnetism of the waving banner, the roving spirits would be tempted to enter the junk at the sight of all the attractive objects found inside. After the procession ended the junk would be burnt with all the valuables and spirits presumed to be inside. The junk was always followed by two smaller boats in each of which sat a *Chai-lian.*

Another outstanding item would be the idols which were placed in a sedan chair carried by four persons. These are known as the *Ong-yahs.*

The story regarding the *Ong-yahs* tells of the Emperor of the Tong Dynasty Lee See Bin's desire to test the magical powers of Teo Thien Su, the immortal pope of Taoism. For this purpose, he had three hundred and sixty of his most brilliant subjects carefully hidden in a cave and ordered them to make the greatest noise they could with certain instruments. The collective noise made by these persons sounded as if it had come from deep down in the earth. When everything was ready the Emperor sent for the great priest while the band was in full swing and, pretending that the noise came from some evil spirits that had come to haunt the palace, requested Teo Thien Su to use his magic art on the evil ones. By some mysterious means the priest succeeded in cutting off the heads of the three hundred and sixty innocent scholars whose angry souls hurried to the presence of the horrified Emperor and demanded due reparation from him. Aware of the great wrong which he had the Emperor then canonised them *Ong-yahs* (princes) and full liberty to enter into every part of his country and And so even today, those wronged souls wander re disturbing the people. Now here is an impor-

tant point. It is believed that five of them have even wandered beyond the Emperor's domain and entered Sarawak.

The *wangkang* or junk was an essential part of the procession. The Henghuas who are nearly all fishermen, undertook its construction. This task used to take two months to complete. In the meantime, they had to live on vegetarian diet and were not allowed to return to their homes.

In the early days the *wangkang* used to be set free at sea but later it was decided that it should be burnt; the reason being that, after it had been released in the sea, it was sometimes driven back to a neighbouring town where the evil spirits would then gleefully come ashore and pester the people there or, if it was ashore close to Kuching, they would happily hurry back to the town and all the paraphernalia of holding the procession would have been in vain.

The *wangkang* was always burnt at the small tidal stream near the junction of Padungan and Petanak Roads. The time was always midnight. A procession would start to this point accompanied by musicians and led by members of the rickshaw-puller and fishing communities, dressed in scarlet trousers, many coloured jackets and holding in their hands various wands of office, their faces smeared with the brightest colours they could obtain. As they approached the spot where the junk was to be burnt, they would perform a strange sort of dance accompanied by strenuous beating of drums and gongs. Six bullock carts and several rickshaws would follow, loaded with wood for the burning of the junk and quantities of joss paper, the latter being set alight and kept burning throughout the proceedings, while most of the spectators would throw something into the flames. As the junk approached the crowd lining the side of the road would fall down on their knees and with joss sticks in their hands offer obeisance.

The junk was a masterpiece of labour, care and detail. It was hard to believe that the elaborate figureheads at the bow and stern were only made of paper. These used to take the form of two fierce faces with large white tusks protruding from the corners of their mouths. Beautiful lanterns would be hung all over the deck and sides where rows of little paper sailors stood hand in hand, while above them, flags of all colours fluttered in the breeze.

When the junk finally arrived at the spot where it was to be

burnt and firewood had been placed all around and under it, that was the signal for all those taking part in the ceremony to throw their lighted joss sticks into it. Once the fire had started people would return to their homes without speaking a single word, as bad luck would come if they did so. These junks even in those days, cost about $450 each to build.

Now, should you ever have the opportunity to peep into one of these model junks, you might expect to see two large bags of rice, eleven hundred small bundles of firewood, five hundred small jars containing salt and sugar, various vegetables, joss paper representing paper money, one live pig, two white cocks (one cooked and one alive), one duck, salt fish, three sets of religious weapons taken from the temple, eight wooden cannons, one small brass cannon, thirty-four large and small silk flags, nine rolls of red silk cloth, five silk umbrellas, three large fans, seven lamps, fourteen round rotan shields, knives, forks and cooking pans, one complete set of carpenter's tools, three model bedsteads with pillows and mosquito nets for the three cabins, three paper sedan chairs with paper carriers, four paper horses with their *syces* (attendants), the paper captain and his crew of sailors and three wooden anchors with ropes complete. There was also a human being but of course, he jumped out as soon as the fire was lighted. The live white cock on board was free and would make its escape as soon as the flames got too hot. Anyone who caught it would be considered extremely fortunate as it would bring him good luck and prosperity for the rest of his life. Presumably the pig, being unable to escape, was burnt to death. From this it can be seen that the evil spirits were well cared for on their journey into exile.

Finally, there is a story told that, during one of the practice sessions, the second Rajah's horse was frightened by fire crackers being fired and he was nearly thrown over. He became so angry that he fined the Hokkien community as being responsible. However, he forgave them a few days later and returned the fine with the request that it be paid towards the expenses of the procession.

CHAPTER 14

THE MOUNTAINS AND HILLS AROUND KUCHING

SHOULD you care to take a walk to the top of the Sarawak Club hill in Kuching on a clear day and glance around the horizon from south to north, you will see a series of mountains and hills, some of which form the border between Sarawak and Indonesian Borneo but closest and most outstanding you will see Sta'at, Serambau, Singghi, Matang Range and Santubong, in that order. All of these have something of interest which might not generally be known to most people in Kuching, so I shall try to relate some of the main points which are related to each.

14.1 STA'AT

Starting from the south, the first mountain you will see is Sta'at. This mountain is often mistaken for Mount Penrissen as the Penrissen Road appears to proceed from that direction. However, Penrissen is much further on, perhaps another twenty or thirty miles, almost on the Indonesian border, and is about three times as high as Sta'at. Mount Sta'at, which is also sometimes referred to as Gading, has nothing of particular interest about it but nevertheless it is an outstanding landmark.

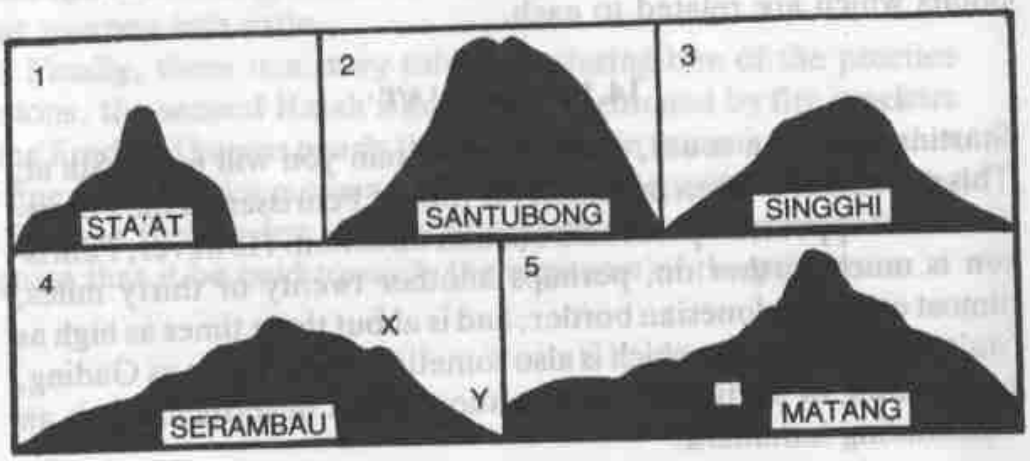
It is interesting to know that the word *gading* means 'ivory'. There are several Gading mountains and Gading hills in Sarawak, the reason being that the surfaces of these mountains and hills are composed of bare white limestone, the colour of which is compared with that of ivory.

This mountain lies above Batu Kitang and beyond the Sungei Sarawak, a rivulet from which Sarawak first got its name, and is about thirty miles from Kuching.

14.2 SINGGHI

Although Serambau comes next in order, I am taking Singghi first as its history is older. The story of Singghi is mainly that of a refuge. It is in a Land Dayak area. For countless years the Land Dayaks had been continually attacked by their more numerous and physically powerful enemy the Sea Dayaks from the Saribas River and so it is easy to see why the Land Dayaks, who were only able to put up a feeble resistance, took refuge on the top of this steep-sided, flat-topped mountain, rising 1,600 feet high. The defence of the top was comparatively easy as the steep, narrow paths, which would only allow ascent in single file, were easily defended. Similar to castles in the early days of European history, those on top simply threw stones on those ascending and, in any hand-to-hand fighting on the narrow pathways, the men on the top always held an advantage.

The last known attempted, but fortunately frustrated, attack took place shortly after the arrival of the first Rajah in about 1840.



On this occasion it was the turn of the Skrang Dayaks, who came sweeping up the Sarawak River in their warboats, as was their custom under their two famous chieftains, *Bulan* (Moon) and *Mata Hari* (Sun). Thinking the Rajah appeared as a kind, easy-going man, they asked his permission to attack the Singghi Dayaks, and were astonished when he replied, "No, why should you wish to attack them when they have done you no harm." But the Rajah was not yet officially Rajah. He was still known only as *Tuan Besar*, so they went to Rajah Muda Hassim, who was still the Viceroy in Sarawak under the Sultan of Brunei. His answer was "Yes", the arrangement being that the Skrang Dayaks should take the heads and he and his Malay followers the loot, which always included the prettiest of the women, and the children as slaves, which had been the understanding for several years before.

