



MALAYA AND  
ITS HISTORY

SIR RICHARD WINSTEDT

*Formerly of the Malayan Civil Service and Reader in  
Malay in the University of London*



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## BRITISH EMPIRE HISTORY

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*Editor*

SIR REGINALD COUPLAND

K.C.M.G., C.I.E., M.A., D.LITT.

*Late Beit Professor of the History of the British Empire  
in the University of Oxford*

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SIR RICHARD WINSTEDT

K.B.E., C.M.G., F.B.A., D.LITT. (OXON.), M.A., HON. LL.D. (MALAYA)

FORMERLY OF THE MALAYAN CIVIL  
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UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



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## CHAPTER I

# MALAYA—THE LAND

### i

SEVEN times the Malay Peninsula has played a notable part on the world's stage. About 6000 B.C. it was a bridge down which the ancestors of the Australian aborigine and of the Papuan made their way to the narrow waters they crossed one after another to their present homes. About 2000 B.C. the ancestors of the Malays descended its rivers on their trek from Yunnan to Sumatra and Java and beyond. Then, when India and China had built ships for the high seas, a Malay Buddhist empire, Sri Vijaya, maintained a footing in the north of the peninsula to command the Straits of Malacca, as it maintained a footing in Palembang to command the Sunda Straits. For five centuries the fleets of its Maharaja intercepted ships faring between India and China to levy tribute and toll, as afterwards the fleets of Portuguese and Dutch monopolists were to do. In the fourteenth century Sri Vijaya and its colonies fell before the attacks of Majapahit, Java's last Hindu empire, and one of its fugitive princes founded about 1403 the port kingdom of Malacca to be for a hundred years a Malay world market. In addition (a happening even more momentous) Malacca became a centre from which Indian and Arab missionaries carried the religion of Muhammad to the islands of the archipelago.

Then came the European. In 1511 d'Albuquerque captured Malacca to be Portugal's base for trade with the Spice Islands and the Far East. From Portugal it was wrested in 1641 by the Dutch, who, having settled at Batavia to command the Sunda Straits, wanted, like Sri Vijaya, to dominate the Straits of Malacca also, the more effectively to hold the East and West in fee. Under Dutch rule Malacca, after nearly two and a half centuries of greatness, was eclipsed by Batavia, and when in the nineteenth century it was transferred to Great Britain, the



increased draught of East Indiamen had already made it a less convenient port of call than Raffles' "political child" Singapore, where the introduction of free trade furnished modern Asia with a new pattern of commerce and government. A century later the demand of the motor industry for tin and rubber lifted Singapore into one of the world's ten greatest ports. In 1941 the capture of that key to the Pacific by the Japanese saw the defence of Netherlands India collapse like a house of cards, and exposed India and Australia to menace.

So much we know of Malaya's past and more, although Muslim fanaticism destroyed nearly all the vestiges of its Hindu period and British engineers blasted the fourteenth-century monument to Majapahit's conquest of Singapore, blew up Malacca's mediaeval Portuguese fortress and used the bricks of a Dutch fort in Lower Perak to make roads.

Wave after wave of early migrants visited the Malay peninsula and aborigines stayed behind on its mountains, although it was not till the Christian era that states emerged into history, already called after rivers with Malay names or bearing Sanskrit names introduced by sparse Indian colonists. For the whole peninsula there was until the nineteenth century no common label, rivers giving their separate names to those sections of the limitless forest into which they cut the only openings. By Malays it came to be termed "Malay land" (*tanah Melayu*), though parts of Sumatra and Borneo are also "Malay land". The continent of Europe still calls the country the Peninsula of Malacca. But it was the British whose roads first pierced the great forest and joined river states, and it was left for the British to employ a suitable name for the whole peninsula. When and by whom was that name, Malaya, invented? It occurs in *Mendez Pinto* (1539), in Leyden's *Dirge of the Departed Year*, written in 1806, and again in Captain Sherard Osborn's pleasant book on *Quedah*, which was published in London in 1857 but written as a diary when he was a midshipman in Malayan waters.

