



JAMES BROOKE, the first Rajah

"THE FABULOUS BROOKES"...

Written for "The Listener"
by A.M.R.)

and novels to her credit, capped one indiscreet autobiography with an even less discreet one, but has never (as reports have stated) been cast off by her husband and had to work for her living (1941) in an American brewery. Her daughter Leonora (Princess Gold) married Lord Inchcape and on his death became (at 28) the P. & O. heiress. Elizabeth (Princess Pearl) married, with parental approval, Harry Roy (né Lipman), leader of the Mayfair Dance Orchestra, who celebrated the wedding by composing "I Love You, Sarawaki." Valerie

(Princess Baba) married—and divorced—Bob Gregory, a professional wrestler. The wife of Bertram (Adeh) Brooke, who discovered in a newspaper last week that he was no longer Tuan Muda or heir to the throne, has been successively Anglican, Christian Scientist, Roman Catholic and Mohammedan. The greatest sensation in Sarawak itself, however, was Kathleen's marriage to Antoni (Bertram's son and at that time the Rajah's heir) when her father was a mere government official. Her new husband was at once stood down in the succession and rusticated "up-country."

The Truth Behind the Glamour

The above account of the female Brookes is correct as it stands—he would, indeed, be an inventive newspaperman who could improve on it. But the judgments that have been quoted upon the three Rajahs and their kingdom are all fantastically false.

James Brooke (later knighted Sir James) was no "mutilated" pirate, but an officer of the East India Company respectably retired with a respectable wound in the chest. Inheriting a romantic disposition and £30,000 when 38, he fitted out the "Royalist" (prophetic name) in the year that New Zealand was founded, in order to go knight-errant for civilisation around the still-barbarous fringes of the Dutch Indies. By extraordinary luck he sailed up a jungle river straight into a Malay Rajah so beset by rebels and pirates that he could see no way of saving his Kingdom except by giving it away to the energetic blue-eyed stranger who had no word of Malay but a hold-full of arms.

Sarawak in 1840 was a tiny principality compared with its 50,000 square miles and half-million inhabitants of today. However, the new ruler's problems (even after disposing of the rebels) were terrific. In the words of an official British report of the period, "the Sultans of

shipwrecked Irishman, and the illiterate body-servant who were at first his only European companions, brought him into collision with British politicians and into British law courts. Nevertheless, though their verdict was only "Not proven," history absolves James Brooke completely of self-seeking and awards him a high place among successful civilisers. To almost the end of his life he lived in constant personal danger and discomfort, and would have died penniless but for the subscriptions of friends in Britain.

"Dynastic Troubles"

Charles Brooke, his sister's son, who succeeded him, was as calculating and cold as his uncle had been generous and impulsive. His half century of rule (to 1917) was spent in consolidating Sir James' administration and in enforcing his laws. Out of debt he brought prosperity and out of anomalous insecurity recognition by "The Powers." And then

