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XXXII

THE STRAITS SETTLEMENTS

1826-67

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# The Straits Settlements

1826-67

Indian Presidency to Crown Colony

*by*  
C. M. TURNBULL

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## PREFACE

THIS book deals with the period from 1826, when the Straits Settlements were united to form the fourth presidency of India, to 1867, when they were separated from the Indian administration to become a crown colony. While my interest in these years first began with a study of the constitutional movement for transfer, which was submitted to the University of London as a Ph.D. thesis, the present work is not only a study of British administration in the Straits Settlements. It aims rather to trace the development of Straits society as a whole, viewed not from London nor from Calcutta, but from the settlements themselves, and particularly from the capital in Singapore.

Inevitably the Straits-based European minority play a role in this story out of proportion to their numbers. In part this is because British officials held all but the most subordinate government posts, and the movements for constitutional reform and control over economic policy were almost exclusively the domain of private European residents, while the Asian population, and particularly the Chinese, maintained its own separate organization of society. In part it is because the absence of vernacular newspapers in this period and the dearth of documentary material in local languages has forced Asian scholars to rely heavily on western sources. While anthropological, sociological and historical studies of Asian communities in neighbouring areas and at later periods reflect light on Asian society in the Straits Settlements and will probably provide greater indirect illumination in future, unless hitherto unsuspected sources of information in the vernacular come to light, it appears that historians will be compelled to continue to view the Asian majority at that time through the eyes of western contemporaries.

I am grateful to Professor C. D. Cowan for his kindness, patience and practical help in seeing this book through the various stages of publication. I owe much to the late Carl

Gibson-Hill, Curator of the then Raffles Museum, Singapore, and my thanks also go to Dr John Bastin, Dr Eunice Thio and Dr R. Suntharalingam who read my draft manuscript in part or in whole and have provided very valuable comments. To Major Orfeur Cavenagh of Victoria, British Columbia, I am indebted for allowing me to see his grandfather's diaries, and to Colonel L. Firbank for generously allowing me to make use of maps from his private collection. I am appreciative of the help and facilities provided by the Singapore National Library, the Libraries of the Universities of Singapore and Malaya, the Geography Department of the University of Singapore, the National Archives of India in New Delhi, the Keeper of the Records of West Bengal in Calcutta, the Madras Record Office, the British Museum and the Public Record Office, and especially grateful for the cheerful forbearance of Mr S. C. Sutton and the India Office Library staff in patiently providing numerous tomes giving only occasional references to the Straits Settlements. No more striking proof can be seen of the relative unimportance of the Straits to India than the physical evidence of fragmentary Straits records buried in the mass of paper accumulated by the East India Company. Special thanks are due to my husband, Leonard Rayner, for his continued encouragement and constructive criticism.

University of Singapore  
April 1971

C. M. TURNBULL

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CO	Colonial Office
COD	Colonial Office Despatches
DIB	<i>Dictionary of Indian Biography</i>
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
GD	Governor's Despatches
IO	India Office
JIA	<i>Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia</i>
JMBRAS	<i>Journal of the Malayan Branch, Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JRAS	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSBRAS	<i>Journal of the Straits Branch, Royal Asiatic Society</i>
JSEAH	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian History</i>
JSEAS	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</i>
JSSS	<i>Journal of the South Seas Society</i>
NAI	National Archives of India
PG	<i>Penang Gazette</i>
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRO	Public Record Office
SFP	<i>Singapore Free Press</i>
SSR	Straits Settlements Records
ST	<i>Straits Times</i>
WO	War Office

## CURRENCY

Rupees 220 = \$100 = £22



The Malay Peninsula in the Nineteenth Century

## Introduction

IN 1826 Singapore, Malacca and Penang were combined to form the Straits Settlements, the fourth presidency of India, and remained an Indian dependency for the next forty-one years. They were the East India Company's most incongruous offspring. 'Of all the expedients that can well be contrived to stunt the natural growth of a new colony, that of an exclusive company is undoubtedly the most effectual', wrote Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, ten years before the Company acquired its first foothold on the Malay peninsula: 'Such exclusive companies are nuisances in every respect; always more or less inconvenient to the countries in which they are established, and destructive to those which have the misfortune to fall under their government.' Calcutta's rule did not seriously stunt the natural growth of the Straits Settlements, but the association was one of growing friction and anomaly. By the mid-nineteenth century the Straits Settlements offered striking justification of the theories of free trade, light taxation and *laissez-faire* government. Their development stood in strong contrast to the financial and political tribulations of the parent Company, with its increasingly unfashionable policy of commercial monopoly, restricted immigration and closed bureaucracy.

The East India Company obtained possession of the island of Penang in 1786 as a base to protect the Company's rapidly expanding China trade and a centre for the collection of Straits produce from the Malay peninsula and the eastern archipelago for shipment to China. Elevated to the status of presidency in 1805, Penang proved an expensive disappointment to the Company, and after the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 was subjected to a series of measures of retrenchment and economy.

