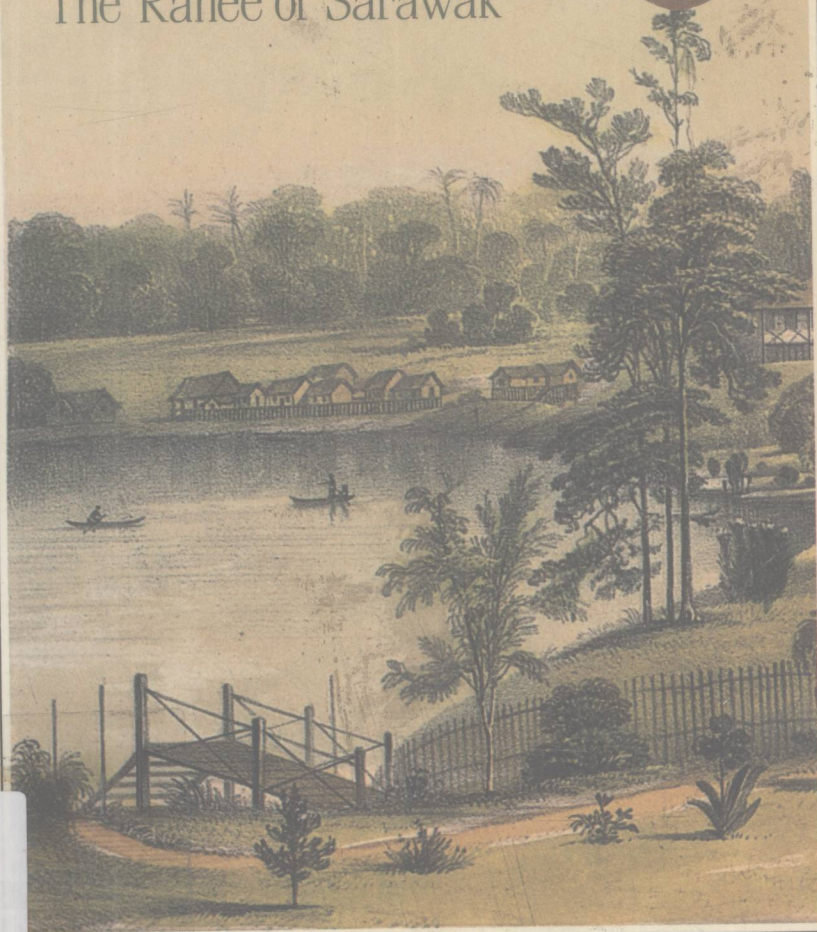




OXFORD

# My Life in Sarawak

Margaret Brooke  
The Ranee of Sarawak



# MY LIFE IN SARAWAK

BY  
THE RANEE OF SARAWAK

PREFACE BY

SIR FRANK SWETTENHAM, G.C.M.G.

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WITH TWENTY-SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

