

# MY LIFE IN SARAWAK

BY  
THE RANEE OF SARAWAK

PREFACE BY

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WITH TWENTY-SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

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## CHAPTER XXVII

ON our way down the Rejang we stayed one evening at Sibü. Arriving there about sunset, we took a walk round the Chinese Bazaar to look at the shops and say good-bye to some of our friends. The Chinese are supposed to have been the first people to discover camphor, and Sibü Bazaar is one of the principal dépôts for it in Sarawak. In early days camphor was purchased for about \$10 a cattie (1½ lb.), but the price has now risen to three times that amount. Chinese merchants all over Sarawak buy this commodity from the natives and send it to Singapore. The camphor seekers in the forests of Sarawak go through a great many superstitious rites in order to find good supplies. Sometimes they stay in the forests for weeks together, having only salt and rice for their sustenance.

The Rejang river is rich in many articles of export: indiarubber, gutta-percha, beeswax, mats, ebony, beads, and geliga or bezoar stones, the latter being found in the stomach of three species of monkeys—wah-wahs, jelu-merahs, and jelu-jangkits. The natives kill these animals with the blow-pipe, and about seven out of every ten are said to contain these

valuable and rare stones, highly prized by Chinamen, who buy them at extremely high prices. Bezoar stones are also to be found in porcupines, but they are rarer, and are, in consequence, even dearer than those found in monkeys. A small species of rhinoceros also exists and roams about not far from Kapit Fort; these animals are to be met with near a limestone mountain, called the Mountain of the Moon. The creatures are hunted and killed by the natives for the sake of their horns, which the Chinese scrape into powder, mix with water, and give as a medicine for inflammation; they also boil the dung of these animals and use it as a medicine. The animals are not savage, and only turn upon human beings when wounded.

One of our visits, on this evening at Sibü, was to an old Chinese chemist, who had settled himself in the place when the Rejang was given over to the first white Rajah. His shop was situated in the middle of a row of houses, roofed with wooden shingles, in front of which were wide verandahs with balustrades, floored with planks, where the shopkeepers sat in the cool of the evening, and purchasers wandered about them in comfort all day long, sheltered from sun and rain. The Chinaman was very glad to see us, and Dr. Langmore was interested to meet a colleague, for the old man was supposed to be one of the most skilful doctors in the neighbourhood. He showed Dr. Langmore his grated rhinoceros horn, the powdered bezoar

stone, the broth made from sharks' fins, and on one of the counters was a steaming bowl of tamarinds, in readiness for stomachic complaints. He was ending his days in peace and prosperity. His dispensary was thronged from morning to night with patients suffering from all kinds of diseases, nervous and otherwise. The death-rate at Sibü, however, was low, so one imagines the old man's methods were beneficent. Nor was our old friend quite without an eye to the future, for he owned a beautiful coffin made of iron-wood, or bilian, which he kept polished like a looking-glass. It was often put out in the warm, dry air, so that it should be thoroughly well seasoned in case of emergency. The old gentleman would sit on the edge of the coffin smoking his opium pipe after his day's labour—that one solace of hard-working Chinamen, who take one pipe of opium in the evening, just as an abstemious man enjoys his glass of whisky and water before going to bed. From my own experience amongst the people of Sarawak, I can say with truth that opium is not in any way such a curse to the country as are the spirits and "fire water" sold in such large quantities all over the United Kingdom and its colonies, with, apparently, so few restrictions. But to return to our old friend: he would point to his coffin with pride, for he did not dread the time when the lid would close over him and his place in the world know him no more.

Going back to our bungalow near the Fort, we

to speak with authority as to the affection in which all the people of the Batang Lupar hold his name. He joined the Rajah's service as a young man of twenty-two years of age. He first of all learned the methods of Sarawak policy under Mr. Skelton, another of the Rajah's loyal officers, who, alas, was destined to die young. At Mr. Skelton's death, Mr. Maxwell was given charge of this district, and for years he toiled there for the benefit of the people. Head-hunters were busy in those days in the inland country of the Batang Lupar, and many were the expeditions led by him in order to restore peace and trade in the vicinity. A chief, called Lang Endang, gave immense trouble, and at one time menaced in a somewhat serious manner the inhabitants residing in the lower waters of the Batang Lupar River. Now that Mr. Maxwell has passed away, I do not fear his displeasure at pointing out the manner in which he drove these enemies of the Rajah back, thus establishing security and peace in the district. One of these expeditions comes back forcibly to my mind as I write. Mr. Maxwell's health was never very good on account of constant malaria and rheumatism, and once when an expedition was absolutely necessary he was lying crippled with an attack of acute rheumatism in Simanggang Fort. He was carried down to his boat and placed on a mattress, from which he directed the operations necessary against the rebel force. During the arduous river journey he lay almost unable to move

hand or foot. } Notwithstanding these drawbacks, he led his Dyaks to victory, and when he got back to the Fort and had leisure to be ill in comfort—although still in great pain—he must have felt repaid for his exertions by the grateful affection of the Malays and Dyaks, who, as I have said before, admire above all other things courage and endurance. It was not from Mr. Maxwell that I learned the details of this expedition, but from the Simanggang people themselves.

The same devotion to the country distinguished Mr. Bailey, who was content to live in the Fort situated up that green cliff overlooking the Batang Lupar River for years and years, bereft of European society, with the exception of the English officer under him, straining every nerve to bring the people into civilization, to teach them the benefits of good agriculture, and to keep them as much as possible from the pernicious habit of head-hunting, which seems ingrained in their very bones.

These two names which occur to me as I write are of those who have gone beyond the influence of either praise or blame. Fortunately many of the Rajah's other officers are still alive, and it is only because I have the pleasure of being their friend, and know how much they would dislike being dragged into print, that I refrain from saying all I should like to say about such men as Mr. Bampfylde, Mr. Harry Deshon, and others, who have so nobly followed the example set before them by their chief.