While the Company grumbled, Penang's private traders

prospered. The dislocation of Dutch trade in the east during the French wars and the East India Company's temporary occupation of Java and other Dutch territories opened the rich markets of the eastern archipelago and the Malay peninsula to private trade. The British government intended to strengthen the Netherlands in Europe by returning most of her colonies after the war. The Company, having no desire to extend its permanent commitments in southeast Asia, welcomed the opportunity to rid itself of the expensive burden of administering the Dutch territories. But private British merchants and the Company's senior officials on the spot saw the revival of Dutch military and political control as a threat to British trade. In 1818, when the Dutch were about to resume control in Malacca, the Governor of Penang sent officials to Perak, Selangor, Riau and Siak to negotiate treaties, which sought to guarantee freedom for British trade and preclude the revival of former restrictive treaties with the Dutch.

The government of India approved these safeguards but repudiated the more aggressive measures taken in 1818 by Sir Stamford Raffles, lieutenant Governor of the East India Company's west Sumatran station at Bencoolen and formerly lieutenant Governor of Java, in an attempt to establish British authority in south Sumatra and to prevent the Dutch recovering Padang and Palembang. This induced Raffles to visit Calcutta himself later that year, when he succeeded in convincing the Governor General of the need to safeguard the route to China, and obtained permission to make arrangements to guard the northern and southern ends of the Malacca Straits, provided he did not bring the Company into conflict with the Dutch authorities. When Raffles found the Dutch had forestalled him in Riau, he set up a factory on Singapore island in January 1819 (under control from Bencoolen) and made a treaty with the sultan of Acheh in north Sumatra two months later.

Dutch protests at the founding of the British station at Singapore became one item in protracted Anglo-Dutch negotiations for a general territorial and commercial settlement in the East, which culminated in the Treaty of London of March 1824, by which Britain and the Netherlands recognized each other's separate sphere of influence. The British transferred Bencoolen



to the Dutch and undertook not to interfere in islands outside a limit ten miles south of Singapore, while the Netherlands transferred Malacca to Britain, recognized the legality of the latter's occupation of Singapore and agreed not to interfere in the Malay peninsula.

As a matter of administrative convenience, in 1826 Singapore and Malacca became part of the presidency of Penang, which remained the headquarters of government until 1832 and the centre of judicial administration until 1856.

The Straits Settlements formed a scattered unit, which was difficult to administer efficiently. On the mainland opposite Penang island was Province Wellesley, a strip of land some thirty miles long by about three miles wide, which was acquired by the Company from the sultan of Kedah in 1800. Two hundred and sixty miles to the south was Malacca, comprising the town and a hinterland about forty miles long and on average twenty-five miles wide. Singapore island lay a further hundred and twenty miles to the south, at the tip of the Malay peninsula. The only communication between the settlements was by sea, and up to 1861 the Straits government possessed only two antiquated sailing gunboats and one steamer, which was largely employed in transporting the Governor, Recorders and senior officials between the three stations. Communications with the East India Company's Calcutta headquarters were also poor, and until 1864 a monthly steamer service between Calcutta and the Straits Settlements remained the only link with the seat of government.<sup>1</sup>

Division of interest between the East India Company and its eastern dependencies was even more formidable than the geographical and physical problems of administration. The sole value of the Straits Settlements to the East India Company was to protect and stimulate the China trade. When the Company lost its monopoly of this trade in 1833 Calcutta was left with an unrewarding and expensive burden. She could not abandon the Straits Settlements but constantly begrudged the drain they made upon India's financial resources and upon the time and attention of senior officials over the next thirty years. In

<sup>1</sup> SSR, S 32, Items 105, 204; SSR, R 45, pp. 246-7.

Calcutta's eyes, the chief duties facing the Governor of the Straits Settlements were to balance his budget and to insulate the settlements from complications in the hinterland. These considerations dominated the government of India's attitude to its Malayan dependency throughout the remaining period of Indian rule, but the policy was doomed to fail. As the settlements prospered the European merchants demanded more expensive and sophisticated administration, an efficient judicial system, defence and security for their property and trade, which the government could not provide since it lacked the means to raise sufficient revenue from the Straits Settlements. Land and agriculture failed to yield a healthy revenue, and the Company was committed to the total freedom from taxation on trade, which Raffles pledged for Singapore in 1823, and which was extended to the united Straits Settlements on their formation three years later. Meanwhile the activities of ambitious pioneers, mainly Chinese immigrants, lured by the wealth of the interior, made it impossible for the Straits government to cut the settlements off from the affairs of the Malay states. Calcutta maintained its policy of rigid non-intervention to the end, but in practice every would-be final settlement the government of India authorized merely provided the basis for further involvement.