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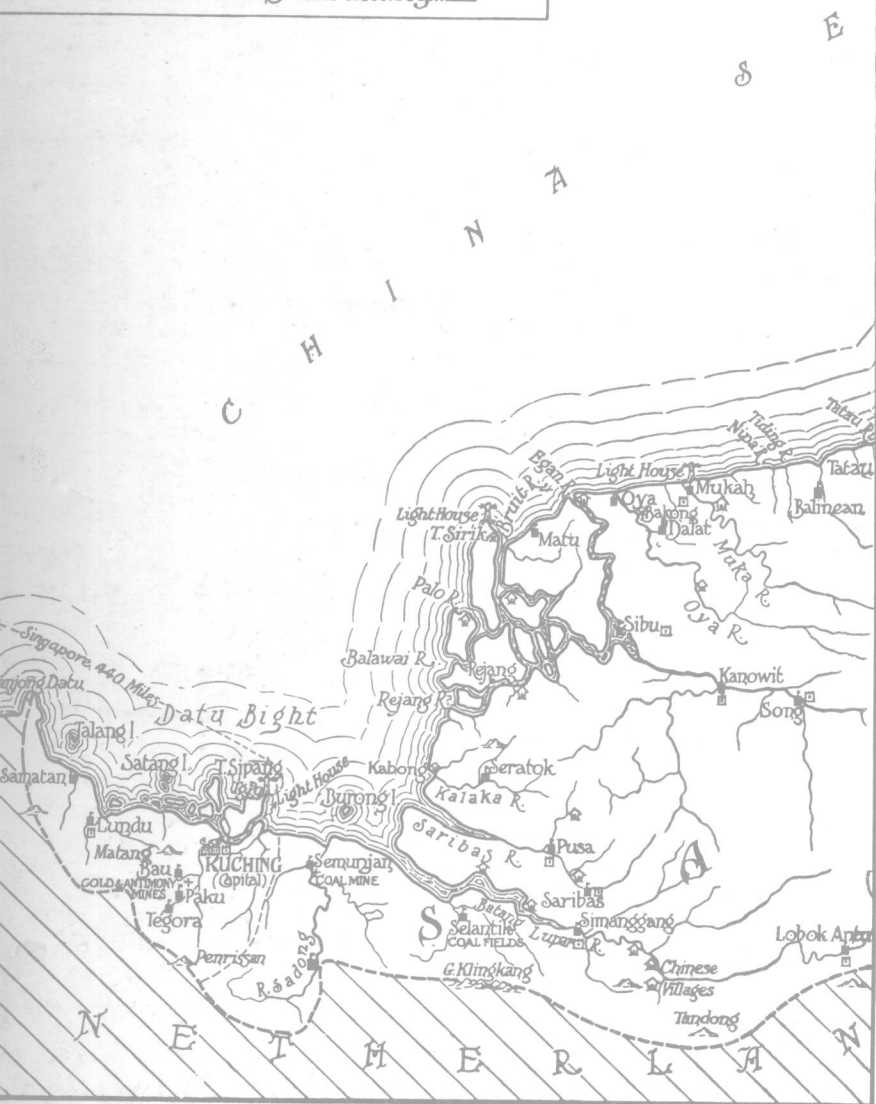
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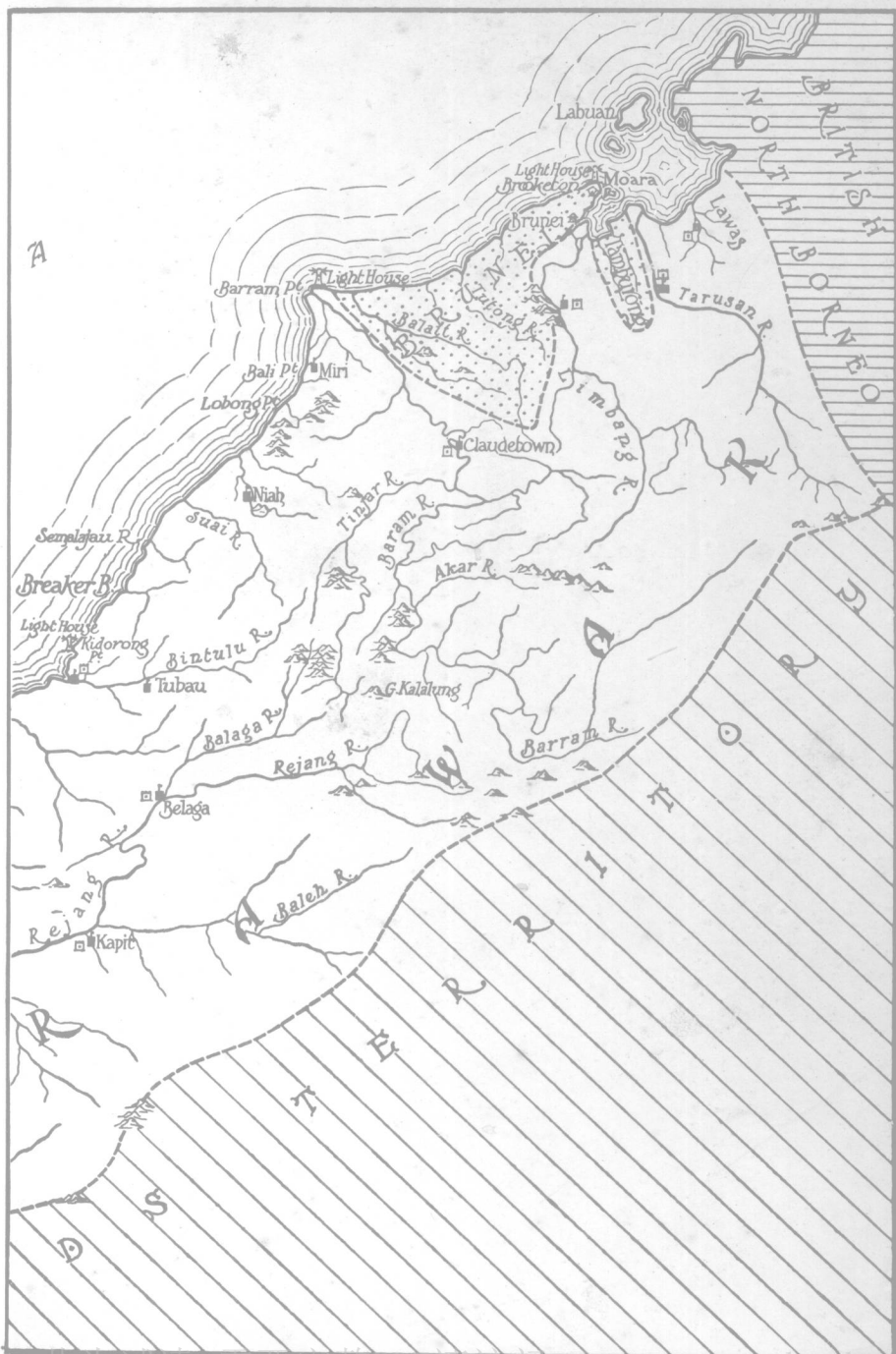
# SKETCH MAP OF SARAWAK

