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The Development of the British Empire in Malaya

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The mighty empire to which we belong is composed of a few great self-governing dominions and innumerable dependencies administered by officials directly responsible to the government at home. Not by any means the least important of the latter colonies, is that called the Straits Settlements and known to the world as British Malaya. Situated as it is at the south-eastern extremity of Asia, half-way between India and ~~Siam~~^{Siam}, a singular degree of importance is attached to it. On a small island at the southern end of the Malay Peninsula, lies that much discussed city of Singapore. This small portion of our gracious Majesty's demesne occupies a remarkable position as the centre of commerce and administration for the whole of the Malay Archipelago under British rule. British Malaya holds a monopoly of the rubber industry and has a tin output of more than half the total of the world's supply, for, on the island of Pulau Brani, in the vicinity, the largest tin-smelting works of our time stand as a memento of what past pioneers have done for Britain. Singapore is the great emporium of the Malay Archipelago, and has immense coaling wharves, docks and shipping facilities. Notwithstanding, the great importance lies mainly in its splendid situation and natural facilities for the formation of the greatest naval base of all times. After great controversy, British politicians have finally decided to form a base at Singapore, ~~the~~ Australia, New Zealand and Canada have volunteered assistance, and

people are looking forward ~~when~~ to the time when British power in the Pacific and the East will be definitely secured. Now that we have had an opportunity to realize the full significance of our Straits Settlements colony, we must endeavour to grasp its story.

Shortly after the discovery of America and of a sea-route to India, Portuguese seamen, instigated by their prince, Henry the Navigator, commenced trading with India and the Spice Islands. Soon their influence became felt throughout the Malay Archipelago and their centre at Malacca held world-renown. At Malacca ships from the West met ships from the East and cargoes were exchanged. The harshness of Portuguese rule, however, served to antagonise the natives, and the way was opened for the British and the Dutch.

Previous to the beginning of the seventeenth century, English explorers and traders entered the Portuguese sphere of influence. Indeed, Malaccan shipping was harassed by an English fleet at one period. About 1613, a trading post was established, by the British East India Company, at Patani on the Malay Peninsula; but in 1623, owing to the death of its president and consequent confusion, it was seized by the Dutch who had been growing steadily in power, and were destined to prove a serious menace to English commerce and colonisation. In 1619 a Dutch force seized Amboyna Island, an English post, and massacred its inhabitants. For this infamous deed, Cromwell, some thirty years later, exacted compensation to be paid to the descendants of those killed.

At this stage, it would, perhaps, be advisable to describe the Dutch system of government

Dutch officials encouraged marriage with native women in order to provide the ~~colony~~ colonies with a fixed population of European descent. By the use of slave labour and the application of the 'corvée' system to natives who were nominally free, they were able to lower the cost of production considerably, while the absence of competition enabled prices to be raised. Yet, although they had every advantage, they were not successful. The system as a whole became corrupt and the foolish financial methods of the Dutch East India Company, finally caused its downfall and ruin. Thus, until the abolition of the Dutch company, the door was opened for the English company to make great headway, if a good policy was sternly pursued.

The Dutch had stern resolutions to urge them onward, whereas the English had none. The former came to the Indies to avenge the injuries Spain had perpetrated upon their land, to wreck that nation's Eastern power (for Spain had assumed the control of Portuguese possessions), and to break its commercial monopoly; the latter came merely as traders and explorers.

The early rivalry between Dutch and English led to a Treaty of Defence, by which they agreed to co-operate and to maintain a joint fleet. The Treaty had little or no effect.

The foundations of our Eastern colonies were really laid when an obscure sea-captain, Francis Light, formed a lasting friendship with the Sultan of Kedah, so that on the failure of the British company's plan for establishing a base at Achin in Sumatra, he was able to bring about an agreement by which the Sultan ceded

Penang on the payment of 10,000 dollars, a sum which is still paid in perpetuity. This ~~was~~ was in 1786. A few years later we acquired Province Wellesley from the same friendly potentate, and in 1795, Malacca was taken from the Dutch. Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century, our Eastern colonies had become a reality.

About this period we entered upon a new and far more important phase of the story of Malaya. This new phase was wrapped in the personality and individual genius of Thomas Stamford Raffles. On the decision of the British Company to make Penang a Presidency ranking with Bombay and Madras, Raffles was sent out as ^{assistant} secretary to the governor. During the voyage he made a complete study of the Malayan grammar and soon after his arrival he was able to converse fluently in that tongue. As a result he became Malay interpreter, a position which entailed a heavy and unappreciated addition to his regular duties. By diligent work he rose to the position of secretary, but owing to a breakdown in health, Raffles was ordered to Malacca. This proved the turning-point in his splendid career.

