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THE BAU CHINESE ATTACK ON KUCHING, FEBRUARY 1857: A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE**Graham Saunders****ABSTRACT**

The attack on Kuching by the Chinese goldminers of Bau has been described many times. In this article I wish to analyse it from a different perspective: That of the effects this event had upon the relationship between the Brooke Raj and the Anglican Mission in Sarawak. In particular, this means analysing the behaviour of Rajah James Brooke and of Bishop Francis McDougall. How they responded to the crisis of those few days in February 1857, and how each thought the other had behaved, gravely affected the opinion each held of the other afterwards. These personal views were greatly to influence the relationship between the Brooke Government and the Anglican Mission.

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Before considering the events of February 1857, we need to set the scene briefly.¹

The Mission had been founded, largely at the instigation of Sir James Brooke, in 1847. The head of the Mission was the Rev. Francis Thomas McDougall, who arrived in Sarawak in June 1848 accompanied by his wife, Harriette, and their second son, Harry, their elder son being left in England. Also with them was William Bodham Wright, his wife and baby, a young man called Harrington Parr and two female servants. Wright was in deacon's orders and remained only seven months. He left because of differences with McDougall over the management of the school Wright had established: differences which were aggravated by Mrs Wright's dislike of Sarawak and the tensions created by the two families living at close quarters in the same building. McDougall remained the sole missionary, aided by his wife, until March 1851, when the Rev. Walter Chambers arrived, followed by the Rev. William Gomes in 1852. They established mission stations at Banting and Lundu respectively. Also in 1852, the Rev. Andrew Horsbrough was recruited from Hong Kong to work in Kuching. He managed the Mission when McDougall was on furlough in England from October 1852 to April 1855. When McDougall returned, new missionaries were on their way and to bolster his authority over them he was consecrated Bishop in Calcutta in October 1855. The Mission was now a substantial force, with a church, mission house and school in Kuching, mission

stations at Banting and Lundu and hopes for further expansion when new men arrived in 1857.

Over the years, the McDougalls had suffered personal bereavement, with the deaths of two newly born infants and of Harry during their first tour of duty and of their eldest son while they were in England. The birth of a daughter, Mary, was some consolation.

Over the same period, the Rajah had suffered his own tribulations. He was personally distressed by the deaths of two of his young officers, Alan Lee, killed in a Dayak attack at Skrang in January 1853, and Willie Brereton from dysentery in August 1854. He had also undergone the strain and humiliation of a public inquiry into his actions against the Skrang and Saribas Dayaks, whom he had branded as pirates but whose cause had been taken up by humanitarians in England. The Commission sat in Singapore from 11 September to 21 November 1854. Brooke was exonerated, but he lost the ready assistance of Royal Navy vessels and his prestige was lessened. In 1855, while McDougall was away, the Rajah suffered a near fatal attack of smallpox, which left him disfigured, sapped of energy, moody and depressed. He was concerned about the future of Sarawak and beginning to consider seeking protection for his regime from sources other than England, a line of policy for which McDougall had no sympathy at all.

McDougall was some ten years younger than the Rajah and during the early years of their relationship held the Rajah in high regard. He accepted the general view of Sir James Brooke as the romantic hero and greatly admired him. McDougall was a large, bluff, hearty fellow, swarthy in complexion, regarded as a skilled physician, a good sailor, and a man of energy. However his health belied his appearance for he was plagued by minor ailments which occasioned absences from Sarawak for recuperation. Ill health did not improve his temper. He was impatient, irascible and outspoken, so that faint hearts went in awe of him, while others thought him at times bombastic and ridiculous; but he was also kindly, generous and unstinting in his services as a doctor. One gathers, however, that his wife was more liked than he and that she smoothed feelings ruffled by his blunter manner. He was no philosopher, accepted without question the faith that he was ordained to teach and was ill fitted to handle theological argument, in which the Unitarian-leaning Rajah delighted. McDougall was also no match for the Rajah's clever and malicious private secretary, Spenser St. John, who had arrived also in 1848 and who paraded his Unitarianism in a manner McDougall found offensive; although Mrs McDougall patiently hoped that she might persuade St. John to see the error of his ways. Despite these differences in character and temperament, members of the small European community in Sarawak had to get along, and did so reasonably well. In 1856, St. John was appointed British Consul-General to Brunei and went to reside there. He was not in Kuching during the events of 1857.