SCALE

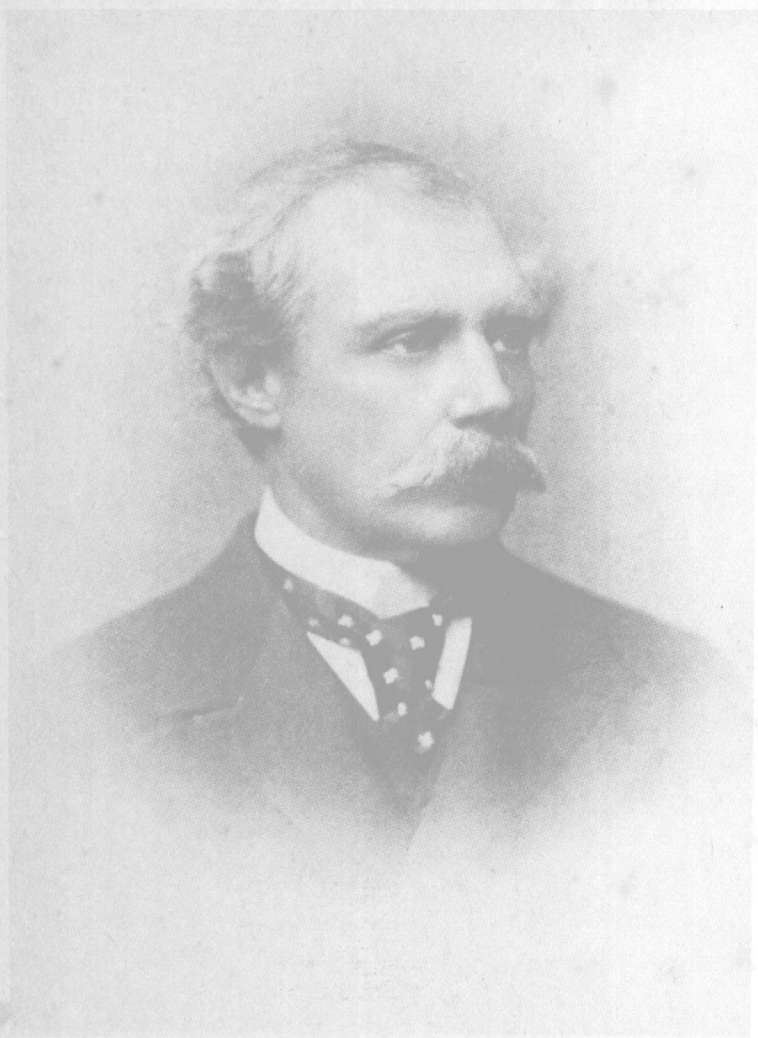
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Forts ..... Villages .....  
Govt. Stations ..... Brunei Territory .....