The formative years under Indian rule determined the nature of the Straits Settlements, affected their transition to the direct rule of the British crown and established many of the permanent characteristics of the society which survived throughout the British regime. The Company's policy of simple, inexpensive administration in the Straits Settlements created a tradition of light central government. Unlike continental India, with its settled indigenous population and long historical traditions, Singapore and Penang were almost uninhabited islands when they came under the East India Company, and they relied upon immigrants for settlement, labour and capital. Unrestricted immigration attracted a large fluctuating Asian population, mostly Chinese who brought with them a traditional aloofness from the machinery of government. The Straits Settlements administration, lacking effective means to control them or the desire to interfere in their social customs, found it difficult

to bring them within the pale of its political and judicial system.

The principle of free trade and light taxation enabled the European merchants to prosper, but despite their growing economic power they were precluded by the nature of the East India Company's administration from any active role in politics. They grew increasingly restive at being excluded from political power, until in 1867 they succeeded in persuading the British government to transfer the Straits Settlements to the direct rule of the crown. After the long years of unrestricted and vocal opposition without responsibility, they then found themselves disappointed with the limited share in political power which a British colonial constitution in practice allowed them.



## CHAPTER I

### An Immigrant Society

WHEN the East India Company acquired the various Straits Settlements only Malacca had a settled population. Penang and Singapore were almost uninhabited islands, while Province Wellesley was a sparsely peopled wilderness. For labour, capital and development the Straits Settlements had to rely on immigrants, who came from the Malay states and the eastern archipelago, from China, India, the Middle East and Europe. Capital was supplied mainly by Europeans, Arabs, Jews and Parsees, labour chiefly by Indians and Chinese, while most of the agricultural and mining operations in the Straits Settlements and the interior which required capital were organized by Chinese entrepreneurs, often with financial backing from European merchants.

Population figures during the Indian administration can only be taken as a rough guide, since a large part of the population was floating and transitory, and the Straits authorities lacked the men and money to conduct an accurate census. In the towns most of the figures were supplied by the already over-worked police, while in the country districts of Penang, Malacca and Province Wellesley they were the responsibility of the *penghulus* or headmen. In the rural districts of Singapore, where the population was scattered and there were no *penghulus*, the figures were largely guess-work.<sup>1</sup>

The three settlements were very different in character. Penang, the oldest of the East India Company's possessions in Malaya, had no inhabitants when the Company acquired it in 1786. Most of the early settlers who came to Penang were of Malay stock from the mainland and Sumatra, but there were also large numbers of Indians. By the 1790s Indians were

<sup>1</sup> SSR, S 23, Items 75, 145; SSR, R 30, pp. 141-4.

coming into Penang at the rate of 1,300 to 2,000 a year.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1830s more than 16,000 out of Penang's population of 40,000 were Malays. The Indians were the second largest community, over 11,000 strong, and there were nearly 9,000 Chinese. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century Penang continued to be predominantly an Indo-Malay settlement. As late as 1864 more Indians than Chinese disembarked at Penang,<sup>3</sup> and Indians played a more important role in Penang than in the other Straits Settlements.

Several centuries before the arrival of the British, Indian merchants had dominated court and commercial life in the Malay ports, and men of mixed Malay, Indian and Arab blood were still very powerful in the Kedah court in the late eighteenth century. A number came to Penang from Kedah, Aceh and other neighbouring ports. But the influence of Indian financiers and intellectuals was already on the wane in Malaya before the advent of the British, and during the nineteenth century Indian immigrants were almost exclusively labourers and petty traders, not professional men or merchants of standing. A minority of Indian immigrants came from north India, mainly Bengalis, Parsees and Gujaratis, and north Indians were found predominantly in the commercial field, but the vast majority of Indians, Muslims and Hindus, came from southern India. Europeans at that time referred to all south Indians as Klings and north Indians as Bengalis. Nearly all Indian labourers and most petty traders came from south India, as did the more prosperous *chettiar* Hindus. Most Penang *chettians* came as employees of parent firms in Madras, at first concentrated in the textile trade, but in the mid-nineteenth century they extended their operations, and many of them became wealthy as independent businessmen and money-lenders.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1850s the Chinese were the largest single community in Penang, numbering 24,000 in 1858 out of a total population of nearly 58,000, compared with 12,000 Indians and over

<sup>2</sup> K. S. Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya: Immigration and Settlement, 1786-1957* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> SSR, R 44, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 228; Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, pp. 118-19.

20,000 Malays.<sup>5</sup> Despite the prohibition which the Chinese imperial authorities put on emigration before 1860, the Chinese were more ready to emigrate than Indians. They were not bound to their native land by caste or family system, there was no organized emigration on better terms to other parts of the world, and the Straits Settlements were the most attractive areas for the Chinese.

Francis Light, the founder of Penang, encouraged the immigration of Chinese, whom he held to be 'the only people of the East from whom a revenue may be raised without expense and extraordinary efforts of government'.<sup>6</sup> At the time of the British occupation of Penang there was a thriving Chinese community in Kedah, who supplied the early leaders of the Chinese in Penang. The first headman or Kapitan China appointed by Light was Koh Lay Huan, a wealthy and educated man, who had earlier rebelled against the Manchus and fled to Kedah.<sup>7</sup> Koh Lay Huan came to Penang soon after Light's arrival and settled there as a merchant, planter and tax farmer, although he continued to maintain close contact with Kedah, keeping one family in Kedah and another in Penang, where he died, a very wealthy man, in 1826.<sup>8</sup> His eldest son by his Penang wife, Koh Kok Chye, generally known as Kokchai, was on very friendly terms with European officials and merchants, including Raffles, whom he accompanied to Singapore in 1819, and up to the time of his death in 1849 Kokchai carried more influence than any other of his countrymen with the Penang authorities.