However, the Rajah sent messengers to intercept them and warn them that should they attack the Singghi Dayaks, he would attack their homes in the Skrang River. Thus, the attack was prevented. But the Singghi Dayaks had always lived in fear and continued to live on top of the mountain for more than a hundred years after this threat. Now at last, with peace and security among all races and tribes in Sarawak, they have lost their previous fear of attack and have abandoned their former stronghold and settled at the foot of the mountain. According to latest reports, their old refuge is now completely deserted and rapidly becoming overgrown with jungle.

14.3 SERAMBAU

The story of Serambau Mountain is much the same as that of Singghi except that it happened later. After the attempted attack of the Skrang Sea Dayaks on the Singghi Land Dayaks had been prevented by the Rajah, they returned home and thought up another plan of attack. They then decided that in order to escape the Rajah's attention, instead of coming up the Sarawak River, they would come from another direction by way of Sadong River and Serian, or what we now call the Simanggang Road, to Serambau which is quite close to Singghi and where there were several Land Dayak villages. As usual, there was no reason for the attacks save

their love of warfare and the usual spoils of the heads of the men, loot, and the women and children taken into slavery. In this way most of the first Rajah's early years in Sarawak were almost entirely occupied in the fighting on Serambau Mountain and in the Siniawan area at its foot (see 'Y' in illustration) he had his fort *Berlidah* on the opposite side of the river.

During one of these attacks against the enemy the Rajah was nearly killed by a Malay chief who, being jealous of the Rajah's increasing power, hurled a spear at his back, which fortunately missed, and then pretended that it was badly aimed at one of the enemy. The Rajah's forces eventually drove the Skrang Dayaks off and forced them to return the women and children whom they had taken into captivity as slaves.

On this mountain, the Rajah later built what he called his country house, Peninjau (The Look-out), on a spur a thousand feet up the mountain side (marked 'X'). All the Europeans used it as a holiday and health resort. It would be a great feat for any school boy to try and find it during their school holidays. As the house was built from belian wood, there would still be some old posts remaining. However, the search would not be an easy one as the ascent followed a water course, past several Dayak villages, and would also mean clambering up old notched, slippery, fallen tree trunks, the ascent in some parts being as steep as seventy degrees.

Should anyone be able to reach this spot, he would be well rewarded for his efforts with a magnificent view which is described as stretching from Tanjong Datu on the left to Simanggang on the right, about eighty miles away.

14.4 MATANG

Matang is a mountain range; its highest peak being Serapi, 3,000 feet high.

Writers of over a century ago used to say that *matang* meant 'abode of peace' from its wonderfully pleasant, peaceful surroundings but they were obviously mistaken since *matang* in Malay means 'a long sandy ridge' or what is known in England as a 'hog's back' and in Dayak it means 'shade'. Both meanings seem to fit its shape and position as it shades Kuching from the setting sun. World

famous artists in the past have declared that nowhere in the world have they seen more beautiful sunsets than some of those to be seen over Matang.

Sadly enough, the story of Matang for many years was only one of great commercial disappointment and loss. The second Rajah in addition to others, invested large sums of money in growing tea and coffee on the higher slopes of the range but apparently the climate was not suitable. After many years of continual loss he had to admit failure and as a result, his financial resources were badly depleted for many years.

It might be as well to mention here that the Indian labourers whom we see mostly working on the roads in Kuching today are the descendants of the Indians whom the second Rajah brought specially from India to work on his Matang tea estate. By the time the estate closed down they had already intermarried with the local Malays and Dayaks and had even lost most of their mother-tongue. An attempt was made to repatriate them during the slump of the 1930s, but it was found that on returning to their native land, they could hardly make themselves understood. In sympathy the third Rajah allowed them to remain in Sarawak.

Before the war there used to be a bungalow about a third of the way up the mountain side which was built by the second Rajah and used as a holiday resort. In this bungalow hanging on a pair of deer's horns in the dining room, were his hunting crop and sun helmet which nobody dared touch even twenty-five years after his death.

After the failure of commercial ventures Matang eventually proved useful as the source for the first piped water supply to Kuching in about 1902. This was a real blessing as it started to put an end to the cholera epidemics which were so frequent when the townspeople had only river and well water to depend upon. The water even until just after the Second World War, used to come straight from the mountain top into a reservoir (see white mark on illustration) about a third of the way up the mountain side,. and through the mains down to Kuching without having been treated in any way. It had a pleasant, sweet taste, unlike any water I have ever tasted elsewhere. The bath water would often be halfful of dead leaves and grass especially after heavy rain, which no doubt, accord-

ing to present day standards, would be considered full of harmful bacteria but strangely enough, it did us no harm.

From this water supply came an old saying among the Europeans, "Once you have tasted the water from Matang, your heart will always remain in Sarawak". (Perhaps that is why I was still there in my thirty-eighth year in Sarawak).

The completion of the reservoir led to the pipe-line; the pipeline to the road; and the road further led to the Satǫk Suspension Bridge.

14.5 SANTUBONG

Santubong, a Chinese name which translated into English, is said to mean 'king of the wild boar', is a mountain of about 2,700 feet in height. The mountain itself has little interest attached to it save for botanists who have made frequent ascents of the steep mountain side over the years to examine its plant life. But around its foot are places of great archaeological interest, principally the remains of an old Hindu occupation hundreds of years old which is still being carefully investigated by the Sarawak Museum, and the fact that it was also the home of the early Sarawak Malays until they were driven up to Kuching in about the 1850s owing to continual attacks from the powerful Saribas Dayaks.

The mountain is assumed to have been thrown straight up from the sea following some volcanic eruption probably millions of years ago. For a long time it interested those in search of gold but without success. There used to be an old theory that all the gold in the First Division of Sarawak lies in a straight line between Santubong and Bau which I think has so far been proved correct.

It is thought that the same volcanic eruption which threw Santubong up out of the sea, also threw up the earth and scattered the gold deposits in the area which explains why no large deposits have yet been found.

However, there is a certain amount of gold in the mountain since fishermen in the past used to depend for their livelihood during the *landas* season, when the sea was too rough for fishing, by panning gold in the small mountain streams from which they could expect to gain an average of twenty dollars a month.

CHAPTER 15
THE GHOSTS OF 'GOLF LINKS' BUNGALOW

'GOLF Links' Bungalow, which lies hidden away among old graves on the top of a hill at Crookshank Road in Kuching, must be one of the oldest government bungalows in Sarawak. This massive old building, dark and gloomy in appearance from the fact that it is build almost entirely of plain *belian* wood, was the home of a succession of medical officers almost from the time it was erected until just after the Second World War. It was built privately in 1908 at a time when the second Rajah ordered that all European government officers should own their own bungalow. The downstairs was originally used as stables which is understandable, since horse-riding was popular with the Europeans in those days before the advent of motorcars in Kuching a little later.

On the death of the second Rajah, the third Rajah had different views and would not allow his European government officers to own property in Sarawak. Thus, as the old officers retired, their bungalows were taken over by the government for the use of third Rajah's officers. 'Golf Links' Bungalow was one of these. It has always been the most famous of all the old European bungalows on the town side of the river due to the many strange stories associated

with it. Some of these were related to me by old residents many years ago and I shall now try to relate what I can remember.

The oldest story tells of a gold mine coolie (labourer) from Bau who was brought down to Kuching with a badly crushed arm. On admission to hospital the doctor decided that the only way to save the patient's life would be to amputate his arm immediately, but the coolie objected strongly and so the doctor was left powerless to do anything. Later, when the patient's condition had deteriorated to such an extent that he was no longer sufficiently conscious to continue his protests, the doctor decided to take matters into his own hands and with or without the patient's consent he would amputate. This he did but it was too late. The patient came round from the operation but only lived long enough to curse the doctor.

A few days later the doctor began to hear strange sounds at night — like something thumping on his bedroom floor. One night he struck a light to see what it was. Then, peering out of his mosquito curtains he saw it. It was the arm which he had amputated, advancing and thumping its way along the floor towards his bed, with the hand clutched as if ready to strangle him.

It is said that after his experience the doctor became a nervous wreck and one morning was found dead in bed with his own hand clutching his throat.

Then there is the story of the ghost of the Tamil woman. I was told this story by a medical officer who claimed that he had seen it. This occurred at the time when the downstairs of the house was still used as a stable. Apparently a Tamil woman had been murdered there and her ghost used to pay frequent visits to the scene of the crime. This doctor had his first experience shortly after he occupied the bungalow. One night he returned home late and on entering the house saw a Tamil woman in a distressed state sitting on a box in the stable. He rushed upstairs to collect his medical bag but when he returned the woman had disappeared. It was only later that he learnt the story of this often-seen ghost from a previous occupant of the bungalow. Eventually when the downstairs was no longer needed as a stable and was walled up to form a dining and sitting room, the ghost ceased to make its appearances.

This doctor also told me that all the time he lived in the bungalow, his dogs hardly ever ceased whining at night. If he locked

his bathroom door, as sure as anything, it would be open in the morning. In the end he let his dogs sleep in the bathroom and left the door open.