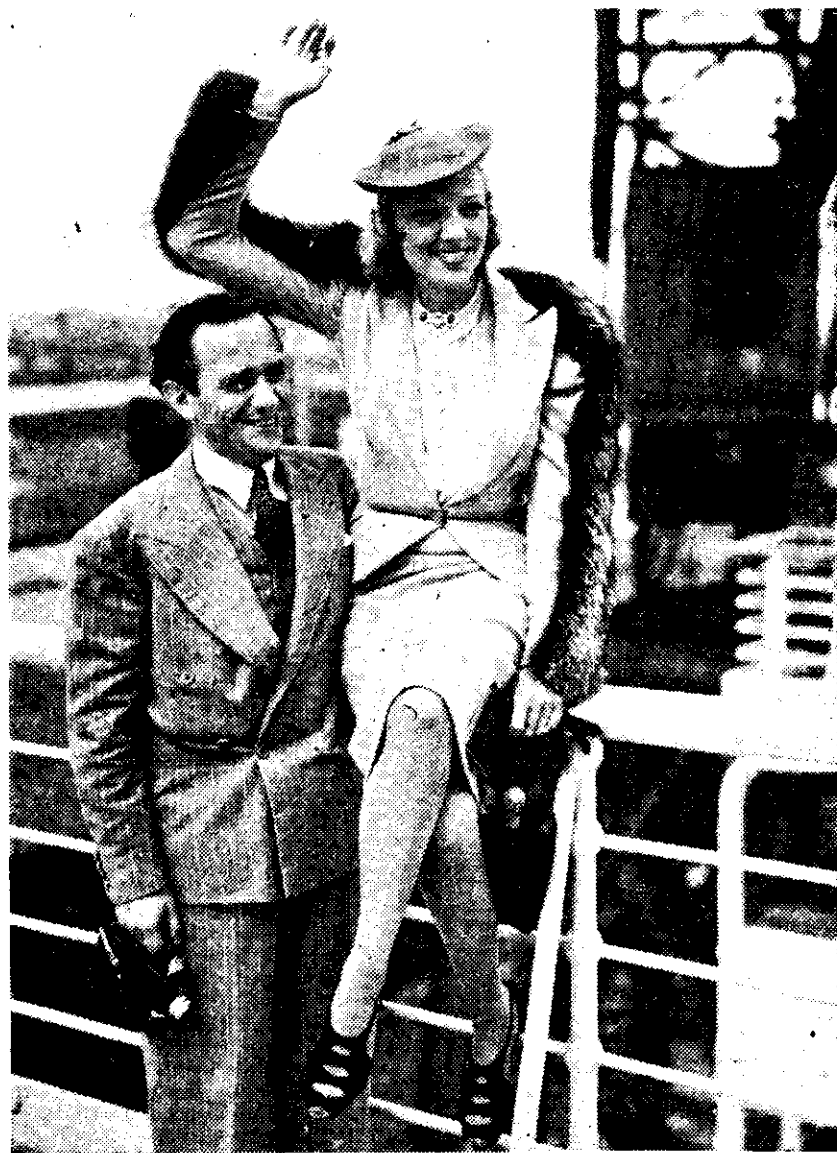
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"YES, I met the Rajah and the Raneé when I was stationed at Singapore," said a distinguished Colonial Administrator, asked to comment on events in Sarawak as he passed through New Zealand. "I can't tell you much about 'Sarawak,' but the Brooke family, you understand, are — er — somewhat odd."

American journalists have been less restrained in their descriptions. One well-informed magazine recently wrote that "the original white Rajah, the privateer Jamie Brooke . . . got his principality by violence and trickery and thereafter practiced ruthless extortion on the natives." Being "mutilated in battle and doomed to a childless future" (another paper reported) he was succeeded by King Brooke II, "a lusting, jungle-loving buck." An English paper, on the contrary, described the second Rajah as "deaf, and with one eye, so piercing in its intensity that it filled every native with awe. . . . When he came to the throne he was regarded as an almost divine oracle."

Opinions are quite as divergent, if less picturesque, about the third Rajah. To one American journal he is a "suave, hard, efficient potentate, ruling with an iron hand." To another (British) he is "because of his fearless courage the idol of his people." His own wife, however, reports a Sarawak schoolboy as confessing in an essay on "The Three Rajahs" that "all I know of the present Rajah is that he is alive." Similarly Sarawak (it really is pronounced 'Sa-rah-wa') appears in one magazine as a "model of happy existence . . . with no railway, no newspapers, no lawyers, no income tax." To another it is "viciously virginal jungle, (the haunt of) superstitious head hunters who dote on such delicacies as wood slugs and hot rice wine."

The Brooke men, you see, and their "private empire" make good stories. The women, however, make headlines. Sylvia, the Raneé, who has some passable plays



Right: HARRY ROY AND ELIZABETH. He loved his Sarawaki