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GOD'S WONDERS IN BORNEO

The reason Louie was sitting in the cockpit of the Catalina flying boat when it splashed down at Pontianak, Borneo, was that he knew the pilot. It had been a delightful surprise to discover that he was an old boyhood friend from Australia. He had attended a rival school when Louie was at Newington, and they had battled it out many times on the football field.

Standing among the bronze-skinned people at the wharf to welcome Louie and Paul was Biola graduate Arthur Mouw, a missionary serving under the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Something else also greeted them in that town straddling the equator—a Borneo cloudburst. After assembling the necessary provisions, they loaded them into a launch.

As the travelers chugged two hundred and fifty miles up rivers to Balai Sepoeak, the weather felt to them “like a Turkish bath,” and Louie frequented the improvised shower. It was supplied with buckets of river water, which he poured over himself with a can.

Coolness came with sundown. The moon turned the river into a yellow ribbon. With the folds of night came a change.

“The skies grew dark and the silence deepened,” wrote Louie. “I had always heard you could cut the jungle quiet with a knife, and now I believe it. . . . All we could discern along the river banks were deep, dark thickets.” The sultry stillness was only broken by the chattering of monkeys in the tops of the trees, the chug-chug of the motor, and on occasion the call of some wild bird.

His sixtieth birthday was the next day, and he requested a sample of monkey meat to celebrate. The next morning Mr. Mouw shot a monkey high in a tree, and it was skinned, cleaned, and cooked for the birthday dinner. Such kidding and apprehension accompanied the ceremony, and Louie was laughing so hard, that he had to postpone the blessing.
"I managed to get some of the meat down," he said, "but I never seemed hungry enough to try it again."

Later, they arrived at the mission station, where Mrs. Mouw's delicious meal helped prepare them for a long trek to a Christian Dyak church deeper in the jungle.

They traversed a twelve-inch-wide footpath that had been gouged out of the jungle. A tangle of roots beneath them kept tripping their feet, and on every side were tough grasses, moss, vines, and ferns. Overhead hung the impenetrable thicket of trees and vines that shut out light and occasionally struck them in the face. Louie peered anxiously from time to time to the right and left, and wondered when the lurking snakes, spiders, or insects would attack.

"It had rained heavily the night before. We walked in ooze, occasionally sinking to our hips and once to our waists in the water. . . . It was unbearably hot and humid."

Finally, the first village! Before Louie and his group stretched a two-hundred-fifty-foot longhouse built on stilts six feet off the ground and ringed by ladders of notched logs. Inside the longhouse the Dyaks chopped their wood, wove their baskets, made their knives, reared their families, conducted community gatherings, and celebrated feasts.

After refreshing themselves with rice balls, tea, and coconut milk
at the first village, they set out for Rasa Terbang and reached the Dyak longhouse at 5:30 p.m. There the local custom had been to put the nose against the visitor’s cheek and then smell him all over.

Louie was glad he was spared that—he felt that he needed a bath more than anything else.

Even though the travelers were bone weary, the approximately five hundred Dyaks insisted on shaking hands. And after supper they would not leave until the visitors took off their shirts and shoes and slipped beneath the mosquito netting.

At four o’clock in the morning a loud flapping awakened the men with a start, as an “old rooster began to blow his horn. This was the signal for the greatest bedlam I ever heard in my life. All the other chickens, dogs, pigs and ducks joined in the chorus.”

The Dyaks gathered for prayer at 5:30 a.m. at the longhouse, where they related their needs in detail to the Lord; they included prayer for sick chickens and pigs.

Louie, then sixty years old, had aching muscles, stiff joints, and blistered feet, but he pressed on to Bethel. There a Sunday school choir sang a welcome song, followed by hymn after hymn memorized perfectly. The group had committed to memory nearly three hundred hymns.

He reflected on the influence of the Christian Gospel. Years ago
these former “wild men of Borneo” would have been taking the visitors’ heads instead of shaking their hands, and Louie ranked the work of the missionaries with that of David Livingstone. He prayed that as people at home saw the pictures, they might realize the power of God available to them to change their own lives.

The church service in the Dyaks’ bamboo sanctuary, which looked something like an American park pavilion raised high off the ground, lasted for what seemed like half a day; those who came from outlying regions had spent too much time on the trail to hurry home. The Dyaks had built the church themselves with no cost to the mission. The bamboo was fastened by rattan. It had no nails, and it had no seats except two benches for the elders who assisted in prayer and personal work. Bethel Church had a membership of six hundred, and the membership of all the churches totaled four thousand.

Dyaks whom Louie met on the footpaths would report to friends at the next village, “On the trail he is very weak, but he is really mighty and powerful in preaching.”

In the following days Louie preached with a variety of handicaps: a streptococcus infection in his ankle, blisters on his heels, and insect bites all over his body. He took quinine to fight off malaria. “It was worth it all just to see those trophies of the grace of God in those jungle churches,” he said.

Louie’s enthusiasm and lively preaching stamped its mark on the Dyak church. When he left the jungles where thousands had heard him preach, many of the national pastors adopted the mannerisms and voice modulation of their visitor from America. Mr. Mouw was amused to see Dyak pastors stabbing the index finger for emphasis while kicking up the left foot, or using other characteristic gestures in an attempt to capture the dynamism that marked Louie’s sermons even when translated into another tongue.

Mr. Mouw commented, “He preached with the same power that he does at home, although the Dyaks could not understand a word until I put it into their language. When he used his red Gospel fan, and through me explained its meaning, they understood all: If you go the Lord’s way—to the right—your life falls into a useful, orderly pattern, but if to the left, all is confusion and chaos. We thank God Dr. Talbot came our way.”

After Louie left that tropic isle, he plunged into the multitudes of India.