Lastly, there was the tree. It stood in the garden on the steep slope about half-way between the front verandah and the road. For many years it had been regarded as having miraculous properties. This huge tree was always regarded with awe. Few people cared to pass close to it at night. Even on the road much further away, people would hurry past it after dark. It seemed to have a peculiar attraction for lightning and was known to have been struck several times with the result that part became charred and I have been assured by many people that sparks* could often be seen flying out of the top at night. It was as might be expected, hollow in parts and at one time was the home of countless bats. It used to be quite an eerie experience to sit on the verandah at sunset when, suddenly with a screech and a whirl of wings, hundreds of bats would emerge from a hole in the old tree trunk to start their nightly prowls.

Knowing a certain amount of the history of this old building, many a person occupying the bungalow has spent a restless, perspiring night disturbed by the strange noises only to find that they were usually caused by bats clinging under the verandah flapping their wings every now and then.

I mentioned that the tree was regarded as possessing miraculous properties but when I occupied the bungalow I found that the most frequent visitors were gamblers praying for luck. It was quite usual to find flowers and food placed at the foot of the tree. Even my own Malay boy used to place curry and rice there on race days hoping that it would help my pony to win.

To end, I would like to mention that it would be of little use to try to take a look at the old place now. The garden is overgrown and rapidly reverting to jungle. The graves that formed part of an old Chinese cemetery at the front and side are now hidden. The old tree

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* After this story had been published, a previous occupant of the bungalow gave his opinion that the 'sparks' flying out of the top of the tree was caused by a thick growth of phosphorescent fungi.

fell down some time ago and can no longer be seen. But the bungalow still stands looking more gloomy than ever surrounded by a high wire fence on which there is a curt notice in large black and red letters which reads

PROTECTED PLACE
KEEP OUT!

It had been converted into a place of detention for arrested members of the Clandestine Communist Organisation.

CHAPTER 16

THE OLD CHRISTIAN CEMETERY, KUCHING

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England.

(Rupert Brooke)

THE opening of the Municipal car park at the top of Bishopsgate Street, which is approached from the side of the Lands & Survey Department Office, has exposed a view which many people in Kuching have never seen before or, perhaps, never even knew existed. It is the old Christian cemetery in which Christians of all denominations were buried from the time when it was first opened in 1848 until 1888, as the Anglican Mission was the only Christian Church in Sarawak during that period.

Records show that from 1848 to 1858, all burials which took place there were of Europeans but as the Church began to reap the fruits of its labour, many Chinese and Dayak names appeared in the Register. When the cemetery was finally closed and the present cemetery opened in 1889, twenty-seven Europeans and a hundred

and sixty-one Asians had been buried there, making a total of a hundred and eighty-eight burials. Of these, only thirty-two graves remain still marked today — four with the remains of *belian* (iron-wood) crosses and twenty-eight with tombstones. Of these, the inscriptions on only eight can easily be read. The following six are given in their order of burial. Some are of great historical interest.

16.1 BISHOP MCDOUGALL'S INFANT SONS (1848, 1849, 1851)

Bishop McDougall had the sad experience of burying three of his infant sons in this cemetery. Edward, who was only one day old when he died, was the first to be buried there in November 1848. His brothers Thomas, who died at the age of six days in November 1849, and Robert, one day old in September 1851, also shared the same little grave. Although this is the oldest grave in the cemetery, the inscription on the stone (one for all three) can still easily be read. They all died from the same cause — congenital heart trouble.

16.2 ALAN LEE (1853); WILLIAM BRERETON (1854)

Next to the grave of Bishop McDougall's infant sons, two well-preserved graves lie side by side. This is fitting because they are those of Alan Lee and his great friend, William Brereton, who is said to have indirectly been the cause of Lee's death.

In 1849, a fort had been built at Skrang to prevent Rentap (Earth Tremor), a Dayak Chief and notorious pirate, from moving downriver to continue his old practices. Finally becoming frustrated with the presence of the fort, Rentap decided to attack it. Brereton was in charge at the time and called upon Lee and a force of Lingga Dayaks to help him to defend it. They decided that rather than let Rentap attack the fort, they would meet his forces upriver. Having advanced a few miles they reached a bend in the river and Lee, realising that there would probably be a trap around the corner, suggested that they should advance no further.

Brereton, however, who is said to have been drinking accused Lee of cowardice. Eventually, unable to stand his taunts any more Lee advanced and walked right into the trap which he had expected. He was killed fighting valiantly and standing in his boat with only a

sword in his hand. His hand was severed from his shoulders in one blow by Rentap's son-in-law. Brereton died a year later from dysentery. He never forgave himself for the part he had played in bringing about Lee's death.

What happened to Lee's head is a question that may never be satisfactorily answered. Sarawak's written history which is noto-

Bishop McDougall.

rious for its minor contradictions, gives two versions. The second Rajah in his book *Ten Years in Sarawak*, stated the Lee's head definitely was not taken and that the head, which was supposed to be his, is in fact that of a European who accompanied the ship *Dido* on a punitive expedition and was killed at almost the same spot some years earlier. On the other hand, official government publications stated that Lee's head was taken and the Dayaks are quite certain that they have it. They always kept it carefully hidden away from European government officers for fear that it might be confiscated. To distinguish it from other heads they placed a brass ring in the cheek bone. Now it is said to be at Pulau Kerto, near Sibu, badly rotted away through neglect during the Japanese Occupation.

16.3 CHARLES JAMES FOX AND HENRY STEELE (1859)

Fox and Steele were treacherously murdered on June 15, 1859, while in charge of the fort at Kanowit. Steele was inside the fort unarmed when he was attacked and cut down by two men, whom he had known and trusted. Fox was at the time outside superintending the digging of a ditch, when a party of Kanowits rushed out of a Chinese house where they had been hiding and killed him. The murderers were caught and executed. At the foot of the stone over their grave are the following words: "Justice was done".

16.4 CHARLES ADAIR CRYMBLE (1862)

One of the best preserved graves is that of Charles Adair Crymble, who started his service in Sarawak in 1851 in charge of the fort (actually a stockade), which stood on the riverside at the foot of the hill on which Fort Margherita now stands, until it was burnt down in the Insurrection of 1857. He was also Treasurer of Sarawak from 1856 until the time of his death in 1862.

Crymble has been described by various old writers in different ways. For instance, one refers to him as "a wild Irishman" and another as "a shipwrecked junior clerk". But whatever others may have thought the first Rajah had a high opinion of him, principally for his brave conduct during the Insurrection, when he defended the

fort until he was the only defender left alive. Though badly wounded he leapt over the parapet, miraculously avoided numerous sword and spear thrusts from the insurgents and escaped into the river.

The stone over his grave was laid by the Rajah and amongst other particulars bears these words:

> THIS STONE WAS LAID BY THE RAJAH AS A MEMORIAL OF HIS PUBLIC SERVICES, PRIVATE WORTH AND TRIED FIDELITY.

What better epitaph could any man desire?

16.5 MRS. MESNEY (1884)

Mrs. Mesney was the wife of Archdeacon Mesney. Her grave is the first which one will see when one enters the cemetery. She was held

The old Christian Cemetery.

in great esteem by the European community and when she died a baptismal font was presented to the cathedral in her memory.

Should you care to visit this lonely little cemetery, you will find that it is well cared for by the mission and the grass is almost like that of a lawn but of course, other than for the tombstones, the rest is bare. There are now no more flowers because there is no longer anyone left in Sarawak to care for those who are buried there.

CHAPTER 17
THE SARAWAK FLAG

IT is recorded that after James Brooke had been proclaimed Rajah of Sarawak in September 1841, he adopted the flag of St. George, which was a red cross on a white background, in the form of a swallow-tailed pennant, as his own personal symbol of authority. It was this flag which was flown over his first fort at Berlidah and was carried in the warboats of the Malay and Dayak chiefs, who supported him during the early, turbulent years of his rule.

A few of these much-prized flags could still be seen in the longhouses of the descendants of some of these Dayak chiefs, in the Saribas and Skrang Rivers, even until the commencement of the war with Japan in 1941 which was exactly a hundred years later. They were regarded as *pesaka* or hereditary, that is, family property which could not be disposed of.

It was not until 1845 that the Rajah decided to give the country a flag of its own but owing to continual unforseen delays, it was not eventually hoisted until September 21, 1848.

This flag was designed by the Rajah himself and was said to have been made up from the half purple and half red cross of his armorial bearings, on a yellow ground. Yellow was the royal colour of Borneo. This statement is probably misleading since the colour of

the cross in the Brooke armorial bearings was later described in a letter written by the second Rajah as *blue* and red.

Having designed the flag the Rajah in 1848 applied to Lord Palmerston and Earl Grey, Ministers for Foreign and Colonial Affairs, for the government's recognition of Sarawak by allowing a Protectorate flag to be displayed. In November 1846, Lord Palmerstone informed the Rajah that this was a matter on which Her Majesty's Government was not yet prepared to decide. Then in September 1848, the position between the Rajah and the British Government still being the same, the Rajah impatiently decided to hoist the Sarawak flag. In March the following year, the Rajah again wrote to Lord Palmerston saying that he hoped if sanctioned by the British Government, the act would afford permanency to the country. Lord Palmerston replied three months later saying that Her Majesty's Government approved the proceedings.

