

# The Last of a Great Sultan

BY POULTNEY BIGELOW

IT is a solemn thing to have an audience with such as have power of life and death—especially in states where the habeas corpus passes for political poison. This thought went through me as I sat in the presence of His Imperial Highness Sri Paduka Bawa Duli Sultan Hashim Jalil-Ul-Alam Akamadin Ibni Almerhum Sri Paduka Manlana Sultan Omar Ali Saijudin, the twenty-fifth of his illustrious dynasty in Brunei.

I may not have got in all his titles—he is a modest man. But for these few I have official authority no less than that of H. B. M. Acting Consul at Brunei, a Scot after my own heart—fond of speculating on cause and effect.

There was room for speculation, for my seat had been placed on the Sultan's right, immediately in front of a long brass smooth-bore muzzle-loading piece of artillery, behind which piece stood a brown gentleman with a turban on his head and a torch in his hand—said torch being occasionally used for the lighting of cigars. It would not have been etiquette to have asked whether the brass piece was or was not loaded.

But maybe I am going ahead too fast. Perhaps you have never been to Brunei—perhaps you do not know that the Sultan of Brunei is the hereditary Sultan, not merely of all Borneo and the bulk of the present Malay Archipelago, but that his ships dominated the Strait of Malacca, and that the southern states of China once sent him tribute.

To-day he stoutly claims dominion over several islands of the Philippine group—notably those which profess the faith of Islam.

The Sultan of Brunei is eighty-three years of age—at least so he told me. And while he stoops as he walks, he makes the appearance rather of a temporary invalid than of an old man. He seemed pleased when I told him that he might pass for sixty; and indeed he might, for his face

is singularly free from wrinkles. His expression of benevolence suggests the late Leo XIII.—his smile is engaging, albeit tinged with sadness.

His house was ruling when the Roman Empire had hardly ceased to crumble. His ancestors gave the law to a vast Eastern Empire when Europe was but a patchwork of barbarous chiefs; and when, after centuries, Spanish and Portuguese found their way to the Spice Islands they laid propitiating gifts at the feet of the Borneo Sultan—as vassals, humbly begging the right to live within his dominions.

Brunei is still the metropolis of native Borneo—indeed the name Borneo is but a corruption of Brunei,—yet few maps show the existence of this empire. It is Venice in Borneo—a city whose streets are water, whose citizens are born in houses perched on slender piles, whose in and out going is the affair not of side-walks, but of single-bladed paddles; where even the market is held afloat in the “Grand Canal,” where the shops are propelled through a fleet of prospective customers. Imagine a Henley week—innumerable small craft; dugout canoes, anywhere from a tiny water “perambulator” little larger than a cradle, through the successive sizes capable of holding a full-grown man—a dozen men,—to the covered-over barges of state which correspond to those of early Venice.

House-boats there are also at Brunei; but they have a commercial character, are mainly owned by Chinese, who fit them up as floating stores with show-cases and shelves on both sides—doors wide open. At bow and stern are Malay paddlers, while the proprietor sits at his side entrance offering his wares to the crowd of jostling canoeists, who handle their craft (we must be just) with infinitely more grace and good humor than the bulk of our aquatic brethren of Henley or even of the Adirondacks.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF BRUNEI, ANCIENT CAPITAL OF THE EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO

Brunei offers several advantages over Heuley—for here it is the house-boat that circulates, but with infinite gentleness and good breeding. Am I exaggerating? Did I not have the ocular proof; did I not paddle among ten thousand other canoes at the heated moment of market activity, a short while before its close? Did I hear a single word of profanity? Did I note a single rude jostling of one boat against another? Did I even have occasion to feel hostile atmosphere? On the contrary, in this Venice of the brown man, courtesy was of the blood—I am convinced that the true gentleman originated in Borneo.

But I am getting away from the Sultan.