It was, however, not till the present century that the name became popular. British Malaya it was sometimes amplified, to distinguish between British and Siamese Malaya. But as their

states were protectorates and not colonies, Malays resented the adjective, bitterly after a Union was mooted. And apart from the euphonious Malaya, the peninsula was singularly unfortunate in names of British invention: Prince of Wales' Island for a settlement never called by any name but Penang; Straits Settlements, an unromantic description for the Colony, with a penal nuance; Malayan Union, a term reminiscent of poor-houses and primers on political science. "Malaya" the peninsula is called by all races, and, happily when independent, Malaya it remains. Malaya fits the new country of tin and rubber, but it fits also the country of Swettenham's *Real Malay* and Hugh Clifford's *Brown Humanity* and George Maxwell's *In Malay Forests*, the country of palm and mangrove and tawny rivers.

## ii

That part of Malaya which fell within the British sphere was a little larger than England without Wales. Hardly a quarter of the area has been hacked out of the sea of forest. The species of trees exceed in number all those of India and Burma, and flowering plants and ferns amount to more than 9000.

There are three kinds of forest. Above 2000 feet is one of low trees, lichens, mosses, ferns, liverworts and orchids. Below that height is another type with the vegetation most characteristic of the country, ranging from trees 150 to 200 feet tall down to a dense undergrowth of palms, tree-ferns and herbaceous plants. Along the coast the forest changes again. Wherever there are sandy spits or rocky soil, the graceful casuarina flourishes, and wherever there are mud-flats, mile upon mile of mangrove trees straddle the ooze.

Mountains and rivers are big for the size of the country. The highest mountain, Gunong Tahan, which lies on the northern frontier of Pahang, rises to 7184 feet, and the next highest (7160 feet) is one of the granite peaks of the main range, named by the Indonesian Sakai Korbu, meaning "Mountain"

—though modern Malays and map-makers have corrupted it into Kerbau—"Buffalo". For, excepting a large area of fresh-water swamps, each type of soil covered by the different kinds of forest has supported different races. Like their kinsmen the Igorots of Luzon and the Bataks of Sumatra, the Sakai have felled clearings on mountain slopes, and the higher the sites, the healthier and more intelligent the tribe. On the level land the Malays are to be found: attracted by the rice-plains of the north, and, since commerce visited their shores, by the jungle produce, resin, guttapercha, rattans, and by tin and gold, they used for their highways the rivers, the Kelantan, the Trengganu, the Pahang, the Johore, the Selangor, the Perak, the Kedah, all of which have given their names to Malay states. Finally, along the coastal belt and at the estuaries settled the Malay sea-gipsies, fishermen and, with the coming of Indian commerce, pirates, whose ancestors, for example, formed an element in the population of Sri Vijaya and of mediaeval Malacca.

But country broken into small valleys afforded little promise of livelihood for an agricultural people in days before international commerce opened markets for metals and jungle produce. When they descended from the continent of Asia, Malays had already learnt to irrigate rice-fields; so at the wide plains of northern Malaya, Perlis, Kedah and Kelantan, a wave of Malay agriculturists halted. There in the north a large Malay population collected, leaving the more southerly part of the peninsula to nomad aborigines and Malay sea-gipsies until in mediaeval times it, too, was developed by the aforesaid sea-tribes, by Minangkabaus who colonized Negri Sembilan and by Bugis who colonized Selangor.

Like every tropical country, Malaya is always green and always beautiful, though not perhaps as beautiful as Ceylon or Java or as varied in its landscape as Indo-China. But, except in valleys where rice-fields have been cut out of the jungle, as, for example, in Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan, in Malacca and Negri Sembilan, it is only from some mountain height that the visitor can get free of the enclosing forest and rubber estates and confront landscape in perspective.

Few nowadays get the chance to travel by Malayan rivers,

past avenues of trees of all shades, hung with veils of smoky-grey or orange-flowered creepers, past clumps of feathery bamboo and white-leaved bushes and plants with crimson tassels or rosemadder fringes. Fewer still know the fairy beauty of the islands off the east coast or of the Langkawis that from the Peak at Penang can be descried far off in a setting of cloud-chased peacock sea. Across the harbour of Penang towers Kedah Peak, purple at sunrise above the willow-green shoots or golden grain of rice-fields. Penang, beyond dispute, is one of the world's fairest spots.

Seldom in a sea of forest does the wayfarer light on elephant or tiger or rhinoceros or the wild bison or deer or many of the 650 species of birds. In the jungle of Pahang and Johore is a huge bearded pig, but even hunters have encountered them so seldom that it was a moot point whether they had not been imported in the last 50 years, until at last their skeletal remains were unearthed among the prehistoric litter of a Kelantan cave. Crocodiles one may see in every river, nor are iguanas or monkeys shy. Once in a lifetime, if the fates are kind, the traveller may catch a glimpse of a pack of the red fox-like wild dogs in hot chase across a clearing, or surprise a baby tapir at his bath. There are over 130 varieties of snakes, and some 800 butterflies and 200 dragon-flies. The fauna of the mountains is closely related to that of the Himalayan ranges, but, curiously enough, there are affinities between the birds and insects of Malaya and West Africa.