But Sarawak still had to wait for another fifteen years (January, 1864) before Britain would recognise it as an independent state, and for another thirty-five years (June, 1888) before Britain would guarantee its protection. Subsequently, the Rajah expressed regret that the flag did not contain a quartered Union Jack.

The only recorded eye-witness account of the first hoisting of the Sarawak flag is given in a book *Letters from Sarawak*. These letters were written in 1851 by Mrs. McDougall, the wife of Bishop McDougall, to her young son Charley who was at school in England. They were later published, by chance, by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) to help raise funds for missionary work in Sarawak. Charley was fated to die a year after these letters had been written following a blow from a cricket ball.

"The Sarawak flag is a purple and red cross, out of Sir James Brooke's armorial shield, on a yellow background, yellow being the royal colour of Borneo," writes Mrs. McDougall. "It was given by the Rajah to his people on his return from England in 1848 and I remember well what a grand occasion it was. *H.M.S. Meander* was at Sarawak (the old name for Kuching) at the time, and their band played, *God Save the Queen*, as the flag was for the first time hoisted on the flagstaff before the Rajah's house. All the English were assembled there, and a great crowd of natives, Malays and Dayaks, whom the Rajah addressed in the Malay language telling them that

the flag which he had that day given them would, he hoped, be their glory and protection, as the flag of England had been hers ... The Malays listened with love and reverence to his words and *from my house across the river,* I could hear their acclamations ...."

The only other writer to describe the cross as being purple and red is Gertrude Jacob in *The Rajah of Sarawak* (1876) but she is only quoting Mrs. McDougall. All other writers for the next twenty years (until 1870), who mentioned the flag gave the colours of the cross as *blue* and red.

The question now arises — was Mrs. McDougall right? Were the colours of the cross on the flag which she was first hoisted, in fact *purple* and red? As she witnessed this ceremony from the top of one hill to the top of another, nearly a mile away, with the main part of the town and the Sarawak River in between, she might easily have been mistaken. Also the Rajah's words which she quoted, are not firsthand since she was not actually present on the spot.

Again, Mrs. McDougall was writing to a young boy probably with no thought of her letters ever being published. She would therefore, not have been concerned with accuracy and, in fact, some of these letters may well contain a certain amount of fiction in order to make them more interesting.

Nevertheless, Mrs. McDougall's description of the flag which was printed in 1852, during the lifetime of the first Rajah (he died in 1868) is not recorded as ever having been questioned; neither was Gertrude Jacob's repetition of Mrs. McDougall's description in *The Rajah of Sarawak* printed in 1876, during the time of the second Rajah, who was noted to be person insistent on accuracy in matters of this nature. It might be argued that *Letters from Sarawak* was too childish to be of interest to anyone in Sarawak and thus escaped attention, but the same could not be said of *The Rajah of Sarawak.*

Was Mrs. McDougall still using her imagination when she described the background of the flag as being yellow because it was the royal colour of Borneo, when the background of the Brooke shield was gold which, when applied to a flag, would be represented by yellow? Or was it a mere coincidence that both explanations should fit?

The first recorded official notification regarding the Sarawak

flag was issued by the second Rajah on the May 7, 1870. It was primarily concerned with the dimensions of the flag and the number which should be issued to outstations but contained the sentence "Black bunting to be used in place of blue".

This seems to confirm that the cross was originally blue and red and also denotes the time of the change to black and red, which are its present colours. But no reason for the change was given at the time. A careful search through the state archives failed to reveal anything except a clue in an odd sentence in an angry letter in the second Rajah's letter books written ten years later, in May 1880, addressed to the Borneo Company Limited, regarding the flying of the Sarawak flag by them over their Singapore office.

The letter reads: "It is the Sarawak flag which was arranged in England at the Herald's Office from the Brooke Armorial Bearings, the only trivial difference was in the colour of part of the cross (blue or black), which it was thought to be an improvement in a flag". In a later letter the Rajah mentioned that for that advice, he paid the Herald's Office the sum of £100.

The second Rajah gave flags to three local bodies in Kuching. They were the S.P.G. Mission in 1871; the Borneo Company in 1874; and the Roman Catholic Mission in 1906. But none of these flags seem to have been used for any length of time and certainly none was used today.

The S.P.G. Mission flag became officially recognised by a notification in the *Sarawak Gazette*, dated May 7, 1871, which read: "The Mission has been granted a quartering of a Christian Badge or Monogram in the flag. This is to be recognised as the Mission Flag". This happened during the time of Bishop Chambers. When he retired in 1881 he was succeeded by Bishop Hose, who asked for the Rajah's permission to incorporate his own armorial bearings in the mission flag. This the Rajah had to refuse, since he was of the opinion that a precedent of this nature might lead to a change in the mission flag with each successive bishop.

The flag given to the Borneo Company Limited by the Rajah in 1874 was a Sarawak flag with a blue border, as in this form it could be used by their offices outside Sarawak. The following is the rest of the letter of May 1880, already referred to, which also deals with this flag.

Singapore,
May 21st, 1880

Messrs. The Borneo Co., Ltd.,
LONDON.

Dear Sirs,

I wish to draw your notice to the fact that the flag now used by the Borneo Company in Singapore, and I conclude in other branches of your company throughout the world, is the Sarawak flag .... The first time we heard the Sarawak flag was being used by the Borneo Co. Ltd., was when the company required a flag for the vessel, **Sri Sarawak.** *It was then arranged that a blue border should be put around the flag for a distinguishing mark, and I fully understood that this blue would be used throughout all your branches .... I was, as you may imagine, somewhat surprised in finding the Sarawak flag flying at the wharf before the Manager's house in New Harbour (Singapore) on coming in the other day. I should much prefer the blue border being adopted, and the Sarawak flag not used excepting in its proper place, or by vessels belonging to Sarawak, or in Sarawak. I leave you gentlemen to judge that it, being used outside Sarawak, is liable to lead to mistakes or misconceptions from the public as much as a misplaced seal or signature might do. It is perhaps late in the day to make complaint about this matter, but I am only just cognisant of the fact of it being still used by the Borneo Co. Ltd., or I should have brought it to your notice before, and trust that there will be no trouble or at any rate very little, in making so slight an alteration which will quite satisfy us.*

I am, Gentlemen,
Yours faithfully,
C. BROOKE.

It is recorded that this flag was used for a short time by the Kuching office but no reason is given for its withdrawal. However, two very good reasons could possibly have been that first, it was too ugly, and secondly, the blue border being a Chinese sign of mourning might have been considered unlucky for business.

The Roman Catholic Mission was granted its flag by an Order dated June 28, 1906, which read: "The Roman Catholic Mission has been granted permission to use a Sarawak flag with a white diagonal cross quartered in the head of it".

The *Sarawak Gazette* records the first hoisting of the flag thus: "A new flagstaff has recently been erected in front of the R.C. Mission Headquarters. The Mission flag, kindly presented by His Highness the Rajah, was hoisted for the first time on the morning of 26th September, H.H. The *Rajah Muda*'s birthday. A Guard of Honour was drawn up for the occasion and the flag, having been hoisted by the Superior of the Mission, was saluted by a salvo of guns. The Sarawak Hymn, sung by the schoolboys, concluded the proceedings".

The following is another typical Brooke gesture regarding the use of the Sarawak flag, which is taken from the second Rajah's letter books. The person referred to was Mr. D.J.S. Bailey, a Sarawak government officer (1888-1909), who served most of his time as Resident, Simanggang.

KNOW YE ALL MEN WHOM IT MAY CONCERN that I, Charles Brooke, Rajah of Sarawak, do grant with pleasure full permission to Colonel Bailey of Ightham Court, to hoist and make use of the Sarawak flag whensoever he may judge necessary in order to commemorate the many years of valuable and zealous service of his brother Demetrius in the State of Sarawak.

C. BROOKE
Rajah

Given under my hand and seal this 1st day of Jun, 1911.

The second Rajah had his own personal pennant or bargee

which he passed on to his son, the *Rajah Muda* (later third Rajah) together with the right to use the royal yellow umbrella by a proclamation of June, 1904.

It was the second Rajah's custom to present his own personal pennant to those chiefs who had assisted him in expeditions against rebel tribes; a custom which was also observed by the first Rajah. Many of these flags can still be seen in the respective longhouses, principle in the Second Division of Sarawak. These same pennant is now used as the personal flag of the Governor of Sarawak.

CHAPTER 18
THE STORY OF AVIATION IN SARAWAK

18.1 Part I

WHEN does the story of aviation in Sarawak begin? Perhaps we should take it from the time when the first flying object was observed over Sarawak territory, in which case it must be August 14, 1922. On that day shortly after dusk, the startled people of Belaga, a small government station in the far interior of the Third Division, rushed from their houses at the noisy drone of the engine of an approaching 'flying vessel' and a few minutes later saw a grey boat-like shape appear out of the sky and fly low over the town. It banked slowly round Fort Vyner, fired a verey light which lit up the area and itself, and then disappeared behind a heavy trail of white smoke. It was a Dutch flying boat on a test flight for a feeder service in connection with the proposed K.L.M. London/Singapore run which was to prove to be successful a few years later.