His messenger, no less than the lordly Orang Kaya Maharaja di Rajah, had given us notice that his Majesty would receive me at two o'clock on that same afternoon,—and at two punctually we glided up to the palace steps. Our canoe was of the grandest pattern—a dugout

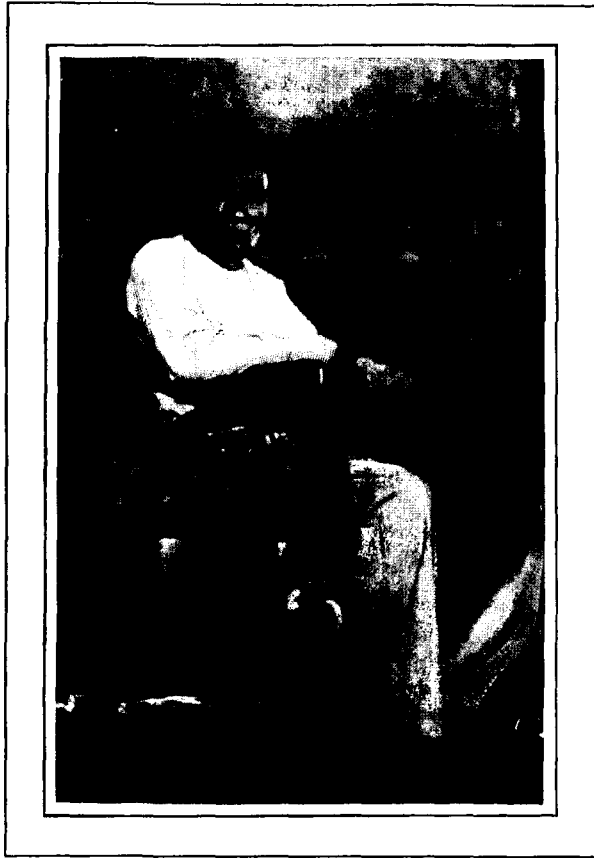
as to hull, sides built up a trifle, a platform of bamboo by way of deck, and a thatch roof over the whole of it.

It was painted white, with a blue streak, and was propelled by six Malays, who squatted on the edge of the gunwale and plied paddles whose blades were as long as their handles. They wore velvet skull-caps—a head-covering corresponding somewhat to the fez of western Islam.

At the palace stairs we were met in state by the Grand Vizier, who gave us formal greeting in the name of his Imperial Highness, shook hands gravely, and then led the way to the throne-room, which was about a hundred yards distant along a covered wooden platform reared upon piles.

Now if this landing-stage suggests the approach to the Doge's Palace in Venice, my language needs some modification.

The royal approach resembled rather the steps which assist a hen in reaching her night lodgings; it was a broad ladder going up from the water to the imperial



HIS IMPERIAL HIGHNESS THE SULTAN OF BRUNEI

From a photograph taken in his throne-room

platform, and the ascent of this required a certain degree of acrobatic agility.

The platform itself was interesting rather than secure. The boards beneath my feet appeared to require nailing here and there, and they rattled ominously—showed such seams as might have caused a broken leg of a dark night.

On either side of the landing were three pieces of antique artillery—mainly English, to judge by the inscriptions. It was on the tip of my tongue to ask the Lord Chancellor if these pieces had been the fruit of past piracy,—but this would have sounded personal.

The palace is a house on piles—it is the most imposing building in Brunei, of course. The imperial standard flies over it, and fifty yards from its front door is a little platform standing alone and con-

taining a saluting battery of guns made in Brunei—for in times past Brunei had a famous foundry.

This array of artillery to-day does not, as at Tangiers, serve even the purpose of saluting; for the British government forbids the importation of gunpowder, and the Sultan therefore can salute no one in the former noisy manner.

We walked along the royal platform, or wharf, for perhaps a hundred yards, and then stepped over a heavy beam which we may call the threshold of a house without doors. Here was a large chamber—at one end rose a gaudy piece of Chinese carving, painted red and yellow and green. It was a square box and the top seemed like that of a heathen shrine. This was the throne, but it was empty.

So I concluded that the Sultan would make his appearance later on, and meanwhile we might look about us.

On either side of this big room were apartments, probably harem and other domestic rooms, in front of which were planted pieces of artillery—this time of native manufacture.

The audience-room itself was about sixty feet long by thirty wide—the ceiling seemed thirty feet high. At the lower end sat in a row six *grandeos* of the palace; two of them wore white turbans, green waistcoats, and long white gowns—advertising the fact that they had been to Mecca and were consequently entitled to more respect than their colleagues. I was presented to each in turn—shook hands, and was then escorted to the other end of the chamber, where stood the throne.

Around this audience-room ran a veranda on which many of the minor aristocracy squatted and watched proceedings with undisguised interest.

