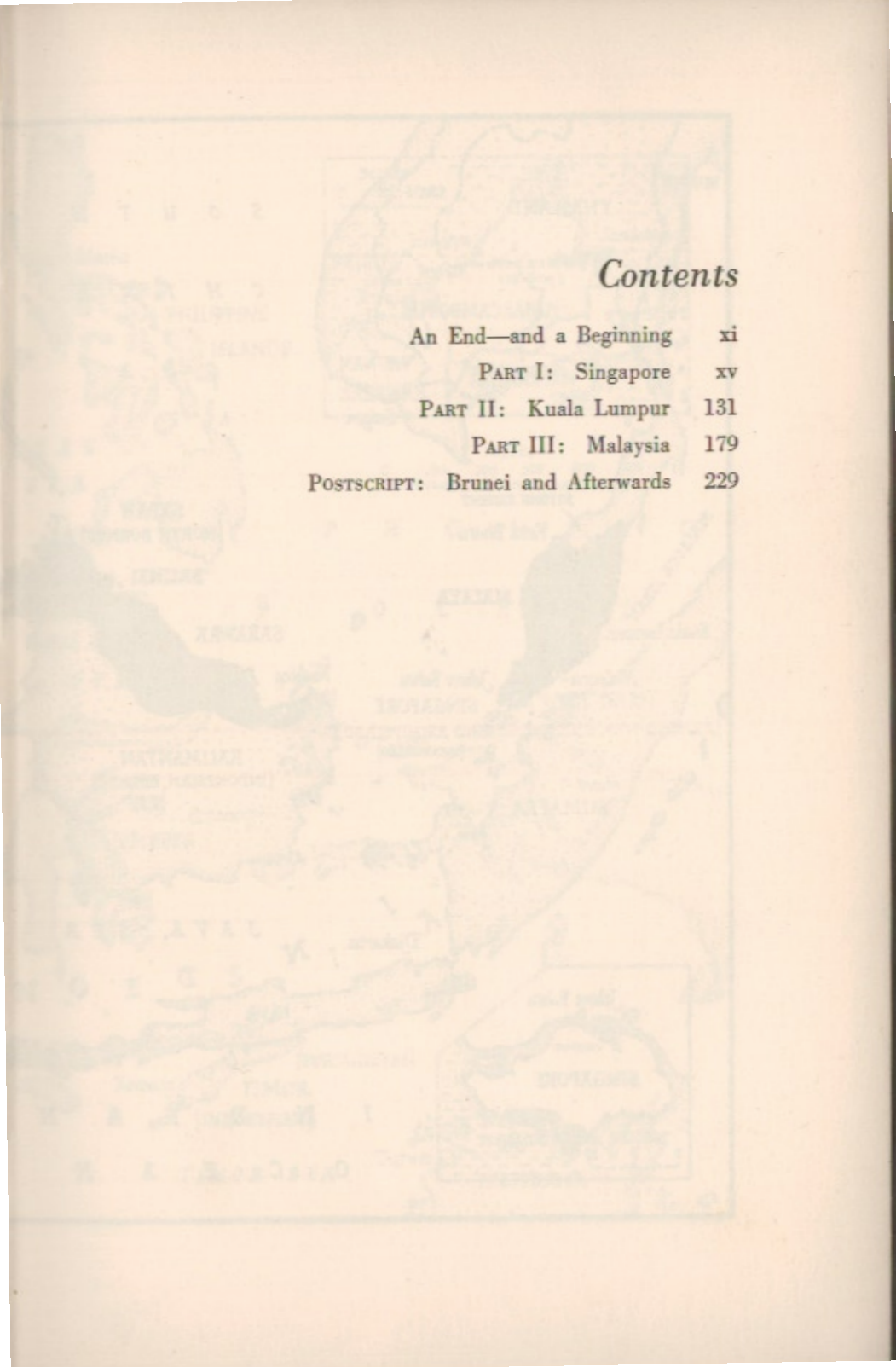
The background of the book cover features four bamboo stalks that cross each other in the center. Two stalks are a golden-yellow color, and two are a dark reddish-brown color. Each stalk has several white horizontal rings or nodes. The stalks are arranged in a way that they appear to be leaning against each other, creating a central point where they meet.