During his convalescence he conferred with native authorities concerning the possible resources of the interior, and when the British Company decided to abandon Malacca, he disapproved of ~~their~~ ^{its} intentions. He then drew up a report, explaining the true situation and vehemently urging Malacca's retention. When Lord Minto received this welcome information, he ordered the evacuation to be suspended, and shortly afterwards the previous decision was reversed. Thus Raffles saved the alienation of Malacca from the British crown.

While Raffles was in India, during a vacation, he interviewed Lord Minto and advocated the conquest of Java; he had dreams of making Java the centre of a British Eastern Empire. Lord Minto was persuaded and undertook to command an expedition within a short time. Raffles was given an important post and on the capitulation of the Dutch forces in 1811 was appointed lieutenant-governor of the newly acquired territory.

Volumes could be written describing Raffles's governorship and reforms, but we must be satisfied with a brief account. He performed an entire reorganisation of the Dutch system of government. He abolished transit dues and reduced port dues to one-third; the Dutch system of slave labour was replaced by work performed by natives who could honestly call themselves free, while the 'corvée' system was modified considerably. Under him, there was no possibility of corrupt service, he engaged competent civil servants and all officials were fully qualified for their positions. As a result of his reforms, the total revenue was increased ten-fold and everyone was satisfied. He desired to rule "not only without fear but without reproach." Rajah Brooke of Sarawak said "I go to carry Sir Stamford Raffles's views in Java over the whole archipelago."

In 1816, Raffles went to England. On his return he was appointed governor in Sumatra. He performed his new duties ~~in~~ with even more conspicuous success and gratifying results than in Java. As before, he re-organized the administration discarding old Dutch methods. During his period of governorship he came into conflict with the Dutch, who did all in their power to

retard him. Thereupon Raffles determined to establish a base as security against their intrusions; so, in 1819, by an agreement with the Sultan of Johor, he purchased Singapore, then occupied by a few native fishermen. No more valuable acquisition could possibly have been made and he cannot be sufficiently praised for his great foresight and the splendid way in which he carried out his plans. Where, previously, had stood only the huts of a few fishermen, he founded a fine city which in future years, was to be of ~~such~~ immense value to the motherland.

During the following years, Singapore and the other Straits Settlements thrived under British rule; Malacca was restored to Holland in 1818 but in 1824, by another treaty, it was returned to England in exchange for ~~the~~ Benkulen in Sumatra and certain other minor settlements. This precluded the Dutch from interference in affairs of the Malay Peninsula and the British from similar action in Sumatra. Contrary to the views of Sir Stamford Raffles, Java had been restored to the Dutch, so that they were supreme in that portion of the Archipelago. Throughout his career Raffles cherished hopes of establishing a close relationship with Japan, whose people he described as intelligent, industrious and highly polished. When he died he had earned a vast reputation and if his work were judged rather by its promise than its actual fulfilment he "deserves to rank among the greatest of our Empire-builders."

Owing to the sudden rise of Singapore, Penang was reduced from its rank as a presidency, and its place was taken by Singapore, which was

made the seat of government in 1837.

~~On~~ Because of the silting up of its port, Malacca had steadily declined but when the territory in the interior behind it was opened up in 1833, it received a new impetus and its fall was averted.

The development of the resources of Malaya progressed steadily, rubber plantations were formed, and under good organization, became prosperous, the tin-deposits were worked and tropical fruits were exported. The prosperity of Malaya was so obvious that in 1867 it was formed into a crown colony under the name of the Straits Settlements. The King was to be represented by a governor aided by an executive council composed purely of official members and a legislative council composed of a majority of official and a minority of nominated members. Penang and Malacca were to be governed directly by resident councillors responsible to the governor, while each native state was to be administered by a resident, responsible, since the federation, to a resident-general. The governor was also to be high commissioner for all British possessions in the Archipelago.

Several treaties with Siam rectified the boundary of Province Wellesley and several native states were ceded to us. The Dindings and Perak were placed under the same officials.

We have a wonderful colony in Malaya, and it is our duty to develop its resources, to administer justice to its inhabitants and to make the very most of all our opportunities of establishing that empire in the Far-East which Sir Stamford Raffles visualized and did so much to further. Indeed, is not that the best way in which we can

show our appreciation of what he has done for us?
At the present-day Malacca is not of very great importance. It is famous for the relics which it contains of the first Christian Mission established by St Francis Xavier during Portuguese supremacy. Singapore of course is recognized as a wonderful naval base of the future. It virtually commands the mighty Pacific which will soon be the scene of the worlds naval activity and perhaps of a more advanced civilization. In Malaya and Singapore we have an invaluable friend and one on whom which we must thrust kindness and consideration, for, in the near future, it may control the destiny of the world.