It is a pity that Malaya was a *terra incognita* to the Victorian lady who wrote to a friend in 1841, "When I say romantic, I mean damp." On 27 December, 1926, there fell at Kemaman in Trengganu  $15\frac{1}{2}$  inches of rain, and Trengganu's total rainfall for the month was 76.54 inches. In the same month the Perak River rose  $38\frac{1}{2}$  feet at Kuala Kangsar and the Pahang River over 60 feet at Temerloh. That year was abnormal. Ordinarily the annual rainfall varies between 50 inches in the driest locality and 259 inches in the mountains. During December and January the east coast of Malaya is swept by the north-east monsoon blowing across the China Sea. From May to October, tempered by Sumatra's mountains, the south-west monsoon prevails. To get an idea of the temperature it is only necessary

to visit the palm-house at Kew. In the hottest spot on the plains the mean daily maximum is about  $95^{\circ}\text{F.}$  in the shade; on the highest mountains night has seen it fall to less than half that. The early mornings are delightful and the nights tolerable.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PEOPLES

#### ABORIGINES

THE most primitive race extant in south-east Asia and the Malay archipelago is that of the dwarf Negritos, called Semang in Kedah and Perak, and Pangan in Kelantan. These little black woolly-headed nomads are related to the Aetas of the Philippines and the Mincopies of the Andaman Islands. In Malaya there are only 3000 of them, living on jungle fruits, roots and wild game. Their weapon is the bow and arrow, but they have borrowed the blow-pipe of the Sakai, with whom they have intermarried. They build neither houses nor boats, but sleep round a forest fire on a floor of sticks under a wall-less leaf shelter propped on a stick. Innocent of the crimes that spring from greed and passion, they live in family groups with no ruling class or tribal organization. They fear thunder and lightning and draw blood from their shins to appease the unseen powers that cause them.

Far higher in the scale of civilization are the taller, fair, wavy-haired Sakai or Senoi of the mountains and foot-hills. They are cinnamon-coloured people of Indonesian stock, which is one of the components of the Malay race, but their language is mainly Mon-Annam. They are akin to hill-tribes in Yunnan, Indo-China and the Malay archipelago, but those of the lower hills have not only intermarried with the Negrito in the north and the Jakun or proto-Malay in the south but exhibit an Australo-Melanesoid strain; that is, traces of the blood of the remote ancestors of the Papuans and of Australia's aborigines. There are some 24,000 Sakai, divided into tribes and families under patriarchal chiefs. Their houses, like those of the Malays, are built on piles, and they plant rice, sugar, millet, plantain and tobacco, moving to fresh clearings as the soil becomes exhausted. Like the primitive Malay, they are animists, fearing innumerable spirits of sickness. Like the Malay and the Mongol, they believe in the

shaman, giving him as the Malay once did tree-burial, to let the tiger familiar rend his body and release his spirit.

In the southern half of British Malaya are found primitive tribes, whose proto-Malay ancestors trekked down from Yunnan and overran Indo-China. Whether of the land or sea these 7000 Jakun, as they call themselves, have the Indonesian and Mongoloid strains that, along with foreign blood acquired in historical times, make up the modern civilized Malay. But some of them also exhibit the very early Australo-Melanesoid blood and one may see a Johore Jakun as big, black and bearded as a Papuan. The jungle tribes live on fruits and wild game and the Orang Laut (Kipling's "Orange Lord") or Sea-Folk by fishing, their families with them in their boats or ashore in huts. These sea-tribes would transfix fish with wooden spears, and in modern times they dive for coins in Singapore dock. Tomé Pires, the Portuguese writer (1515), was the first to term them "Cellates", which may mean People of the *Selat* or Straits. He describes them as pirates who haunted the Carimon (*Kërimun*) islands, showed the port of Malacca to its founder and took part with their blow-pipes in its defence against d'Albuquerque. He adds that the founder of Malacca rewarded these aboriginal followers by bestowing on them titles and offices such as that of Bendahara or Prime Minister and Laksamana or Admiral, which would make them the ancestors of leading Malay families. In the eighteenth century they were still loyal followers of the sultans of Johore, who condescendingly bestowed on them grandiloquent titles. Their religion is animism, the belief that stocks and stones are animated by living spirits, but from their civilized neighbours they learnt also to invoke Hindu deities. Their language is Malay, free from foreign loan-words.