The second plane to be seen over Sarawak made its appearance almost exactly two years later and its timing could not have been better arranged. It was a seaplane from *H.M.S. Pegasus*, which was passing from Singapore to Miri. The plane appeared unexpectedly over Kuching on the morning of Saturday, October 16, 1924, during

the unveiling ceremony of the Rajah Charles Brooke Memorial in front of the Court House. To many of the superstitious, it symbolised the return of the spirit of the old Rajah who had died in England seven years earlier. Later, this seaplane was joined by two others. They entertained the people of Kuching by flying round and round the town before landing on the river in front of Main Bazaar. The crowd could not have been larger nor more appreciative for, on that particular day, Kuching was gay with a large number of visitors from outstations and upcountry.

A year later in 1925, the use of seaplanes, in carrying out aerial surveys in this part of the world, had become increasingly appreciated. Aerial photography had come rapidly to the force during the First World War in mapping enemy positions. As a result, the Sarawak Oilfields contracted with the Air Survey Company, London, for two seaplanes to carry out aerial photography of 1,300 square miles of Sarawak and Brunei territories. On the completion of this survey, the Rajah then authorised the same company to carry out a survey of the Rejang Delta comprising 1,750 square miles. The propeller of one of these aircrafts can still be seen in the Sarawak Museum. This survey was completed in 1927 and Sarawak had now begun to be very much air-minded.

On November 1, 1928, Kuching received its first visit from the Royal Air Force, consisting of four *Southampton* type flying boats under the command of Group Captain Cave-Browne-Cave. They were on a training flight, which planned a round trip to Hongkong *via* the Borneo States and return *via* Bangkok. They landed at Pending amid great excitement, and their stay was celebrated with a four-day non-stop round of parties terminating with a "most enjoyable evening" given by the Rajah at the Astana.

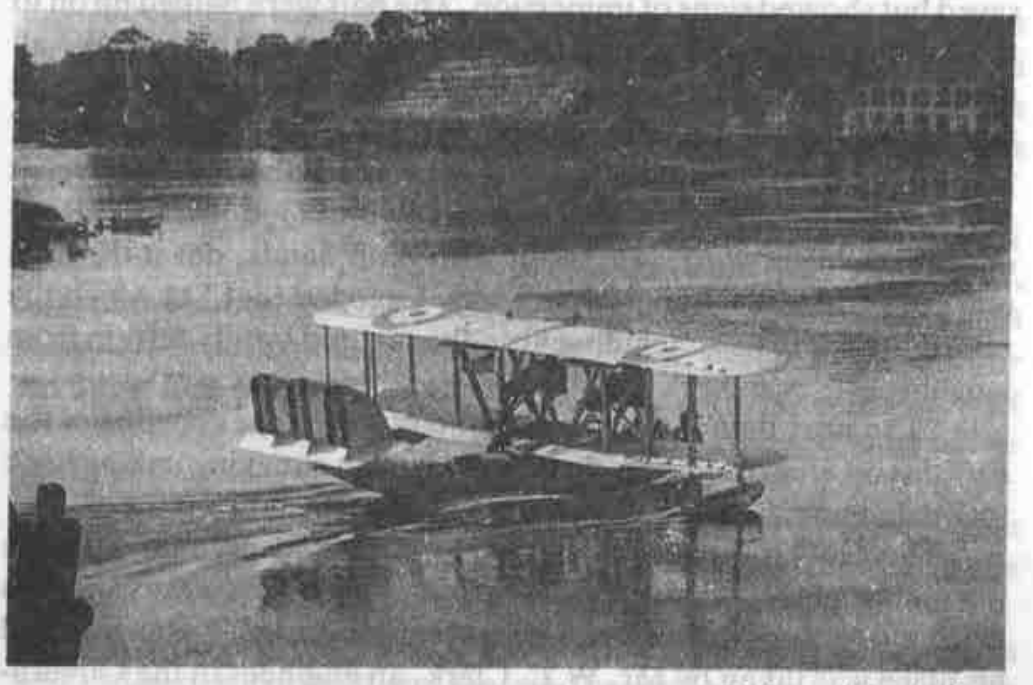
The Rajah had by now become convinced of the great use to which an air service comprising seaplanes could be put in this land of rivers with few other means of communication. The government therefore, purchased two *Gipsy Moth* seaplanes with metal floats, constructed by the De Havilland Aircraft Company. A slipway and hanger were constructed on the riverside near Satok Suspension Bridge, Kuching, and the public were informed that the machines were intended for use in land development and mail carrying. At first it was decided that their names should be the *Royalist* and the

Jolly Bachelor in perpetuation of the memory of "their more famous, if slower predecessors". The former was the name of the sailing ship in which James Brooke first arrived in Sarawak and the latter was the name of an early government gunboat. Eventually, the name *Venus* was substituted for *Jolly Bachelor.*

The service was officially brought into being on December 1, 1928, by a notification in the *Sarawak Government Gazette* appointing the Commissioner of Trade and Customs to be Director of Government Air Service; Mr. W.H. Phillips to be Flight Lieutenant; and Mr. J.W. Goodban to be Leading Aircraftsman.

The *Royalist,* carrying the first Sarawak Government air mail, left Kuching on the January 12, 1929 at 6.20 a.m. and reached Simanggang at 7.25 a.m., where it struck an air pocket while travelling at eighty miles per hour (there were no 'knots' in those days), and crashed into the river.

Mr. W.P.N.I. Ditmas, who had just arrived in the country was a junior cadet at Simanggang at the same time. Here is his interesting eye-witness account of the crash.



By Courtesy of Sarawak Museum

One of the first two seaplanes in Sarawak

"The plane throttled back, to come in to land on the river under the telephone wire on which we had fixed a red flag. Then suddenly and surprisingly, it opened to full throttle again, presumably because of striking an air pocket, but the aircraft did not recover and crashed straight into the river with a tremendous splash. Then there was dead silence as the almost submerged wreckage rapidly drifted downriver. The engine of the standby mooring launch refused to start but a few minutes later a police paddle boat followed the wreckage which was now about three hundred yards downstream. We saw one figure struggling in the wreckage.

"To make matters worse, the petrol tank came down on Goodban, who was in the front cockpit. He was a non-swimmer and was wearing old-fashioned water wings which he had inflated just before landing and which jammed him in the cockpit. Phillips, the pilot, lost several front teeth and had a badly cut chin. Goodban suffered from shock and near drowning. In fact, he would have drowned had it not been for the gallant action of Phillips in extricating him from his almost submerged, trapped position.

"They were then pulled into the police boat. The mail was also saved but showed signs of immersion. The pair were helped up on to the landing stage by the senior cadet, Langton, and myself. We all proceeded to the old Astana, which was on the site of the present Government Offices, where Langton rushed to the sideboard, poured out a stiffy brandy and water and (here, he could not resist relating this anecdote) as he was handing it to Goodban, the Resident reached forward, grasped it with both hands, put it down in one gulp and said, 'Langton, my boy, I needed that,' at which the rest of the company, including Goodban, could hardly refrain from laughing.

"The next day, it was a sad moment to see the remains of the *Royalist* on an exceedingly dirty, slow launch chugging its way back to Kuching."

The Government Air Service continued to operate with the remaining plane, *Venus,* but Goodban never flew again; he was given a new appointment as Quartermaster Sarawak Rangers and his place was taken by Mr. W.L. Clark, an engineer in the Government Electricity Department. After one year of existence, the air service then came to a sudden end. The Rajah came to this decision

after finally being disillusioned by the high cost of maintenance, the misfortune which had struck the service and the fact that the planes proved to be too light and unsuitable for the work required of them. He then, in his usual generous manner, did an extraordinary thing. He gave the seaplane *Venus* to the pilot, Phillips, who attempted to fly it to Malaya but only succeeded in reaching Pontianak, just over a hundred miles south of Kuching, from where the rest of the journey was continued by boat.

Later in Kuala Lumpur, Phillips used the plane for pleasure flights and eventually sold it to the local flying club, who replaced the floats with wheels and used it as a trainer plane.

18.2 PART II

By 1932, Sarawak was receiving frequent visits from R.A.F. aircraft — all flying-boats — since the Kuching airfield was not opened until 1938. They belonged to 205 Squadron based in Singapore. To most of the people the novelty of seeing an aircraft was now wearing off.

About this time, the Hollywood film world began to show a keen interest in Sarawak. This followed much publicity given to a proposed film of the life of the first Rajah in which Errol Flynn was to play the leading part. As a result, Sarawak started to receive visits from persons and aircraft of world-wide renown.

The first of these to arrive in Kuching was the seaplane *Flying Carpet* in October 1932. The occupants were two Americans, Richard Halliburton and Moye Stephens. The former was a traveller, writer and flyer, who had just taken part in a very successful flying film of the time, "Hell's Angels". The *Ranee* Sylvia went up for a flight over Kuching in this plane and here are some of her comments later.