The richest Penang merchant in the later years of Indian rule was Koh Seang Tat, great-grandson of Koh Lay Huan, who was educated at the Penang Free School, and became a revenue farmer and first Chinese justice of the peace in Penang.<sup>9</sup> The other most influential Chinese family in Penang at that time were the Hokkien Khoos, who were related to the Kohs by marriage.

In the first half of the century the Penang Chinese were more

<sup>5</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 136.

<sup>6</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Penang', *JIA*, iv (1850), 641.

<sup>7</sup> Wong Choon San, *A Gallery of Chinese Kapitans* (Singapore, 1964), p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 14.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

settled than their counterparts in Singapore, for despite steady immigration Chinese did not begin to pour into Penang in unmanageable numbers until the rapid development of tin mining began in Larut in the 1850s. There was some social contact between the prosperous Chinese minority and Europeans in Penang. It was customary for the merchants to entertain their European acquaintances at Chinese New Year.<sup>10</sup> Koh Seang Tat often welcomed Europeans in his ornate and luxurious house,<sup>11</sup> where the duke of Edinburgh stayed during his visit to Penang in 1869. The Chinese merchants found a few staunch supporters among the western community. James Richardson Logan,<sup>12</sup> lawyer and newspaper editor, officially appointed their legal adviser by the Chinese merchants in 1857, safeguarded their rights and privileges zealously. 'Treat the mixed Penang Chinese as a class with confidence, consideration and firmness', he urged, 'and there is no race more easily governed.'<sup>13</sup> Two French merchants, Jerome Boudville and Philip Mathieu, often acted as their spokesmen and intermediaries with government officials, and interpreted for the Chinese at public meetings.<sup>14</sup>

Such contacts were superficial, and the Chinese community in Penang held itself aloof from all the others, in contrast to Indian immigrants, particularly Muslims, who intermarried with the Malay population and adopted their customs in their ceremonies and celebrations.<sup>15</sup> In former days long-settled Chinese families in Kedah and Penang had intermarried with Malays, but with increased immigration from China from the middle of the nineteenth century, this mixed Chinese-Malay or

<sup>10</sup> J. D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (Singapore, 1879, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), pp. 43-4.

<sup>11</sup> *PG*, 20 December 1862 in *SFP*, 1 January 1863; *Penang Argus*, 1 January in *SFP*, 29 January 1863.

<sup>12</sup> JAMES RICHARDSON LOGAN (1819-69). Born in Scotland; studied law in Edinburgh; indigo planting in Bengal about 1839 and shortly afterwards moved to Penang as a planter; admitted to the Penang bar as a law agent and from 1843 to 1853 worked in partnership with his brother, Abraham, in Singapore; in 1853 returned to Penang, where he remained till his death. J. T. Thomson, 'A Sketch of the Career of the late James Richardson Logan of Penang and Singapore', *JSSRAS*, vii (1881), 75-81; *DIB*, p. 253.

<sup>13</sup> *PG*, 18 July 1857.

<sup>14</sup> *PG*, 4 November in *SFP*, 1 December 1854.

<sup>15</sup> J. D. Vaughan, 'Notes on the Chinese of Penang', *JIA*, viii (1854), 1.



Baba stock tried to marry pure-blooded Chinese.<sup>16</sup> From the middle of the century the character of Chinese society in Penang changed rapidly with the influx of labourers heading for the Perak mines.

The European population of Penang was very small and in 1864 numbered only 316.<sup>17</sup> In continental India the Company subjected European immigration to tight restrictions. Private Europeans had to obtain a residence licence and were forbidden to buy land. The same licensing system applied in theory to European immigrants in the Straits Settlements, but in practice it was not enforced. In 1797, when Calcutta first enquired by what authority the European inhabitants had settled in Penang, few of them could produce licences, but no steps were taken to evict them.<sup>18</sup> In 1818 the Directors said that as the European settlers were respectable people they could stay. In their concern to develop Penang the East India Company permitted Europeans to acquire large holdings of land, and in 1823 the Recorder ruled that the possession of land entitled them legally to remain in Penang.<sup>19</sup>

While Penang was the first of the East India Company's territories to produce an independent, land-owning European community, the later exploitation of the island's resources was so disappointing that it deterred extensive western immigration and capitalist development. By 1840 Penang was an economic backwater and her European population, which in the early years appeared to be the nucleus of a large and potentially powerful force of permanent residents, was small and far less politically active than its counterpart in Singapore.