The Mohammedan of Malay waters differs from his coreligionary of Morocco in permitting himself a frank curiosity touching things of the outside world. In this matter he suggests the Japanese.

Indeed in my travels throughout the archipelago eastward of the Indian Ocean, from Singapore to the extremes of the Dutch East Indies, I was much impressed by the degree to which the natives suggested Japan. The Philippines do not constitute an exception. There seems to me a greater gulf between the Japanese and the Chinese than between the Japanese and the natives of Borneo, Java, or Luzon.

In the middle of the room ran a long table suggesting the one in the House of Commons which divides the Government from the Opposition. On this table was a very familiar and very cheap reddish cloth such as is found on most tables in German beer-gardens.

There was another small round table immediately in front of the gaudy throne, and as we entered I noticed one whom I took to be a venerable Malay janitor arranging something there. This elderly gentleman offered me his hand—and then he waved us gracefully to the cane chairs at the muzzle of an artillery piece, of which there was one on each side of the

throne, each being guarded by a group of Malays.

I sat down as directed, wondering when the Sultan would appear.

Of course I was bubbling with curiosity anent many things, and sought my information from my consular neighbor.

"Who is the old nut-cracker in the big chair?" quoth I in a hoarse whisper.

"That's Him!" returned my mentor, somewhat drily.

There was a painful pause. But how was I to have known that this was the great Sultan himself! I had met many crowned heads in my day. There was the great Moshesh of Basutoland—a monarch who greeted me in an opera-hat, a war-club, and a pair of spats. King Ja-Ja of West Africa also received me once in state—but then those two were negroes. Japanese and Siamese royalty have I met, to say nothing of the everyday article current in jaded Europe, but nothing anywhere prepared me for the Sultan of Brunei.

He wore a green smoking-cap about eight inches high, on which were worked texts from the Koran. On his feet he wore a pair of yellow gymnasium shoes, and beneath his dressing-gown I caught sight of white duck trousers. This gown looked in the dim light of the palace as though it had been stained by some brownish juice, there were many spots, but more competent authorities assured me that those spots were ornaments worked upon the white cloth.

From his waist down there hung a blue cloth skirt—the conventional native sarong, and by his side was a spittoon which he used freely.

His lips were stained with a reddish juice, possibly of betel-nut, and he was evidently chewing this throughout the audience.

But his face was very kindly and his manner dignified. He reminded me of the late President Kruger; the lines of the mouth were the same, the eyes very similar—likewise the forehead. Each had the long interval between the nose and lip.

But Kruger had the advantage in a strong nose, the key to firmness in a great man, to obstinacy in a narrow one.

The Sultan asked me my opinion of Brunei, to which I could safely answer

that I thought it one of the most beautiful spots I had so far been permitted to see,—and indeed it need not fear comparison with the Thames above Richmond or the Hudson near West Point.

He himself, having spent all his life amongst his own people, probably anticipated my answer, for he smiled in a gentle manner as though pleased to know that I had enough taste to appreciate the beauty of his capital, and then asked me why the United States did not give back to him the islands of the Philippine Archipelago which were a part of his ancestral estate.

While he put this somewhat embarrassing question a Lord Chamberlain approached his master bearing coffee in cups of European proportion and design but Japanese manufacture. Each of us was honored by a cup of exceedingly good coffee—made after the Turkish fashion—already sweetened.

I needed time in which to formulate an answer that would prevent his artillery from exploding, and at the same time not compromise either Washington or London. So I picked up the cup and signalled for assistance to my official mentor.

Fortunately another diversion made its appearance—implements of smoke. I had nearly called them cigars—or even cigarettes. They were twelve inches long and shaped like a cheroot or baseball club. The outside was a whitish leaf, a part of the Neepea palm—the inside was a very gentle and fragrant load of tobacco which looked in quantity sufficient to knock over even a Transvaal Boer.

I was about to decline, not being a smoker, when the consul said I *must*; so I seized one and while I examined it with curiosity he hurriedly coached me in the matter of Borneo foreign policy.

I was not to commit the government of the United States, much less that of Great Britain. The Sultan of Brunei was by treaty bound to hold foreign intercourse solely through the London government, and, moreover, as to the American islands, they had been ceded by Spain, who in her turn held them by treaty from the Sultan of Sulu.