"My one consolation had been that at any rate I should have Dick Halliburton to cling to. Picture my embarrassment when I was pushed into a tiny seat in front of the pilot — alone!

"... I saw all our Malay 'boys' waving from the Astana garden and I tried to wave back, but the wind nearly tore my hand from my wrist, and one of my rings blew right off my finger .... Then we started to turn. How easily one uses the phrase 'paralysed with

fear'. There were two iron hoops in front of me. I crooked my fingers in those and shut my eyes and prayed ....

"As Moye and I clambered from the plane after alighting, I asked him if those iron hoops were really meant for hanging on to. 'Oh, that,' he replied, 'is the crash bar — so if you do crash, you don't get the engine in your stomach'."

This seaplane, which was on a round-the-world flight, had taken a year-and-a-half to reach Sarawak from America.

"It takes your breath away", was the caption of an article which appeared in the *Sarawak Gazette* of June 1933, with sub-captions: "8,000 miles by air". "Man who was ten days ago in London". It then went on to describe a trip made by air from London to Singapore by Lt. Commander E. Baker of *H.M.S. Herald,* survey ship stationed in Sarawak waters. He was the first naval officer to make the journey in this way and was besieged by newspaper reporters in Singapore anxious to know the latest news from London. The only item of interest he had to give them was that beer had gone up a penny a pint. The same trip can now be made in fourteen hours!

On September 1, 1934, for the first time Singapore newspapers were delivered in Kuching on the same day as they were published. This was by courtesy of the R.A.F. and the *Free Press* (a Singapore newspaper) had this to say: "A special consignment of today's issue is being flown to Kuching, in Sarawak, enabling our readers there to read this morning's issue of a Singapore newspaper and thus bring the news of the day to one of the most remote parts of the British Empire".

In August 1934, Mr. C.W. Bailey, Works and Buildings Inspector, R.A.F., arrived in Kuching. Little was it realised at the time what an important part he was to play in aviation in Sarawak. Before the war with Japan, he constructed the Kuching and Miri airfields and had almost completed the Bintulu landing strip when hostilities began. After the Second World War, he returned to Sarawak and supervised the construction of the present Kuching Airport but was fated to die in an air crash in Singapore in March 1958.

By 1935, the speed of aircraft was rapidly improving. For instance, a flight made by the Rajah in an R.A.F. flying-boat from Singapore to Kuching took four hours at about 115 miles per hour,

which was a big improvement on the 85 miles per hour speed limit of the government planes in 1929.

In September 1935, Mr. Martin Johnson, the man who taught the world the advantages of the camera over the gun in 'shooting' big game, arrived in Kuching in a *Sikorsky* amphibian aircraft. Stork-like in shape and giraffe-like in its markings, it had been used in the making of two films of wild animal life in Africa, *Congorilla* and *Baboona*. The plane was named *Spirit of Africa*. Mr. Johnson had his wife as a passenger.

One morning the plane zoomed off from Pending and was not heard of for another year. On his return, Mr. Martin Johnson claimed to have penetrated into parts of the Borneo jungle previously unvisited by Europeans and discovered species of wild animals not known before to exist on the island. He took back with him to America 'Truzon', the world's largest captive *orang-utan*, who was cared for by two Dayaks. 'Truzon' and his keepers were then taken round the United States in a plane on a nine months' lecture tour.

Before leaving Kuching for America, the name of Mr. Johnson's plane written in English, Chinese and Malay, had been changed to *Spirit of Africa and Borneo*.

On September 26, 1938, the Rajah's birthday, the Kuching landing ground was opened by the Officer Administering the Government, Mr. E. Parnell, before a large crowd. Included in his speech were the details that the landing ground was seven hundred yards long by three hundred yards wide. It had the appearance of a lawn because 15,390 trees had been felled and three million grass roots planted. 36 Torpedo Bomber Squadron, who had the honour of opening the landing ground, then took off and made formation flights which were much admired. Just over two years later, the Squadron was to be completely wiped out by the Japanese in Malaya.

In January 1939, Wearnes' Air Service four-engined DH 86 aircraft carried out an experimental survey flight from Singapore to Kuching and, as a result, a twice-weekly service was planned to start within the following three months. However, the subsidy they required from the government could not be granted and so the service was not brought into operation.

In 1939, there were still remote places in Sarawak where aircraft had not yet been seen. Of these perhaps Tebedu on the Indonesian border was the last. It is reported that in June of that year a Dutch flying-boat, slightly off course, flew over the village. The people thought it was an evil spirit about to attack them and became very frightened, howling and weeping. Some ran and hid in the jungle.

When the Second World War broke out in Europe in 1939, a total of thirteen European Sarawak government officers (serving and retired) immediately offered their services to the R.A.F. Three were killed in the first few months. Then followed the outbreak of the war with Japan in December 1941. Kuching began to receive visits from Japanese reconnaissance planes. They came from Saigon. On the 19th of the same month, Kuching came under bombing.

18.3 PART III — War

When war with Japan broke out in December 1941, Kuching had an airfield, but no planes. This was because Singapore and Malaya had barely sufficient fighter planes to defend themselves and, in any case, the few Brewster Buffalo and Hurricane fighters which they had, proved no match for the faster Japanese Zeros. But it was thought that the advancing Japanese forces might need to take the Kuching airfield for an attack on Singapore. Therefore a 'denial scheme' was put into operation, whereby empty oil drums were rolled onto the strip to prevent landings each time warning signals were received. Eventually, on December 23, 1941, the eve of the fall of Kuching, the airfield was blown up and denied to the enemy.

From about mid-December, daily reports were received from the lookout post at Po Point, near the mouth of the Sarawak River, that a Japanese seaplane was observed early each morning passing overhead from south to north. It had a secret hideout somewhere around the turtle islands nearby, which was never discovered. There had been great activity in this area by Japanese 'fishermen' for some time before the war, and it was almost a weekly occurrence

for their boats and nets to be confiscated. This seaplane was obviously waiting for a prey and it did not have long to wait.

The prey was the three ships evacuating oilfield personnel after they had plugged the oil wells at Miri. The ships were the Rajah's yacht *Maimuna*, the *Lipis* and the *Shinai*.

As soon as the Japanese had landed in Miri on December 16, Dutch planes from Singkawang, an airfield about halfway between Kuching and Pontianak, attacked their ships daily. They would fly low over Kuching at about 9 a.m. and return at midday. They succeeded in sinking a Japanese cruiser and Kuching and Pontianak were bombed in retaliation.

From December 13, single Japanese reconnaissance planes began to visit Kuching almost daily but did not attack the town. It was learned that they came from Saigon. Then, on December 19, following the sinking of the Japanese cruiser, suddenly at midday, two flights of Japanese bombers arrived over Kuching, flying at about 4,000 feet. They proceeded to the airfield and, after dropping a few bombs, parted company.

The first flight comprising nine planes, flew on to Pontianak and laid waste a half square mile of the town, which included several schools full of young children. The biggest article to be seen later was a twisted, iron bedstead.

The second flight of seven planes turned back to Kuching and dropped a string of about forty anti-personnel bombs, from Simpang Tiga to the fort; the last one fell just short of its target in midriver. The number killed is sometimes given as twenty-six and sometimes as thirty-two. The badly injured numbered seventy-three. Nearly all the people had taken shelter under the trees.

The only damage done to property in Kuching was an accidental hit on the Borneo Company Oil Store on the riverside from which a huge column of jet black smoke immediately rose and hung like a pall over the town until the evening, turning day almost into night.

No further planes visited Kuching until the morning of Christmas Eve — the day Kuching fell. This was a seaplane covering the advance of the Japanese troops from their landing point at Sibu Laut. Some of the troops came upriver in landing craft and others

on foot along the Lundu Road to the Satok Suspension Bridge and behind the Astana. The plane dropped leaflets, attacked the Rangers at Bukit Siol, and flew low over the town, letting off bursts of machine-gun fire at anything that looked suspicious.

After the Japanese had occupied Kuching, Prince Maeda, a brother of the Emperor of Japan, was appointed Governor of Sarawak, Brunei and North Borneo (now Sabah) and took up his residence at the Astana. The main entrance of the Astana is in the form of an ancient-looking tower overlooking the main door. There was always a Brooke tradition that the exterior of this tower should not be renovated or the creeper, which was not unlike ivy, removed from the wall, otherwise some disaster would occur.

One day Prince Maeda gave instructions for the 'ivy' to be removed from the wall. Two days later, the plane in which he was travelling crashed into the sea off Bintulu and he was killed.

There was little activity as regards aviation in Sarawak during the war years. This was because the Japanese planes numbered fewer and fewer as the war progressed. Nevertheless a few months before the end, they decided to make the long, straight stretch of Batu Kawa Road into a fighter strip but it had hardly been completed when Allied planes bombed it.

A scapegoat had to be found for this incident so the blame was placed on a young European internee who had a good knowledge of Chinese and had learned to speak Japanese during the war. The Japanese accused him of being in secret radio communication with the Allied Forces. He broke down under the harsh treatment he received in their attempt to make him confess to a crime of which he was not guilty, and he committed suicide by cutting his throat with the fragment of a broken bottle.