While the government's revenue was unsatisfactory, Penang island and Georgetown still showed every sign of prosperity in 1826 when the Straits Settlements were formed. The original wooden shanty town had burned down and been replaced with

<sup>16</sup> M. L. Wynne, *Triad and Tabut* (Singapore, 1941), p. 224.

<sup>17</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 136.

<sup>18</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Sequel to Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1865), pp. 22-31.

<sup>19</sup> Lee Chye Hooi, 'The Penang Land Problem, 1786-1841', B.A. academic exercise, University of Malaya (Singapore), 1957, p. 49.

buildings constructed of durable materials. Good roads led into the country districts, and many of the hills were crowned with elegant country houses, surrounded by thriving nutmeg plantations. In the midst of his spice plantation and his deer park, the Governor lived in a hilltop paradise which rivalled the country residence of the Governor General of India himself. While the climate was more oppressive than in Singapore or Malacca, the scenery was delightful, and the island was a favourite health resort for India. There was still plenty of good timber on the island and an abundance of land. Coconuts and betel-nuts were important products, with some pepper, gambier and coarse sugar. But the main field of agriculture was in nutmegs and cloves.

Much of the beauty of the island was destroyed by indiscriminate felling of forests by charcoal burners and the consequent erosion of the hills. Many hills were already bare in 1838,<sup>20</sup> and government prohibitions on felling without licence remained dead letters. By the time effective restrictions were enforced in the 1860s much of Penang's hill country had been ravaged,<sup>21</sup> while the spread of blight among her nutmeg plantations in the 1850s brought havoc to the rural areas round the town. Nevertheless fine estate houses still crowned the hills behind the town and were often set in orchards.

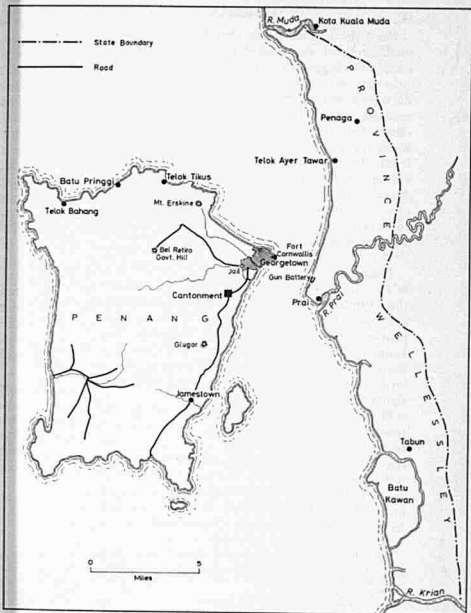
In Georgetown itself the steady growth of trade brought prosperity to the town and in the 1860s many fine houses were put up.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Singapore, Georgetown grew in a haphazard fashion: there was no segregation of wealthy and poor, and small attap huts were to be found close by stylish mansions. Most of the merchants' houses, European and Chinese, were close to the town centre, and in the last years of Indian rule the entire town and suburbs of Georgetown covered no more than a square mile.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1864), p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> PG, 3 January in SFP, 15 January 1846; SFP, 3 January 1851; J. R. Logan, 'The Probable Effects on the Climate of Penang of the Continued Destruction of its Hill Jungles', *JIA*, ii (1848), 534-6; SFP, 11 January 1855; SSR, W 34, Item 274; SSR, DD 34, Item 142; SSR, U 46, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> SSR, DD 34, Item 87.

<sup>23</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), p. 321.



Penang and Province Wellesley in 1867

Based on maps by Lt. T. Woore in 1832 and J. B. Tassin in 1836

Until the middle of the century Georgetown was an evil-smelling town, surrounded by a drainage ditch which was invariably clogged by filth.<sup>24</sup> After reforms introduced in 1857 gave more powers to municipal authorities, the town committee did a great deal to improve public health, reclaiming mangrove swamps, constructing a reservoir and public water supply, cleaning streets and drains, and improving roads,<sup>25</sup> but limited funds precluded the large-scale schemes which would have freed Georgetown from flood and drained the unhealthy swamps.<sup>26</sup> The environs remained filthy, and in 1860 the *Penang Gazette* described the village of Ayer Hitam, on the outskirts of Georgetown, with its 'ditches choked up with rubbish saturated with an indescribable black fluid . . . this laboratory of stench and malaria'.<sup>27</sup>

Province Wellesley, which was separated from the territory of Kedah in the north by the Muda river and from Perak in the south by the Krian river, was a sparsely inhabited territory, supporting barely 6,000 people in 1820. All of these were Malay peasants and fishermen, with the exception of a number of Chinese and Indian shopkeepers and petty traders, and a community of Teochew Chinese sugar planters, who had probably settled at Batu Kawan in the last years of the eighteenth century, shortly before the British occupation.

In 1821 the Siamese invaded Kedah, and the revolts and troubles which ensued drove many refugees to flee to British territory in the twenty years that followed. By 1835-6 the population figures of Province Wellesley had swelled to 47,000, predominantly Malays but including about 2,000 Chinese and 1,000 Indians.<sup>28</sup> By 1850 the population numbered 61,000,<sup>29</sup> and eight years later it stood at more than 67,000. Of these 54,000 were Malays, 8,000 Chinese and just over 5,000 In-

<sup>24</sup> P. J. Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula* (Madras, 1834, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), p. 373; *SFP*, 4 January 1849.