MY LIFE IN SARAWAK



H.H. THE RAJAH OF SARAWAK

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY

OF

MY GREAT FRIEND

DATU ISA



## PREFACE

IT is well for the Malay races of Sarawak that they should find an advocate in their Ranee, for she loves them. To know Ranee Brooke is to know that, and those who read her *Life in Sarawak* will realize this fact to the full, and will feel that, in the years she spent with these simple people, she must have proved it to them and won their confidence by her sympathy. That is the only way to get at the hearts of a Malay people, and though the native population of this section of Borneo is divided into at least two sections,—Malays and Dyaks,—differing widely in religion, customs, and language, they are still members of the great Malay family which is spread over the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, the islands of the Archipelago, and farther afield. It is well for any of the Malay race that they should find a sympathetic writer to tell the world something of their little lives, for they are a silent and exclusive people. They do not understand publicity, they do not want it, so long as they are fairly and justly treated ; indeed, superficial observers might think that Malays do not really care how they are governed, and that it is a matter of

indifference to them whether they are treated well or ill. Those who take the trouble to win his regard know that the Malay is as keenly interested in his own and his country's affairs as are those of other nationalities. He is humble about his own capacity, and that of his fellow-countrymen, to organize and endeavour, to frame a scheme of righteous government and to ensue it. He will, if properly approached and considerately handled by Europeans, be the first to admit that they understand the business better, that they are more trustworthy in matters of justice and money, and that they have a conception of duty, of method, and especially a power of continuous application to work, which is foreign and irksome—indeed well-nigh impossible—to him. Treat him fairly, reasonably, justly, remember that he represents the people of the country for whose benefit, as Lord Curzon of Kedleston said, the white man is there, and, though the white man retains in his own hands the principal offices, the real power, and the work which is his burden, the Malay will give him admiration, gratitude, and loyal support, and show no sign of jealousy or impatience. If one bears in mind, as indeed one must, that the growth of the white man's influence, and the adoption of that advice which we say makes for good government, mean always the lessening of the Malay's authority and the curtailment or abolition of his privileges,—very often bad privileges in our opinion,—it is surely rather wonderful and rather admirable that he should accept his

fate with such a good, often even a charming, grace. The Malay does not always approve of our methods, and sometimes they are really indefensible, but, though he disapproves, what is he to say? To whom is he to complain, and how? We sometimes learn his language, because that is necessary for our benefit; we even take trouble to inquire about his customs and other matters concerning him and his life; but very, very rarely does he learn either our language, or enough of our customs, to make himself heard effectively. He realizes this better than almost any other thing, and therefore, being a fatalist, he accepts what comes because he knows there is no other way. Given his nature, his traditions, his way of life through all the generations, and his present disabilities, how is he to do otherwise? When you have handed over to others the control of everything you once had, can you complain to them of breach of faith, or even of little things like the neglect of your interests when they happen to clash with your controllers' wishes or ambitions? Western people, in humble or subordinate positions, sometimes find it difficult to assert themselves, or what they believe to be their rights; to the Malay it is impossible.

That being so, one would imagine that every white man who comes into a position of authority amongst such a people, so circumstanced, will be doubly and trebly careful to remember that the greater his power, the more need there is not only to seek, with single purpose, the benefit of "the people

of the country," but to champion their cause—when he knows it is right—against all comers, and if need be to his own detriment. To betray Malays, is like taking a mean advantage of a blind man who has put his hand in yours, in the firm belief that he is safe in his blind trust of you. To take advantage of that trust should be unthinkable. I am not writing of the customs of what is called business, nor even of the ways of rival powers; for in both these cases the means employed are less regarded than the end to be gained, and success justifies all things. I am only dealing with the mission of the white man when, for any reason whatever, he undertakes to administer the affairs of a people who possess a possibly rich territory, but are unskilled in the art of administration. That was the case of Sarawak when Sir James Brooke undertook its pacification and development in 1841. This is not the place to describe the task set before the first white Rajah of Sarawak, but it is, I think, the opportunity to point the moral of an achievement which probably has no parallel. James Brooke must have been a man for whom the soft life of cities had no attraction, but he did not approach the problem of enforcing peace in a greatly disturbed province of Borneo as large as England, and suppressing piracy on its coasts, in the spirit of an adventurer; he described his objects in the following words: "It is a grand experiment, which, if it succeeds, will bestow a blessing on these poor people; and their children's children shall bless

me. If it please God to permit me to give a stamp to this country which shall last after I am no more, I shall have lived a life which emperors might envy. If by dedicating myself to the task I am able to introduce better customs and settled laws, and to raise the feeling of the people so that their rights can never in future be wantonly infringed, I shall indeed be content and happy."