However, at the Sultan's request, the British representative yielded so far as to permit a direct appeal from Brunei to Washington, especially after I had made

it plain to the Sultan that in this matter I acted only as a messenger of good-will between two mighty peoples.

And so here I do solemnly record once more the protest of Imperial Brunei against the American usurpation of several islands adjacent to Borneo—lands very precious to this Mohammedan Emperor, and worse than useless to the United States.

In parenthesis it may be well to state here, for the benefit of those who have not cruised in those waters, that Uncle Sam is crowding upon Borneo to an extent little dreamed of by those who originally accepted the surrender of Spain in 1898.

The Island of Taganak, claimed by us, is in the full fairway not more than seventeen miles from Sandakan, the chief port of British North Borneo. It is, like Helgoland at the mouth of the Elbe, of scant use to any one save for lighthouse or military purpose, and obviously should be owned by some government of Borneo. The Island of Tawi Tawi is but thirty-one miles easterly from the northeastern coast-line of British North Borneo. Balabak is but twenty-seven miles north of Balembangam. Kagayan Sulu is but sixty miles east-northeast from the northeastern end of Sulu.

All these islands are claimed by the United States, all are practically within Borneo waters—all have from time immemorial been accustomed to trade freely with Borneo on the one side and the Philippines on the other—at least up to the time of American occupation.

Soon entered a chamberlain with a huge candlestick, such as one sees on Roman Catholic altars—it was two feet high and had a base two feet in diameter. On it was a candle about one yard high. As the chamberlain placed this heavy thing before me, he bowed, then prostrated himself before the Sultan, folding his hands and stretching them far above his head.

Whether this was an act of worship, whether this candle was a religious emblem, whether the base was intended for holy water, whether the top was intended for Allah or for lighting cigars, I shall never know. To be on the safe side I refused to use it for purposes profane—and besides I am inclined to think that good tobacco should not come in contact

with the smoke of tallow. So I lit my long cheroot from a wooden match and found that the Sultan had furnished me with one of the most delicious smokes I had ever experienced.

Brunei is an immensely picturesque community—it is one of the very last states in which primitive society may be studied at first hand; in which justice is administered apparently without any legal machinery; in which the sovereign rules with apparently no rod heavier than the moral ascendancy he enjoys through being the twenty-fifth of his line.

There are but four white people in this city of 12,000 Malays, yet no man ever heard of injury offered to any one of them. The natives are warriors, head-hunting is the national pastime, the kreess is worn ostentatiously when the Malay moves about, and yet I felt in Brunei certainly as secure as in New York or London.

Of course now and then the Sultan is compelled to punish, and he does so in the good old-fashioned patriarchal man-

ner which prevails in all happy Islam countries, from the Strait of Gibraltar to the western edges of New Guinea. He does not waste much time in thumbing learned volumes—he has none nor needs any. He calls such witnesses as he deems useful, listens to as much of the evidence as he finds interesting, and then, with a quotation from the Koran, passes summary judgment from which there is no appeal save to Allah in the next world.

On the Sultan's table there lay a paper written in English; it was a certificate to the effect that the British acting consul had received from the Sultan eight gold dollars in order to pay for a buffalo which had been stolen and slaughtered by one of his subjects.

Now the thief had committed the indiscretion of permitting himself to be discovered with the incriminating buffalo meat in his possession. The British consul was appealed to by the owner of the buffalo, who was not a subject of the Sultan, but belonged in the neighboring state of Sarawak, whose war lord is an Englishman—Rajah Brooke.



FARMING WITH BUFFALO BY NATIVES OF BRUNEI



The case was complicated by the fact that said thief was in the habit of stealing buffalo from Sarawak and of sharing his plunder with the Sultan and his court. Already some fifty buffalo had been traced to this one man. The evidence was so overwhelming that the Sultan was forced to take action, much as he might secretly rejoice in anything which injured his enemy of Sarawak. So he held a grand court of justice and called before him the thief.

"Did you steal this buffalo?" quoth the Sultan.

"No," answered the man of Brunei.

"Then swear it on the Koran," quoth the Sultan.

The Brunei man swore as desired.

"There!" said the Sultan, turning to the consul; "the man swears on the Koran. He is innocent. Are you satisfied? I can do no more."