<sup>25</sup> SSR, S 24, Item 119; SSR, R 31, p. 171; SSR, S 25, Item 153.

<sup>26</sup> SSR, W 29, Item 6.

<sup>27</sup> *PG*, 10 March in *SFP*, 22 March 1860.

<sup>28</sup> T. J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca* (London, 1839, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), i, 105.

<sup>29</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1851.

dians.<sup>30</sup> The death rate, particularly among the Malay peasants, was higher than in any of the other settlements, and the Malay population kept its level only by constant immigration from nearby states.<sup>31</sup>

In Penang and Province Wellesley the majority of Malays were country dwellers, and the heaviest concentration of Malay population was in the northern part of Province Wellesley, close to the Kedah border. In 1857 two-thirds of them were farmers,<sup>32</sup> while most of the others were fishermen. Some village chiefs grew rich, and from the middle of the century a few wealthy Malays and Malay Eurasians began to buy nutmeg plantations in Penang.<sup>33</sup> Few went into business, and in 1864 there were no prominent Malay merchants in any of the three settlements.<sup>34</sup> Nearly all the fishermen in the northern settlement were Malays, whereas the fishmongers were invariably Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

The refugees opened up parts of the northern districts of Province Wellesley for peasant farming, but in 1840 the territory was still largely undrained marsh and jungle, more hospitable to tigers than settlers. More rapid development came with the opening up of extensive European and Chinese sugar plantations and mills in southern Province Wellesley from the 1840s and the influx of Chinese and Indian labourers to work the plantations. By the 1860s Province Wellesley was developing quickly and the Straits authorities embarked on an ambitious programme of road building and drainage works. At the end of the Indian regime Province Wellesley was the most prosperous agricultural territory in the Straits Settlements, a land of rice fields and sugar plantations, a rural area with no towns and the largest centres mere villages.

Malacca was the largest and most populous of the Straits Settlements in 1826, and although the Company acquired the settlement at the end of a thirty-year period of neglect under caretaker governments, Governor Fullerton had great hopes

<sup>30</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 136.

<sup>31</sup> J. D. Vaughan, 'Notes on the Malays at Penang and Province Wellesley', *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857), 160-1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> Vaughan, *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857), 131.

for its future. Its ancient traditions, the magic of its name in the Malay world, its healthy climate and fertile soil, its 'indigenous and attached population', its geographical and strategic position midway in the Straits Settlements, all these to Fullerton made Malacca the ideal capital for the Straits Settlements.<sup>36</sup> Fullerton's dreams for Malacca were doomed to disappointment, for by 1826 her trading pre-eminence was lost to Singapore, and her agriculture failed to blossom under the Indian regime.

In 1826 the settlement of Malacca had 31,000 inhabitants, two-thirds of them Malays. The rural areas were peopled almost exclusively by Malays but Malacca town was more cosmopolitan. Of its population of 12,000, the Chinese, numbering 4,000 to 5,000, were the largest single community. In addition there were more than 3,000 Malays and about 2,000 southern Indians.<sup>37</sup> Of the Eurasian community, the descendants of the Portuguese, who had ruled Malacca for more than a century, were a depressed class, nearly all of them poor fishermen, but there were many prosperous Dutch Eurasian merchants and landowners. There were few Europeans, and the only British residents who came to Malacca during the East India Company's administration were a handful of officials, army officers and missionaries.

Malacca town was divided by the river into two parts: the business section of the town on the flat west bank, where most of the Asian population lived; and the hilly east bank, with its relics of Dutch and Portuguese churches and public buildings, which was the official quarter, housing government offices and the European population. A picturesque town, Malacca by 1826 was living on the memory of past glories. Her commercial prosperity was gone. Sandbanks blocked the estuaries of the rivers to all except the smallest boats, and at Malacca itself big vessels had to anchor two miles out. She exported cattle to Singapore and rattans to Penang, but the principal exports were tin, brought down-river or overland from the Malay states of the interior, and gold dust brought from Mount Ophir, Pahang and from Siak in Sumatra. Malacca produced an

<sup>36</sup> E. A. Blundell, 'Notices of the History and Present Condition of Malacca', *JIA*, ii (1848), 750-1.