Those were his intentions, and to that end he worked for twenty-six years with a success as remarkable as his own devotion and abnegation of self-interest. When James Brooke died in 1868 he left to his nephew and appointed successor, the present Rajah of Sarawak, a peaceful and contented country, the hearts of whose people he had won by studying them, their interests, their customs, their peculiarities, and their happiness, and to them he gave his life and energy and everything he possessed. It was a remarkable achievement, and he left to the country of his adoption the "stamp" of his heart's desire. Much more than that, he established a precedent on which his successor has acted with unswerving consistency for the last forty-six years; it is the stamp of Brooke rule, and so long as it lasts all will be well with Sarawak.

Interesting and successful as were the methods of administration introduced and established in Sarawak by Sir James Brooke and the present Rajah, I cannot go into them. It is sufficient to say that Sarawak has been ruled by the Brookes "for the benefit of the

people of the country," and Mr. Alleyne Ireland, who was well qualified to form a sound judgment, wrote in 1905, after spending two months in travelling up and down the coast and in the interior: "I find myself unable to express the high opinion I have formed of the administration of the country without a fear that I shall lay myself open to the charge of exaggeration. With such knowledge of administrative systems in the tropics as may be gained by actual observation in almost every part of the British Empire except the African Colonies, I can say that in no country which I have ever visited are there to be observed so many signs of a wise and generous rule, such abundant indications of good government, as are to be seen on every hand in Sarawak." Again, in the same book, *Far Eastern Tropics*, Mr. Ireland wrote: "The impression of the country which I carry away with me is that of a land full of contentment and prosperity, a land in which neither the native nor the white man has pushed his views of life to their logical conclusion, but where each has been willing to yield to the other something of his extreme conviction. There has been here a tacit understanding on both sides that those qualities which alone can ensure the *permanence* of good government in the State are to be found in the white man and not in the native; and the final control remains, therefore, in European hands, although every opportunity is taken of consulting the natives and of benefiting by their intimate knowledge

of the country and of the people." That is high praise from an experienced critic, but not too high, and the last words of Mr. Ireland's sentence cannot be insisted upon too urgently when dealing with Malays. In Sarawak, the fact which is most striking and which must command the admiration of every man, especially of those who have been associated intimately with the administration of Eastern peoples and their lands, is that throughout the long years from 1841 to the present time, the two white Rajahs of Sarawak spent practically their whole lives in this remote corner of Asia, devoting their best energies to the prosperity and the happiness of their subjects, whilst taking from the country, of which they were the absolute Rulers, only the most modest income. That has been the admirable and unusual "stamp" of Brooke rule: to live with the people, to make their happiness the first consideration, and to refuse wealth at their expense. Nothing would have been easier—certainly for the present Rajah—than to live at ease in some pleasant Western land, with perhaps an occasional visit to Sarawak, and to devote to his own use revenues which he has spent for the benefit of Sarawak and its people. The State is rich in resources, mineral and agricultural; to many it would have seemed most natural to fill the place with Chinese or to grant concessions to Europeans. Either of these courses would have meant a large accession of revenue, and no one would have thought it strange had the Ruler



of the country spent whatever proportion seemed good to him on himself. Only the people of the country would have suffered; but they, probably, would have considered that it was perfectly natural, and, had they thought otherwise, it would have made no difference, for it is not their habit to complain publicly of the doings of their Rulers. The Rajahs of Sarawak have made "the benefit of the people of the country" the business of their lives; all honour to them for their high purpose. That the tradition they have established by seventy-two years of devotion, of personal care of the affairs of Sarawak, should be continued and perpetuated must be the prayer of all who love Malays.

I make a final quotation from Mr. Ireland's book. It is this: "Nothing could better serve to exhibit at once the strength and the weakness of a despotic form of government than the present condition of Sarawak, for if it be true that the wisdom, tolerance, and sympathy of the present Rajah have moulded the country to the extraordinary state of tranquil prosperity which it now enjoys, the power of an unwise or wicked ruler to throw the country back into a condition of barbarism must be admitted as a necessary corollary. The advent of such a ruler is, however, in the highest degree improbable."

Every one must hope that a departure from the Brooke tradition is impossible, and as the matter is wholly within the discretion of the present Rajah, who knows better than anyone else what is necessary to



secure the objects set out by his predecessor, and confirmed and secured by his own rule, there is no reason to fear for the future of Sarawak. Any real man would be proud to take up and help to perpetuate so great an inheritance. When the time comes, he will remember the words of the first Rajah Brooke: "If it please God to permit me to give a stamp to this country which shall last after I am no more, I shall have lived a life which emperors might envy," and he will begin his rule with the knowledge that his predecessor spent his whole life in making good the promise of those words.

F. A. S.

LONDON, *22nd September* 1913