So the man was acquitted, for it would never have done to have punished this loyal subject of the Sultan who kept the imperial table supplied at so little cost of money.

But the Sultan, while he acquitted a notorious thief, deemed it politic to do justice in another form. He recognized the fact that a theft had been committed by one of his subjects. So

he sent down to the British consul sixteen silver dollars (worth \$8 gold), which were counted out in my presence, and for which formal receipt was given.

This decision pleased all in Brunei; it satisfied the Malay notion of justice—the victim received the price of his stolen buffalo. The consul was com-

pelled to regard this as proof that the Sultan was a stern enemy of crime; the real thief no doubt received a warning to be more careful in future; the supply of buffalo will not diminish.

As we left this interesting ruler, the Lord Chamberlain escorted us to our state barge, and the people stood about respectfully as we paddled away through the crowd of canoes and naked natives.

Here is the last of an empire whose name is that of the

largest island in the world. Dutch and English are now rivals on this soil. The enemy from whom the Sultan has most to fear is the one from whom he once hoped the most. He is being choked to death economically by the state of Sarawak, which now controls not only the territory to the south of him, but the very river that passes his door and on whose trade he has depended from earliest times.



THE SULTAN'S CHIEF MESSENGER

Photograph taken at the entrance to the Bungalow of the Acting British Consul, November, 1904

# The Music of Bird Songs

BY HENRY OLDYS

BIRD song has been the theme of poets of all ages. To wander free in the courts of nature, far from the debasing influences of trade, political intrigue, and all the petty struggles and meannesses of mankind—to loiter amid these different scenes alone with one's soul—has been the peculiar pleasure of the sensitive and refined. Here, in the solitude, the spirit is less fettered; it is brought into contact with things that, less obvious of interpretation, permit the imagination to transform them to terms of higher thought and feeling. The meaning of telegraph pole or painted advertisement is so clear and insistent that it cannot be avoided, and their atmosphere is that of the present commonplace life; but rock, tree, squirrel, enter so remotely into the daily round of duties that they offer but an outline to be colored and shaded at will. Vague, too, is their place in time and locality, and the poet's touch changes them to suit his mood. Thus Nature leaves her suitor free to live among his ideals, to roam in a world of fancy.

The songs that rise in this realm of romance fall upon the ear of the loiterer like the tapping of leaves and acorns in the autumn wood. A subdued and harmonious background to reverie, or a definite object of attention as the spirit may will, they are always but a suggestion to be expanded according to the individual taste and sentiment of the listener. Through association they may come to possess the power to touch certain chords, but the shapes they thus assume are the phenomena; the songs themselves—the underlying noumena—are altogether different. Thus we hear in the note of the thrush a meditative hymn, in the field sparrow's vespersong a tender appeal, and that the strident cries of crow and jay bring thoughts of outlaws and freebooters, and the bluebird's mellow tones suggestions of vernal love.

To the poet every sensation brings its corresponding sentiment, and this transmutation is the highest purpose served by the music of field and grove. Whether the joy of feeling be accompanied by the joy of expression, or whether it remain a silent pleasure, there is no purer or more elevating influence than is derived from that upper realm of emotion in which the poet moves—a realm whose atmosphere distorts every image, a domain of unreality, but which is filled, nevertheless, with the eternal verity of soul truths.

The value of bird song to the poet is well known and recognized, and it is not the present purpose to dwell upon it further. There is another phase of human taste to which bird music appeals, where its service is almost entirely unappreciated. Poets have thronged the temple of nature, penetrating to the inner shrine, but seldom do we find a musician even at the portal. The musician is less dependent on externals than the poet. Four walls confine him far less; they form no barrier between him and that clysium to which his art or taste transports him. If he is found amid wilder scenes, it is in obedience to another mistress than music. Hence it is that while the value of bird song as an inspiration—a foundation for structures of the imagination—is freely utilized, its interest as pure music is little understood. It is for this reason that I would direct special attention to the melody of bird song—would tell in trumpet tones, if I could, that here and there amidst the interwoven mass of bird music are strands of as pure melody as ever grace the musical compositions of man—melody, let it be clearly understood, that is such when measured by the human standard. No poet's fancy is needed here, but the soul of the musician, to appreciate themes intermingled with the conglomerate and incoherent whole of the woodland symphony.