Although the Japanese were masters of the skies at the beginning of the war, the time came when the only air activity was Whistling Lizzie, an old transport plane used in regular flights between Kuching and North Borneo (Sabah) like an excursion train, an odd bomber, or a fighter plane, which used to fly around now and again. It was not until Palm Sunday, March 25, 1945, that Allied planes were to be seen over Kuching again.

18.4 PART IV

The heartening sight of Allied planes over Kuching on March 25, 1945, is described in the autobiography of Mr. J.B. Archer, a former Sarawak Government Officer who, up to that time, had been an internee in Batu Lintang Prison Camp for over three years.

"The time is 11 o'clock in the morning", writes Mr. Archer. "There is the whining of plane engines in the sky. We do not even look upwards. Then suddenly, there is a shout: 'My God, they're ours!' Overhead, dazzling clear in the strong sunlight are two planes flying very high. They are the first Allied planes to be seen over Kuching for more than three years. And then at 2 p.m. the next day, we heard an ever increasing roar as six flights of six planes each flew very low over us. From two planes of the last flight, black specks seemed to spurt out of their tails and falling, broke into hundreds of little fluttering leaflets .... This was the beginning of the end. From then on, more than a hundred raids were made. The Allied objectives were the landing ground and shipping in the river. They came and went as they like without opposition .... On August 15, dropping of food and clothes started by a Douglas plane escorted by strong flights of fighters".

The only loss in Kuching at this time was a Mosquito reconnaissance plane which flew too low and struck the top of a tall durian tree a little way downriver. This type of plane was constructed mostly of wood for lightness and speed but nevertheless, the Japanese displayed parts of the wreckage in the window of the Sarawak Steamship Company office to try to prove that the Allies had run short of metal.

While all this was happening in Kuching there was also activity in the north of Sarawak. As early as January 1945, an American Liberator plane was shot down by a Japanese Zero fighter near Limbang and in February and March, SRD (an Intelligence Detachment) personnel were parachuted into Bario to commence their intelligence work and to organise guerilla warfare against the Japanese.

When the Allied relieving forces arrived in Kuching, they were surprised to find that although there were few Japanese planes left

in the territories which they had formerly overrun, there was a large number of single-engine planes, mostly fighters, parked in bays on the roadside from about the fifth and 7¼ milestone on Penrissen Road and also on the airstrip. The reason for constructing the fighter strip on Batu Kawa Road now became obvious. But events moved so fast in the final stages of the war that a Japanese General and his staff arrived at the Kuching airfield to inspect the Japanese planes there, is still being unknown to them that the Allied relieving forces had already arrived. Alas, for them. They were promptly put into a military vehicle and escorted to town.

When peace came again a weekly courier service was maintained by R.A.F. Sunderland flying boats. The airstrip was being used by the services and private planes but was not considered sufficiently safe for commercial aircraft. In the case of the former some almost unbelievable landings are said to have taken place. For instance, there was the occasion when an American Flying Fortress actually landed and took off from this strip.

Nevertheless, with modern aircraft becoming bigger, heavier and faster it was not surprising when, in May 1948, the Governor announced in Council Negri that a large sum of money had been approved by the British Government for the construction of a new airstrip in Kuching, as the present strip was unsafe for modern air traffic and the R.A.F. could not be expected to maintain indefinitely its flying-boat service.

Following this annoucement Mr. C.W. Bailey, a First World War Royal Flying Corps pilot, who had constructed the first Kuching airstrip, arrived to construct the present airport. He was an elderly man of great charm and soon made himself one of the most popular figures in the country.

On September 26, 1950, on the Rajah's birthday, and exactly twelve years to the day after the first airstrip had come into use, the present Kuching Airport was officially opened. At 10 a.m. a Malayan Airways Dakota from Singapore landed on the old landing ground carrying officials and press representatives. It then took off and landed on the new runway at 11 o'clock and His Excellency the Governor stepped out of the aircraft and said these few words: "I declare the new Kuching Airport opened. May all who pass this way do so in peace and safety."

But strange enough, the very first flight from Kuching to Singapore nearly ended in disaster.

This flight carried many high-ranking government officials and the Chinese Consul in Kuching. It is said that their personal insurances for the flight amounted to about two million dollars.

When the plane reached Singapore weather conditions were too bad to land there. It was, therefore, diverted to Kuala Lumpur where conditions were no better, so the lane was then re-diverted back to Kuching. By now the weather in Kuching had also become so bad that it was impossible for the plane to land. In the circumstances the pilot, with his fuel supply nearly exhausted, had only one alternative left and that was to land on an old Japanese fighter strip at Sibu Laut, which was full of bomb craters.

Here the plane, with its greatly-alarmed passengers made a bumpy, but fortunately, accident-free landing. When they were offered seats on another plane a few days later, most of them declined. They preferred to go by boat!

CHAPTER 19

EARLY DAYS OF HORSE RACING IN SARAWAK

HORSE racing in Sarawak can be said to have commenced officially in 1890, when the first organised race meeting was held in Kuching, although there had been racing of a sort there since 1880. This was principally due to the second Rajah's great love for horses and the fact that most of his European government officers were recruited from his own home country of Devon, where riding has always been popular. It is therefore, surprising to find that it was not until thirty-four years later, in 1924, that the present Sarawak Turf Club was founded.

The first racecourse was opened in Kuching by the second Rajah in 1880, and was the same as that used until the beginning of the Second World War.

The land for the racecourse was obtained free from the persons through whose property it passed. It ran clockwise and was one-and-a-third miles long (the present racecourse is anti-clockwise and one mile long). It was constructed outside the present racecourse and included what are now known as Padungan and William Tan Roads, the former as the home straight.

By 1890, enthusiasm had grown considerably and meetings

began to be held on a more elaborate scale. These were organised by the Kuching Racing Committee, which was the same body as that which so successfully ran the Kuching Annual Regattas for an unbroken period of nearly eighty years.

The types of animal used for racing varied from time to time. For instance in 1890, North Borneo (now Sabah) and Sulu ponies, costing $50 each, raced for $20. In a three-day meeting one of these called *Polo* won five races, which speaks well for the stamina of this type of pony. Later, as interest increased, Australian and Indian ponies were introduced and meetings began to provide races for all types and classes of horses and ponies.

At first the majority of the owners were Europeans because they were the only persons who could ride, but records show that at the first 'official' meeting in 1890, a Chinese owner, Mr. Soon Seng, was registered and his pony *Roman Candle*, ridden by Major Day, Commandant of the Sarawak Rangers, scored a double.

By 1892, there were four Malay owners and four years later, in 1896, racing had become so popular that a decision was made to order horses from Australia. This was followed by an inevitable period of disappointment for some unsuccessful owners, which led to breaks of as much as two years between meetings owing to lack of support.

It is interesting to note what happened to some of these horses during these long, non-racing periods. Those which were not used for riding were often put to other uses to earn their keep. Perhaps the most unusual was the horse which was sent to the Bau Gold Works to draw truck-loads of gold-bearing earth on a tram line.

In time this horse developed the gait of an "Australian Trotter" through his forced high stepping from sleeper to sleeper. The story goes that this held him in good stead because when he was brought to Kuching for the next race meeting, the racecourse was a quagmire and, whereas the other horses tired, slipped and floundered in the conditions, this one-pace horse slowly gained on them and won the race.

The Sultan of Johore, prompted by a chance remark by the Rajah whilst on a visit to Singapore in 1902, decided to send his pony, *Hercules*, to race in Sarawak. The Sultan's confidence in the ability of his pony was not without good reason as results were later

to prove. Running in the class for Australian and Indian ponies, it easily won the *Towkays' Cup* on the first day and the Sarawak Civil Service Cup, presented by the Rajah, by eight lengths on the second day.

The old Rajah who was in his sixties at that time, still liked to ride in the races and once won his own cup in a close finish. But when he found later that his officers sometimes pulled their mounts to let him win, he gave up taking part in any more meetings.

The most successful stable, before the founding of the present Sarawak Turf Club, was the Upper Sarawak *Kongsi.* Their run of successes was gained by a string of such oddly names horses as *Salt, Mustard, Pepper, Bread* and *Butter.* Although the prize money for each race was only between $20 and $40, the value of the cups was sometimes considerable. The few which still survive today are valued at between $10,000 and $20,000 each.

Racing, which was more in the nature of gymkhana meetings in the old days, was often exciting, the jockeys getting plenty of thrills and the crowd plenty of entertainment — often unintentional.

In the race for the Rajah's Cup in 1893, five Australian horses went to the starting post. One jumped the ditch at the side of the racecourse and threw its jockey; another spun round like a top and his jockey fell off; and a third bolted twice round the racecourse in the opposite direction. In the meantime, the remaining two horses were started and the winner collided with the runaway on the bend just after the finishing post. On another occasion, one horse bolted at the start and ran all the way to Pending and back. He then won the last race of the day!

When the First World War started in Europe in 1914, racing was suspended and not revived until 1921. Strangely enough, this was a race between five buffaloes as there were no horses in Kuching at the time. All were ridden by Europeans with a special penalty for those who had learnt Tamil words to encourage their mounts.

