BRITISH MALAYA

AN ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF BRITISH INFLUENCE IN MALAYA

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With a specially compiled map and 49 *illustrations reproduced mainly from photographs*

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 1948 EDITION

"Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em,
And little fleas have lesser fleas, and so *ad infinitum*."

IN a place of Big—and small—debates, it is always permitted to make a personal explanation, and as a lesser flea I have one to make.

Last August, believing that my publishers would produce a new edition of *British Malaya* by Christmas 1945, I wrote an introduction for it, only to be told that it would be impossible to reproduce the book for years. I therefore made use of the Introduction in the Course of Press Correspondence on a subject closely connected with Malay affairs, namely, the British Government's declared policy to arrange a Union and a new Constitution on the nine states of the Malay Peninsula, leaving the tenth state—Petâni—under the control of the Siamese Government, in whose territories so many British subjects had been compelled to work and to die.

The new British policy is going to have such an effect on the Malay race and their homeland that, as a record of events I should like to reprint here the published correspondence which describes—so far as is known to the public—the various steps by which the present Government induced the Malay Rulers —or forced on them—the acceptance of pre-arranged plans. The White Paper which purports to describe them should also be recorded, but that story must be left to another friend of Malaya when all the details of this strange and uncalled for action are known and finis can be written on proceedings discreditable to the British name and character.

The last few years have seen the downfall of two mighty

Powers which set out to conquer West and East and so divide the World between them, while a third Power joined in, rather half-heartedly, hoping to secure some valuable pickings as well as command of the Mediterranean—"Our Sea" as Mussolini styled it. But Italy fell while its fellow gangsters still carried on the struggle. With such stupendous happenings, it was hardly surprising that Malaya was swept into the general mêlée, was overrun by the Japanese, and its Protecting Power, deeply concerned to preserve its own existence, was unable to save the unprepared and distant States from years of occupation by an enemy who proved himself devoid of all decent instincts, and has paid a terrible penalty for his treacherous attack and the barbarous methods he employed in making use of the people—soldiers or civilians, men and women—who fell into his hands.

It may be said that these great events are not the concern of the small States in remote Malaya, but it happens that, owing to the circumstances of their invasion and capture, a good deal has been said and written, since early in 1942, that does concern them very nearly, and that is why I wish to take this opportunity to say something about a country which, and a people who, will always remain of the deepest interest to me.

Malaya is now free again, and it is suggested by many speakers and writers that there must have been something very wrong with her past administration for the Malay States to have fallen so easily into the hands of the Japanese, and these knowledgeable and well-informed people say that this is the opportunity to reorganize and reconstruct the administration and generally to reconstitute Malaya. For whose benefit is usually not stated, but in no instance have I seen it pleaded that the object of proposed panaceas is to make life pleasanter for the people of the country.

The Malay States are not British Territory, and our connection with them is due to the simple fact that 70 years ago the British Government was invited, pushed, and persuaded into helping the Rulers of certain States to introduce order into

their disorderly, penniless, and distracted households, by sending trained British Civil Servants to advise the Rulers in the art of administration and to organize a system of government which would secure justice, freedom, safety for all, with the benefits of what is known as Civilization; and, of course, to provide an annual revenue sufficient to meet all the charges of a government which had to introduce railways, roads, hospitals, water supplies, and all the other requirements of modern life. Of nine States south of Siam, four asked for or accepted this help; four others, threatened by Siam, came later under direct British influence; while Johore, nearest neighbour to Singapore had, ever since the occupation of that island by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819, depended for its development on the wealth and enterprise of Singapore Chinese.

In asking for, or accepting, the guidance and later the control of administration by British Officers, it was rather assumed than definitely agreed that the Malay Rulers placed themselves, their people, and their territories, under the Protection of the British Government, with certain reservations as regards the Muhammadan Faith and ancient Malay Custom; but it has never until quite recently been suggested that the position and authority of the Rulers should be questioned, or that they have in any way lost status.