More and more Malaya's aborigines are ceasing to be nomadic.

### THE CIVILIZED MALAY

The migration of the Malays from Yunnan down to the Malay peninsula took place between 2500 and 1500 B.C. Their quadrangular adze culture, accompanied by unglazed cord-

marked pottery of great variety, has been traced from China southward, and "the highly specialized pick-adzes of Java and Sumatra from a simple adze type with quadrangular cross-section and semi-circular edge found in Laos through an intermediate type frequent in Malaya indicates the direction and way of their migration"—namely, down the Malay peninsula. Some may have travelled by land, others across the Gulf of Siam in craft developed from bamboo outriggers still in use on rivers in Burma and Indo-China. Among the earliest waves may have been the Jakun. But the most important movement brought the ancestors of the Malays of Kedah, Kelantan and Patani to become the civilized hinduized subjects of Langkasuka and Sri Vijaya. The people of Kelantan, who have been compared to the Polynesians, are bigger than the Malays of the south, perhaps because they represent a different strain, perhaps on account of a better climate or the better food of an ancient rice area.

For the culture of primitive Malays, language and prehistoric discoveries provide the only evidence. And while earlier peoples, apparently with an Australo-Melanesoid strain, lived in caves or left gigantic shell-heaps, the debris of antediluvian meals, to bear witness to their location, the more highly civilized Indonesian and primitive Malay inhabited villages that are revealed only by some accident like the great flood of 1926, which unearthed one at Tembeling in Pahang. Yet there is ample evidence that, before these neolithic people left the continent of Asia, they made pottery and built megaliths. They were hunters—not only of game but of human heads for the sake of their soul-substance. They were fishermen acquainted with traps of bamboo and wood, though not, apparently, with the cast-net or other nets of cord. They lived, as villagers still live, in houses built on piles and lashed with rattan, with bamboo flooring and walls. In their gardens they cultivated sugarcane, bananas, the gourd and the coconut. Their field-crops were millet (still a Sakai crop) and rice, both of which provided them with food and fermented drink. They had domesticated the pig and the buffalo and perhaps cattle. Their clothes were of bark. Their numerals went up to a thousand and they possessed some knowledge of the stars.



It must have been long before the Christian era that Malay names were given to many parts of Malaya like Kelantan, Muar and Tumasik (which Hindus changed to Singapore). The meaning of Naning, for example, is forgotten today, but we know from the Malay element in the Khasi of Assam that it means "Upriver". Possibly no generic name was adopted by the scattered tribes until Jambi or Melayu succeeded Sri Vijaya in the thirteenth century, after which they called themselves Malays.

When Jambi fell, Minangkabau dominated Sumatra. And when Malacca was founded with a population largely made up of Malay sea-gipsies, its commerce attracted many Malays from the opposite coast of Sumatra, more especially Hindu Minangkabaus, who sought the gold districts of Pahang and the valleys of what in the eighteenth century became Negri Sembilan. Bugis, too, from Celebes, in 1700 founded modern Selangor and in 1722 became Underkings of the Johore empire. Most of the Bugis immigrants, at any rate, were men of birth who intermarried with peninsular royalties and dominated their local Malay subjects. And to infer from the legends of the *Malay Annals* that most of the Malays of the peninsula crossed from Sumatra in mediaeval times is to ignore the evidence of pre-history and place-names. The Malays have at least as much right to be regarded as the aboriginal people of Malaya as the English have to be called the aborigines of England.

The Malay of today, a broad-headed individual with olive skin, fine eyes, a neat well-proportioned body, lank black hair and almost hairless chin, is the primitive Malay plus many foreign strains derived from marriage with Chinese from Chou times down to the advent of Islam, with Hindus of the Deccan and Bengal, with Muslim Indians, Siamese and Arabs. They have changed little since Magellan's brother-in-law, Duarte Barbosa, described them from his experience in the East between 1500 and 1517: "They are well-set-up men and go bare from the waist up but are clad in cotton garments below. They, the most distinguished among them, wear short coats which come half-way down their thighs, of silk cloth—in grain or brocade—and over this they wear girdles; at their waists they carry daggers in damascene-work which they call creeses.