<sup>37</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, pp. 366-7.

abundance of timber, fruit and fish, but despite her fertility and her climate, which were superior to Penang or Singapore, she had never been a great agricultural centre. A visitor to the Straits in January 1822 contrasted the 'almost deserted' Dutch Malacca with the vitality of Singapore.<sup>38</sup> Malacca town was a backwater and remained so under British rule, 'the Brighton of the Chinese',<sup>39</sup> the place where most of the prominent Chinese of early Singapore had their roots, where they returned on holiday and sometimes to retire, bringing wealth and elegance to the town's main streets, but making no attempt until the 1860s to plough back their profits into country estates or plantations.<sup>40</sup>

The population of Malacca territory continued to be predominantly Malay, and in 1860 more than three-quarters of the population of over 68,000 were Malay.<sup>41</sup> The bulk of them were peasant farmers and there were no chiefs or Malay merchants who carried weight with the Straits authorities. The failure to develop plantation agriculture prevented the influx of Indian immigrants characteristic of Penang and Province Wellesley, while the influence of south Indian merchants, which was so strong at the Malacca court in bygone centuries, had faded away, although the best known individual Indo-Malay in the first half of the nineteenth century, Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, known as Munshi Abdullah, was born in Malacca in 1797. He became clerk to Raffles and tutor to many prominent British merchants and officials, including Governor Butterworth.<sup>42</sup> In the absence of a European population, Malacca society and its economy were dominated by the Chinese Hokkien merchants of Malacca town and by prominent

<sup>38</sup> J. H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent Countries* (Singapore, 1837, reprinted London, 1968), i, 224-9.

<sup>39</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> J. Balestier, 'View of the State of Agriculture in the British Possessions in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, ii (1848), 143; T. Braddell, 'Notes on a Trip to the Interior from Malacca', *JIA*, vii (1853), 74.

<sup>41</sup> *SFP*, 31 January 1861.

<sup>42</sup> ABDULLAH BIN ABDUL KADIR (1797-1854). Of Arab, Tamil and Malay descent, author of several works, the most notable of which was his autobiography, *The Hikayat Abdullah* (Singapore, 1849); translation and commentary by A. H. Hill, *JMBRAS*, xxviii, no. 3 (1955), reprinted as *The Hikayat Abdullah*, Kuala Lumpur, 1970. J. T. Thomson's *Some Glimpses* has a concluding chapter on Munshi Abdullah.

Dutch Eurasian families. Several of these migrated to Singapore and became eminent, particularly in the legal profession, but those who remained in Malacca stood aloof from the British administration, suspicious, unco-operative and obstructive.

Some of the Chinese families had lived in Malacca for centuries, intermarrying with the Malay population to form a large Baba community, retaining many Chinese customs but adopting some features of Malay dress and speaking a Malay patois. Many Baba Chinese went from Malacca to seek their fortune in the new British settlement of Singapore, where they had an advantage over immigrants from China in that they were familiar with ways of doing business in a European settlement and could generally speak Malay and sometimes English. They kept their family connections with Malacca, and the most successful crowned commercial achievement in Singapore by becoming *Teng-chu* of the Hokkien temple in Malacca, which gave them authority over the Baba community. By the 1830s Chinese merchants were taking over former Dutch houses in the fashionable streets of Malacca.<sup>43</sup>

Most of the Chinese in Malacca when the British took possession were Hokkiens, from the Fukien province of southern China, but from the mid-1840s a flood of Chinese labourers arrived, mainly Hakkas from Kwangtung province, who were attracted by the discovery of rich veins of tin at Kassang about sixteen miles inland from Malacca town. At the beginning of 1848 there were two thousand miners at Kassang,<sup>44</sup> and their numbers doubled in the next two years.<sup>45</sup> By the early 1850s 2,500 to 3,000 Chinese youths were landing in Malacca during the junk season in March and April every year.<sup>46</sup>

Malacca also had a flourishing gold trade. In 1848 there were about 250 Chinese miners working gold at the foot of Mount Ophir,<sup>47</sup> and five years later the discovery of an apparently rich vein of gold attracted some European prospectors. Edmund Blundell, then acting Governor of the Straits Settlements, was worried that Malacca might become a 'buccaneering re-

<sup>43</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, p. 367.

<sup>44</sup> Blundell, *JIA*, ii (1848), 747-8.

<sup>45</sup> H. Crookewit, 'The Tin Mines of Malacca', *JIA*, viii (1854), 112-23.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>47</sup> J. B. Westerhout, 'Notes on Malacca', *JIA*, ii (1848), 171.



public',<sup>48</sup> but malaria averted the social evils and problems of a gold rush. A visitor to the mines in 1853 found only three European miners, all prostrate with fever and too sick to work.<sup>49</sup> Others who followed succumbed to the same fate.<sup>50</sup>

Sickness was not the only hazard, and in the border areas both Chinese and Malay enterprise was threatened with extinction by attacks from marauders and the exactions of local chiefs. The gold mines at Geminchi, about forty miles inland from Malacca town, which had employed about 200 people at the beginning of the century, became almost deserted by the 1840s because of molestation by petty chiefs.<sup>51</sup> It was difficult to induce porters from Malacca territory to cross into neighbouring states, and the normally intrepid missionary Father Favre described the inhabitants of the little state of Johole in 1849 as 'the most savage Malays I have ever seen' and thought the country unsafe for European travellers.<sup>52</sup> In 1850 marauders from Johole, Rembau and Sungei Ujong, and militant Rawas, adventurers of Sumatran origin who were a constant threat to peace in the Malay peninsula in the mid-nineteenth century, attacked the Chinese miners at Kassang and murdered many of them.<sup>53</sup> In 1852 the Malacca authorities established a police force at Kassang which brought general peace and order to the area, but by 1857 the miners were beginning to move to the richer mines in the neighbouring Malay states, and by 1862 the Kassang mines were almost deserted.