Thus the flame was rekindled. A batch of ponies was then brought down from North Borneo (Sabah) and, thanks to the initiative of Mr. J.A.H. Hardie, the present Sarawak Turf Club was founded in 1924. Great enthusiasm was again shown and plans were made to lay out racecourses at Sibu and Miri but these did not

materialise and so Sibu now has a Race Course Road but no racecourse.

By 1941, racing was again interrupted by war — the Second World War. The first time the war had lasted for seven years. The second time it was to be for eight years.

Nevertheless, racing flourishes better than ever in Sarawak today and it would be a revelation to some of those old timers still living in England if they could but see it in its present form.

CHAPTER 20
THE OLD KUCHING WIRELESS MASTS

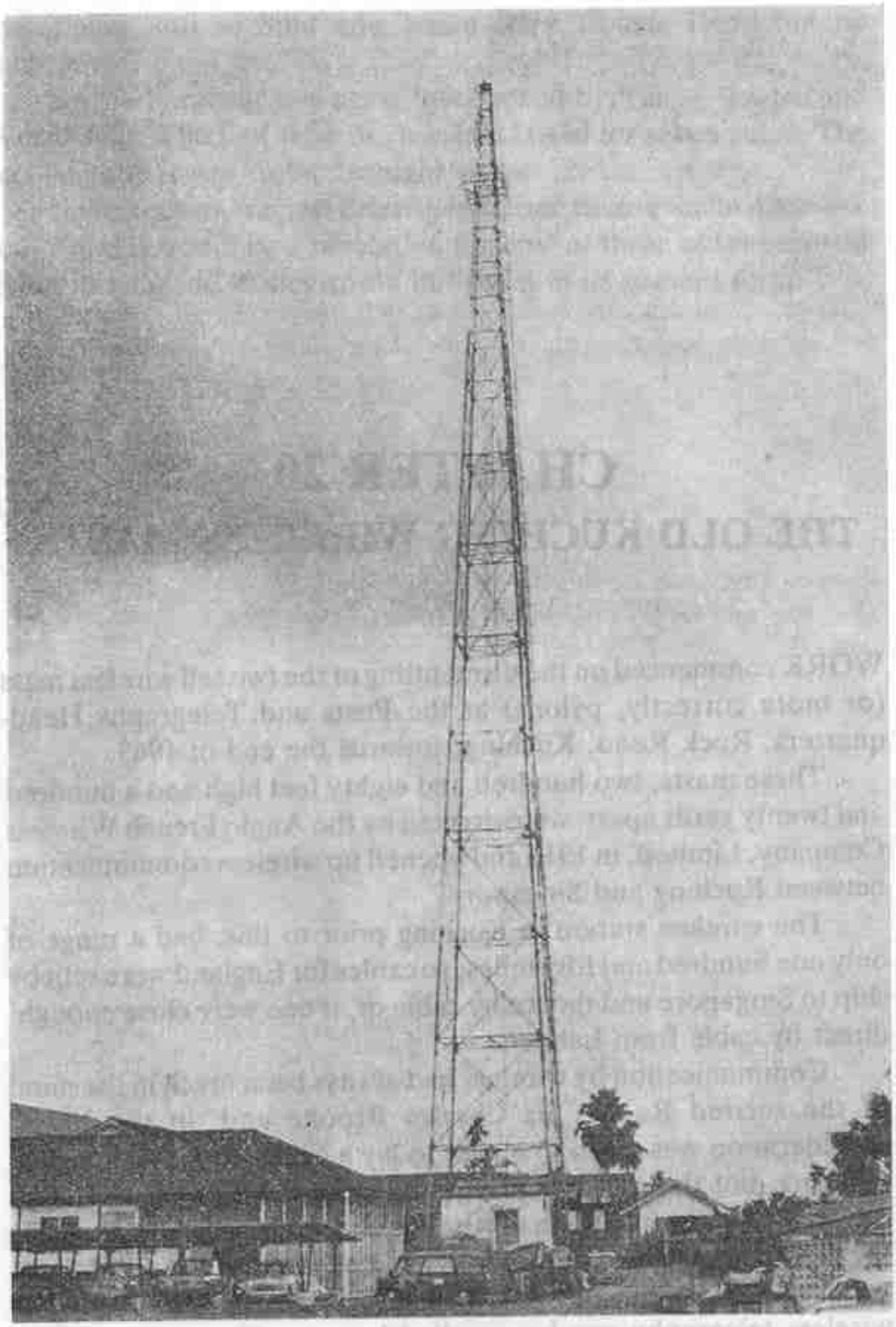
WORK commenced on the dismantling of the two tall wireless mass (or more correctly, pylons) at the Posts and Telegraphs Headquarters, Rock Road, Kuching, towards the end of 1963.

These masts, two hundred and eighty feet high and a hundred and twenty yards apart, were erected by the Anglo French Wireless Company, Limited, in 1916 and opened up wireless communication between Kuching and Singapore.

The wireless station in Kuching prior to this, had a range of only one hundred and fifty miles, so cables for England were sent by ship to Singapore and thence by cable or, if one were close enough, direct by cable from Labuan.

Communication by wireless had always been much in the mind of the second Rajah, Sir Charles Brooke and, in the 1890s, consideration was given to a plan to lay a cable from Singapore to Kuching, but the cost was prohibitive.

By 1910, the invention of wireless had made great progress and the *Straits Times* reported that "His Highness the Rajah of Sarawak, who is on his way to England, intends making inquiry if wireless telegraphy can be supplied between Singapore and the mouth of the Sarawak River".



Nothing happened for four years. Then early in 1914, the Rajah signed a contract with the Anglo French Wireless Company, Limited, for the installation of a wireless station in Kuching, with longer working range than the one in existence, at a cost of £20,000. However, there was a setback as a few months later the First World War broke out in Europe and the contract had to be declared null and void.

By 1916, the position had improved and a second contract, similar to the first, was signed with the same company. However, there was a second setback as the French Government requisitioned the equipment for war purposes, but fortunately released it on pressure from the British Government. Hence in July 1916, two French technicians arrived in Kuching with the equipment and after three months had completed the erection of the two pylons.

The *Ranee* Sylvia of Sarawak mentions the erection of these pylons in her book *The Three White Rajahs*. The Rajah was a very sick man at the time and she described it as almost a race between the snapping of the threads of the old Rajah's life and the iron structure that was being raised. The *Ranee* wrote: "Would they complete it in time for him to see it?" As it happened, the Rajah died the following year.

The installation of the new wireless station was a surprise to many people as the Rajah was a man who had never known to use a telephone or even to ride in a motor car.

The *Ranee* also describes the feelings of the natives. A large number of them thought that the masts were high ladders, from the tops of which they would be able to see Europe. For many weeks the masts became more patronised than the Museum.

However, the erection of the masts was not without incident. The *Sarawak Gazette* reports that at 9 p.m. on the night of April 30, 1918, the voice of a man could be heard singing in Chinese from the platform at the top of the eastern mast (the one nearest Rock Road). The police were informed but before they could arrive, the singer had hurled himself down to his death. It is recorded that he buried himself several feet into the soft soil below.

CHAPTER 21
HOW BROADCASTING FIRST CAME TO SARAWAK

KUCHING was on the air long before Radio Sarawak was established in 1954. In fact the first recorded occasion was in 1922.

This followed the installation in Kuching of the first two powerful transmitters. The tests being carried out were really for wireless telephony, but apparently in those early days of radio, music gave better reception than speech. This led to a letter from the General Officer in Command of the Straits Settlements, as Singapore, Malacca, Penang and Labuan were then called, saying that he was interested in the venture and asking for music to be transmitted on the early morning of August 30, 1922.

The Rajah allowed the Sarawak Rangers Band to perform in the operating room of the wireless station and later in the day a message was received from Singapore reporting that the music was excellent, and expressing the thanks of the General Officer in Command for the entertainment. Thus, it can safely be said that the first 'live' musical performance was given by the Sarawak Rangers Band, since any other tests would probably have been carried out with gramophone records.

Some years after this there was at least one amateur station on

the air in Kuching but as far as the government was concerned, nothing more happened until 1939.

This was a broadcast of a running commentary on the races for the Rajah's Cup and the Ranee's Cup at the Spring Meeting of the Sarawak Turf Club in April of that year, which gave encouraging results as good reception was reported in Sibu and Miri — quite a feat in those days.

Then in September of the same year, following the outbreak of war between Great Britain and Germany and with the threat of war with Japan, regular early Saturday morning broadcasts were started. This became known as the Sarawak Broadcasting Service. The opening speech was made by His Highness the *Rajah Muda,* Mr. Anthony Brooke, and commenced with these words: "This day marks the inauguration of an entirely new departure in administrative practice since, for the first time in the country's history, a broadcasting service is to be used for the communication of official matters to outstations."

These broadcasts were almost wholly concerned with war news, propaganda and information regarding food rationing and matters relating to the Red Cross and air raid precautions. They were given in English, Chinese and Malay. To make them more impressive to listeners, most of the broadcasts were given by leaders of the various communities.

Then came the outbreak of war with Japan and Kuching was in enemy hands on Christmas Eve, 1941. No more broadcasts were made after that until the establishment of Radio Sarawak thirteen years later, in 1954.