***MALAYSIA  
IN  
FOCUS***

***RONALD McKIE***



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## *An End—and a Beginning*

THE thunderheads were lifting in grey folds above the rain trees and the stained tile roofs of the white barracks. The temperature was in the eighties, humidity higher still, a heat which pressed down with damp hands on this cricket field in Singapore not a hundred miles north of the Equator. Across the turf a Malay boy slept under a banana clump weighted with purple flowers, and at the pavilion, near where the road embraced the outfield, players sagged in cane chairs or lay under the trees, their boots small tombstones rising from the grass.

At the brown matting strip pegged on red earth the game was being played with guile and sweat, and presiding over this tribal rite, his silk shirt sticking to his thin shoulders, was Lord Selkirk, British Commissioner General for South-east Asia, a wide straw hat decorated with a red paisley pugaree shading his lined, humorously cynical face.

Lord Selkirk was keeping wickets, and keeping them skilfully for a man of more than sixty on a tropical afternoon when any sensible person should have been, if not asleep, then at least inert and in the shade. Crouched behind the stumps, he failed to catch few of the balls which General Ivan Harris, the opposing captain, missed, for this was a challenge game between the Army and the Commissioner General's team within the shrinking little England of Far East Land Forces Headquarters at Phoenix Park.

The sun began to dip towards the trees. The dancing air smelt of scorched grass, curled leaves, curdled bitumen from the road along which an Indian girl in a rose sari was riding her Lambretta. But on the field cricket was still being worshipped with that casual but passionate concentration which the British reserve for sport, beer, and warfare.

A six had just been hit, a faultless arc right out of the ground, and Lord Selkirk was getting down on his hams again to watch the next fast ball when a car pulled in behind the pavilion and a senior official from the British High Commission got out carrying a black dispatch case.

I saw no sign, no signal, pass between the newcomer and the field, but the game stopped halfway through an over as though a

sergeant-major had bawled an order. Lord Selkirk went to the pavilion, put on a short crimson sweat jacket and, still wearing his straw and now smoking a cigarette in a long black holder, sauntered with the official to another part of the ground where, joined by a playing member of his staff, they sat under a tree.

As any cricketer knows, only the most urgent news, war or revolution, can stop a cricket match, and particularly one between a Commissioner General and a General Officer Commanding. But the black dispatch case was already open and papers of state spread on the grass, so that the other players had no alternative but to wipe their faces and gather at the marquee on the far side of the field—as far away as possible from the cabinet meeting—and have afternoon tea.

For half an hour nothing moved except one bird which settled in a tree near the pavilion, put its head under its wing, and went to sleep. Then a Chinese boy in white carried a tray around the boundary and placed it almost reverently on the grass beside the Commissioner General. His Lordship poured, sipped, and ate iced cucumber sandwiches while the official scribbled on a pad on his knee what was probably the most uncomfortably conceived dispatch in the history of Britain's colonial empire.

The scribbling continued. More papers littered the grass. The High Commissioner fitted yet another cigarette to his long holder. The players came from the marquee, gathered in groups, began to stroll back to the field aimlessly flicking the ball between them. Another fifteen minutes of that heated afternoon dribbled away before the cabinet meeting ended.

The papers were returned to the black dispatch case. The official hurried to his car. Lord Selkirk returned to the pavilion, removed his crimson jacket, put on his batting pads, since the other team had been forced by the delay to close its innings, and went to the wicket to break every rule of batsmanship in the next few minutes.

But those dispatches? They were from No. 10 Downing Street, from Prime Minister Macmillan. They welcomed the concept of Greater Malaysia, suggested that the father of the plan, the Prime Minister of the Federation of Malaya, Tunku Abdul Rahman, should confer with Mr Macmillan in London, and set in motion the negotiations designed to end Britain's colonial era in South-east Asia and in time to create a new and independent nation, the union of Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo territories—the Crown Colonies of Sarawak and North Borneo and the British Protectorate of Brunei—and to begin one of the most fascinating political and social experiments of our time.