A New Tradition at the University

EVERY university must have its own traditions. And the new universities today are acquiring them self-consciously and in a hurry. The University of Malaya is no exception. In the last ten years, it has inherited a few traditions, borrowed some others and built up a number of its own. It has also courageously shed a tradition or two which it has outgrown or found no longer suitable.

Now, in its tenth year, it is in the midst of a new experiment. A new level in student life, a new kind of student community, is being tried out. This is the work of the four residential colleges, three in Singapore and one in Kuala Lumpur.

How is this a new tradition? In 1949 when the University was founded, the basic unit of student hostels was the dormitory or the cubicle (some cubicles have been called rooms). What cohesion there was among the students who lived in these units was derived from the old rivalry between the Raffles College and the King Edward VII College of Medicine. Old loyalties die slowly.

The policy then was to introduce a single loyalty to the University as a whole and to transform old rivalries into new but no less healthy ones. The first part of this policy was successful, rather too successful for it destroyed the rivalry of the past without putting something equally keen in its place. One of the obstacles to the development of new rivalries was the dormitory-cubicle form of hostel. This became an even more serious obstacle when a large number of the students were moved to the semi-detached houses of Dunearn Road in 1952. Here in units of “houses” each holding nine to ten students, student life was further atomized. When in the course of years the Dunearn Road Hostel came to hold more than 500 students both male and female, there was little cohesion or loyalty of any kind.

The importance of individual student communities which compete with one another in a number of academic and non-academic fields cannot be doubted. It is easy to exaggerate this, but when a university has expanded as the University
of Malaya has done, this importance must really be greatly emphasized. When there are over 1,500 students, life becomes increasingly impersonal. New compact units are needed in order to make community living an education and an unforgettable experience. It is to this end that the University is now experimenting with the residential college system.

For Singapore, three of these colleges have been opened. King Edward VII Hall, the first and most luxurious, was opened to medical students in 1957. Then came Eusoff College for the women and Raffles Hall for the Arts, Science and Law male students in 1958. For Kuala Lumpur, the First Residential College, which at present takes both men and women students, was opened in 1959 and the Second College (for men) will be ready in 1960. A mixed college community has different problems but the experiment and the experience will certainly be worthwhile.

A new tradition may rise out of this college system. What are the possible course it will take? First, consider the facilities these Colleges offer. The bedrooms are not large but there are adequate single rooms for the senior students and double rooms for the others. The bath and toilet facilities are excellent and there is even running hot water. Food and laundry services are usually good. And modelled on some of the better hotels, there are comfortable and attractive common-rooms and games rooms. In the best of the Colleges, the games room can hold a billiards table, and still give ample space for other indoor sports. There is also a library in each college which provides additional facilities for the industrious.

Then consider the organisation. For the first time, members of the academic staff are being recruited to
participate in and to guide the life of the college members. There are the Master and Fellows and, especially distinctive for Malaya, there are the Resident Fellows who in many ways share the life of the students. This is a vast improvement on the previous system where the hostel wardens tended to remind one of police constables or watchmen. Now the students and the staff have a chance to be equal members of the new institution. The students run their own affairs. In their Common Room Committees, they learn not only how to co-operate with one another but also how to deal informally with their professors and lecturers and with the college staff. Always the keynote is the spirit of tolerance and understanding. Invariably disagreements are settled in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

The members of the colleges enjoy their leisure in comparative comfort. There is every opportunity to build up a way of life peculiarly their own. That is to say, each of the colleges can go its distinctive way. Through competition, through rivalry, whether in sport or in debates, whether in academic or in extra-mural activities, the college members may develop high standards of living and working of which they may be proud. This pride is probably the key to the new tradition which the University hopes will come about. Whatever may be achieved, it is hoped that each college will emerge with a personality all its own. Everyone of its members will then leave it with the affection and loyalty due to a great institution. The experience can be a cumulative one. Each generation of students will want to add to the traditions of their college and after each generation there should be more to be proud of. In time, the University itself will gain from the personality each college develops.

Kuala Lumpur Residential College, top, takes both men and women students and was opened in 1959. King Edward VII Hall, Singapore, above, was the first and most luxurious of the new colleges. Men and women students, below, relax in the common-room of the Residential College at Kuala Lumpur.
Up the Nenggiri

Katharine Sim describes a pleasant week-end spent in Ulu Kelantan with the Temiar people

It was the eve of Hari Raya when we left Kuala Lumpur by road at 6.30 a.m., there was pink mist over rose-flushed limestone where the early sun caught the hills in Templer Park, and blue mist where the shadows still lay deep.

We arrived at Kuala Lipis on time, and the market there was crowded and gay. It was something of a shock for us to see the Golden Blowpipe, which we were to catch, already drawing into the station, and we on the wrong side of the level crossing. However, we had plenty of time to park our car, and transfer our odd-looking equipment to a hand-truck, much to the surprise of the Hari Raya crowds at the station.

Our baggage ranged from ruckslacks, fishing and under-water swimming gear to safari beds, rolls of bedding, cameras, hats, drawing things, payong, umbrella, and even a piece of glass for viewing a partial eclipse of the sun, that was due the following morning.

After many delays along the track, and a further long delay at Bertam, where we had expected a boat to be waiting to take us on the next leg of our journey up the great Nenggiri river, we did eventually get away. But owing to the disappointment about the boat and the fact that we had to get another in its place we were much too late to reach our destination — a ladang, clearing, on the Sungei Jenera where we had planned to spend the night — a five-hour journey. It was nearly 5 p.m. when we left Bertam and the rapids could not be tackled after dark. We travelled for about an hour and a half. There was a glory of bamboo dark against pale sunlit cliffs of limestone in the evening light; small golden sands, majestic jungle, white ramparts crowned with trees, and the great river kissed by the gold, the blue and the silver light of late afternoon. It was beautiful, but we felt tired and a little depressed because of the frustrating delay that had prevented us from reaching the Sungei Jenera before dark. Our juluan, guide, who was half-Malay and half-Temiar, lived in a riverside ladang which we were able to reach shortly before dusk. He led us up the steep bank to the clearing, and invited us into his house, where we were shown a sleeping place for the night.

All of us — two Malays, who had been inadvertently wished on us as an escort, the driver of the boat, a blaze-looking Malay, the lithe lean little juluan and our three selves — then settled in. There was a good fire burning on the earth hearth at the far end of the hut, and when we had bathed shiveringly in the cold, dark swift-running river, we ate some food and went to bed.

The houses in this village were set very high above the water. In the
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NEGARA MALAYSIA