The story of how the first British Residents performed their difficult task is told in this book, as well as how they evolved a scheme of administration never before tried with a people of different colour, language, and religion inhabiting a tropical country. The book also describes the extraordinary success secured for these Malay States by the efforts of their British advisers, working hand in hand with the Malay Rulers, their Chiefs, and their people. It was not easy work, nor always carried on without opposition, but to-day it is possible to write of an experiment which has had 70 years' trial, except for the last 3½ years of Japanese rule of which, so far, we know little or nothing.

We have no authentic record of the loss of Malaya, and of the British Colony called the Straits Settlements, and a really truthful account of that deplorable disaster may never be told. I know nothing about it, but having regard to the shape and position of the Malay Peninsula, it seems curious that those responsible did not provide for defence, an efficient air force, and at least 100, or 200, or more fast, armed, electrically driven boats to guard the coasts and mouths of rivers from Kădah in the North to Johore in the South, on the West Coast, and from Johore to the Kelantan on the East. The reason appears to be that Servicemen and civilians all believed they were safe and had nothing to fear. Japan's treacherous attack has, however, shown the real feelings of its insignificant ally, Siam, and it must be supposed that the British Government was well informed of its intentions. One may hope that, in return for Siam's services to Japan, her present Rulers—whoever they are—will be compelled to release the Malay State of Petâni from its bondage. It would be justice to free another Malay State, Ligor, which many years ago was attacked and conquered by its then powerful neighbour.

When Japan, dominated by the leaders of its armed forces and unsatisfied by its conquest of Korea and great provinces of China, set out to make itself Mistress of the Pacific—another "Our Sea" dream—not only the Malay States but the impregnable Singapore fell easy victims to its apparently irresistible arms. A crowd of correspondents at once rushed into print, charging the Malays with failing to take up arms and resist the invaders. It was also implied and asserted that their failure was due to want of proper direction by the British controlling authorities who were disliked by the Malays, or at any rate had failed to create enough sympathy to induce the inhabitants to defend their homes and country against an alien enemy. The charge was too ridiculous to need denial. If, having sought, or accepted, British protection, the Malays were expected to defend themselves against a great Power,

what would be gained by "protection"? The Malays are so few in numbers that no efforts of theirs, even had they been highly trained for military service, would have been of the slightest use. A Malay's courage is as good as that of most men. He makes an excellent sailor, with proper training he would become a good airman or jungle fighter, but he was not asked to devote himself to any of these services because it was not expected that his help would be needed. The statement that the Malays disliked the British, that they were not friends, is simply untrue. Equally untrue is the charge that British men and women, civilians, failed to volunteer for, or to render all the services of which they were capable during the period of Japanese attack. The facts have been made public in an account by Sir George Maxwell of the findings of a Committee of Inquiry of which he was Chairman.

Against the charge, unsupported by any evidence, of the dislike of Malays I put my own experience of over 30 years in Malaya, and in support I may add that while I was High Commissioner an American, named Professor Jenks, came to see me in Singapore and told me he wanted to travel in the Malay States and make a report on the place and its people. He went, and when he came to visit me on his return I asked him to say frankly what opinion he had formed. He said, "You have done and are doing so much for the Malays that the only other thing you could do would be to divide the surplus revenues among them."

That brings me to the main question to which I hope some one who can speak with authority will reply, namely, what is the reason for all the clamour we have heard, and which still goes on, demanding the introduction of all sorts of drastic changes in the administration of Malay States affairs?

One does not call in the doctor until there is something the matter. Well, what was wrong with Malay administration as practised up to the end of the year 1941? I have not seen anywhere a list of charges made against the administration of

affairs in any Malay State, but I have read, and know to be true, countless statements of the phenomenal progress and development of Malaya from the year 1874 to the year 1941. Readers are invited to note that beginning with debts, directly the British residents took a hand in affairs, these Malay States advanced and prospered and grew rich, year by year, until they astonished the world. From a revenue which, in 1874, could not have reached £200,000, the four Federated Malay States in 1940 enjoyed a revenue of £12,000,000, with a trade valued at £67,000,000, of which the export duty on tin gave £2,500,000 and on rubber over £800,000.

Is such a result possible with bad administration? I don't believe it. Then why all this fuss about the reorganization, reconstruction, and all the other re's? Malaya is now free again, and it is therefore appropriate to ask these questions before harm is done by well-meaning people, or by others who have axes to grind, and ideals of human happiness with which the Malay has no sympathy.

Though there is in these published letters and speeches, committee reports and nondescript documents, no specific charge of maladministration, nearly all of them suggest that the young Malay of to-day is looking forward to, and wants, a time when self-government will arrive for Malaya, and the writer, or committee or whoever is the author, declares always that the object of the British Government is to prepare every possession or protectorate for self-government. Have the Malay Rulers been consulted on that subject before making these very important statements? I wonder, and I'm sure they have not.

I wonder also what the young Malay, who is supposed to be so anxious to see the ballot box introduced into his country, would reply to the question, "What do you propose to do with your Yang di Pertuan? Are you going to dismiss him, or pension him, or what?"

The ablest Malay I ever knew was the late Raja Idris Sultan of Pêrak. He returned from a visit to Egypt and

England when I was the British Resident in Pêrak, and I went to the station to meet His Highness and drove him to the Residency, where we had a talk. After his news, I showed him an Indian newspaper I had received lately and read to him a leading article it contained on the government of his own State. The article said that I, as British Resident, ran the government and exercised all authority, while the Ruler was kept in the background. When I had translated the article into Malay for him, Sultan Idris said, "What is the matter with the man? What does he want? Of course you do the work—that is what you are paid for. You always consult me about everything of importance before it is done and when that is settled you do it. You are trained for the job. I could not do it, and don't want the trouble if I could."

Years before that incident, Sir Cecil Smith, then High Commissioner for the Malay States, wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Colonel F. A. Stanley, and said, "The enclosed is a copy of a letter from the acting Resident of Pêrak reporting the tenour of a speech made by Raja Idris, Chief Judge of the State, at the celebration of the great annual feast of the Hari Rahja in which His Highness eulogized the system of the administration of the government of the State by British Officers.

"This spontaneous and wholly unexpected public expression of the opinion and feelings of the chief native authorities of the State, cannot, I apprehend, but be gratifying to Her Majesty's Government. It is the most valuable testimony to the good results arising out of the Residential system which could be given, and it is proof that that system is being efficiently worked in sympathy with the wishes of the people and to their welfare."

The Secretary of State replied to that despatch: "Reporting the tenour of a speech made by Raja Idris at the celebration of the annual feast of the Hari Rahja, in which His Highness the Regent had expressed his cordial concurrence, eulogizing the

system of the administration of the Government of Pêrak under British Officers.

"I have to express to you the satisfaction with which Her Majesty's Government have received this expression of the appreciation of the Chief native authorities of Pêrak of the good Government of the State and I note with pleasure the testimony which is thus borne to the ability and discretion of the British Officers of the Residency."

These statements, on the highest authority, seem to dispose of the charge of faulty administration, and if it is urged that they were made a long time ago, and that they do not apply to the present century, I ask, why not? For the States have grown enormously in prosperity and development in the last 40 years, owing largely to the introduction of the rubber planting industry—a British industry, financed with British capital. If the critics are still unsatisfied, I repeat what are the faults of which they complain?

The Malay is a Muhammadan and looks to his Raja as the ruling authority. The ballot box makes no appeal, and self-government has no attractions. If we could order him differently, give him a new idea of life, we should only make him unhappy. Our position in Malaya was arranged, or gained if you like, wholly and entirely through the Malay Rulers. What of them? Are all sorts of changes to be made in these States in the administration of their affairs without any reference whatever to them? It would seem so, if much that has in recent years been said and written is of any account.

The coming of British advisers in 1874 made an enormous change in Malay affairs. It was resented by some of those concerned, who changed their minds when they saw the results of the white man's work. It seems to me advisable to let well alone, and to try to make up for failure to protect a very interesting and trusting people.

There *has* been something the matter in Malaya which can easily be remedied, and it is this. The early practice of making

real friends of the Malay Rulers, their Chiefs, and also their people, seems to have been abandoned; that was a great mistake and should be remedied from now onwards. If done, the speech which Sir Cecil Smith eulogized and the Secretary of State commended may be repeated by another Sultan of Pêrak, or by one of the Rulers of another Malay State. I know there are enthusiasts who would prefer to get rid of all kings, but it may be doubted whether that would be a popular and successful policy in Malaya, and what about the Atlantic Charter?

* * *

As closely concerned with the Malay States, and the British Government's action towards them—so undeserved and deeply resented by the Malay Rulers and their people—I am adding an article on the rubber-growing industry in Malaya which I wrote for publication in the Magazine of the Association of British Malaya, and an extract from the recent speech of the Chairman of the Rubber Growers delivered at the annual meeting of that important Association. These documents will help those interested in Malaya—and they are many—to see the possessive policy of the British Government in its true light.

FRANK SWETTENHAM

London, April 1946

PREFACE TO THE 1929 EDITION

THIS 1929 edition of "British Malaya" follows the text of the original edition of 1906, with a few verbal corrections and the addition of a new chapter dealing with the further progress of the countries comprised in the now well-recognised designation first used when giving a title to this book.

Some illustrations not referred to in the text are now omitted, while three new ones, picturing Raffles, his home in Java, and the church where he lies buried, are added.

The Appendix published with the edition of 1920 is reprinted, and the map has been revised and brought up to date.

The new chapter is not covered by the index as to do that would have entailed complete revision and re-printing.

F. A. S.

July, 1929.

PREFACE TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

IT is an article of popular belief that Englishmen are born sailors; probably it would be more true to say that they are born administrators. The Englishman makes a good sailor because we happen to have hit upon the right training to secure that end; but, though the Empire is large and the duties of administration important, we have no school where they are taught. Still it would be difficult to devise any responsibility, however onerous and unattractive, which a midshipman would not at once undertake, though it had no concern with sea or ship. Moreover, he would make a very good attempt to solve the problem, because his training fits him to deal intelligently with the unexpected. One may, however, question whether any one but a midshipman would have willingly embarked upon a voyage to discover the means of introducing order into the Malay States, when that task was thrust upon the British Government in 1874.

The object of this book is to explain the circumstances under which the experiment was made, the conditions which prevailed, the features of the country and the character of the people; then to describe the gradual evolution of a system of administration which has no exact parallel, and to tell what this new departure has done for Malaya, what effect it has had on the neighbouring British possessions. A comparison is also drawn between the progress made in the Malay States under British protection and the other States of the Peninsula,

whether independent or under Siamese control. In order to give the reader an intelligible account of these matters, it has been necessary to deal briefly with the early history of the Malays and of those Settlements forming the British colony of which the capital is Singapore.

The main idea is to set out accurately the important facts which led to the intervention of Great Britain in the domestic affairs of the countries now known as the Federated Malay States, and to record exactly the steps by which they have been led to their present position as Dependencies of the British Crown. The unique character of the experiment and the success which has attended it are sufficient reasons for describing the efforts which have raised the Malays to a condition of comfort and happiness never before known in their history, and have conferred benefits on Chinese, Indians, and British alike, while opening a new and valuable market to British manufacturers. A further incentive was supplied by the desire of the writer to tell truthfully a story never yet told, though the facts, as far as they concern the Federated States, are no discredit to the British nation, either as the paramount Power in Malaya, or simply as a friend who can sympathize with, and be generous to, a poor neighbour, without considerations of self-interest.

I have felt the disadvantage of writing from intimate knowledge of the events of my time, and, while I could not kill the personal pronoun, for it has a thousand lives and some uses, I have made an effort to scotch it.

My thanks are due to Mr. Basil H. Soulsby, F.S.A., of the Map Department of the British Museum, and to Mr. C. Atchley, I.S.O., Librarian of the Colonial Office, for their kind assistance.

F. A. S.

19 *July*, 1906.

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