Throughout the Indian regime officials were convinced that the key to Malacca's future prosperity lay in agriculture, but the problem of land tenure was not satisfactorily settled during this period, and there was no influx of European capital to develop plantations. Malay peasant farming flourished with the spread of peace and order,<sup>54</sup> and during the 1860s Chinese tapioca planters, mostly Hainanese labourers, moved into

<sup>48</sup> Blundell to India, 4 March 1853, SSR, R 24.

<sup>49</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, vii (1853), 83.

<sup>50</sup> *SFP*, 13 January 1854.

<sup>51</sup> 'Trip to Mount Ophir', *JIA*, vi (1852), 638, reprinted from *SFP*, 27 January 1840; Westerhout, *JIA*, ii (1848), 171.

<sup>52</sup> P. Favre, 'A Journey in the Menangkabau States of the Malay Peninsula', *JIA*, iii (1849), 153.

<sup>53</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1851; Crookewit, *JIA*, viii (1854), 113.

<sup>54</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Five Days in Naning', *JIA*, iii (1849), 31.

Malacca. The Chinese population of the settlement doubled between 1860 and 1881, by which time there were probably 10,000 Chinese tapioca planters in the interior,<sup>55</sup> but they did not come into conflict or even into contact with the Malay population, since they kept to the undeveloped lands between the valleys already farmed by Malay peasants.

Until the last years of Indian rule few Europeans ventured beyond the town area of Malacca, and in 1848 Edmund Blundell, then Resident Councillor, remarked that 'Malacca to this day remains nearly as much unknown as the interior of an African settlement'.<sup>56</sup> During the 1850s a few adventurous individuals visited the Kassang mines or organized expeditions to climb Mount Ophir,<sup>57</sup> but Malacca was at that time still largely unsurveyed, and the maps in the government offices were all based on old Dutch charts.<sup>58</sup>

The spectacle of decay in the midst of potential prosperity caught the imagination of several of Malacca's best administrators, especially that of Edmund Blundell, who, as Resident Councillor from 1847 to 1849, worked with great energy and purpose to restore Malacca to affluence, to drain swamps and dig channels, but there was insufficient revenue to finance the large-scale drainage schemes needed, and throughout the Indian regime large areas of Malacca remained waterlogged and liable to extensive flooding, which caused widespread damage and distress.<sup>59</sup> In the 1860s Governor Cavenagh opened up hitherto inaccessible areas of the interior of Malacca, extending the two main roads running north and south from the town to the frontiers, and opening up bridle paths through the jungles.<sup>60</sup>

Despite these improvements Malacca did not thrive, although the town was the most peaceful in the Straits Settlements. In 1853 Thomas Braddell, then police magistrate of

<sup>55</sup> J. C. Jackson, *Planters and Speculators: Chinese and European Agricultural Enterprise in Malaya, 1786-1921* (Kuala Lumpur, 1968), pp. 55, 74-8.

<sup>56</sup> Blundell, *JIA*, ii (1848), 746.

<sup>57</sup> Crookewit, *JIA*, viii (1854), 112-33; T. Braddell, *JIA*, vii (1853), 73-104; T. Oxley, 'A Trip to the Moar', *JIA*, iv (1850), 348-58.

<sup>58</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notes on Malacca', *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 43.

<sup>59</sup> Cavenagh to India, 15 March 1860, SSR, R 36, pp. 176-8.

<sup>60</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 292-3; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1863-4*.

Malacca, commented, 'The general characteristic of the Malacca territory is the want of life and bustle.'<sup>61</sup> Mining, agriculture and commerce continued to languish in the final years of Indian rule, and Cameron writing in 1864 found Malacca picturesque but depressing, 'dreamy, spiritless and yet apparently contented'.<sup>62</sup>

Of the three settlements Singapore was the most lively, successful and full of activity, and it was to Singapore that the ambitious went to seek 'streets paved with gold'. Almost from the beginning of her existence Singaporeans looked upon Penang and Malacca as faded backwaters, owing their past success only to the fact that Singapore did not then exist and regarding their present relative prosperity as a pale reflection of the general improvement which Singapore had brought to the region.

From its very foundation Singapore attracted large numbers of immigrants. By 1824 there were more than 10,000 inhabitants, and five years later the number had increased to nearly 18,000.<sup>63</sup> By 1845 the population stood at over 52,000,<sup>64</sup> and by 1860 it had expanded to 81,000.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike the other settlements, Singapore soon became predominantly Chinese. At the first census taken in 1824 the Malays were still the largest community, but by 1827 the Chinese constituted nearly half of the total population, and from early days the majority of the inhabitants of the urban areas were Chinese. Chinese immigration was heavy in the mid-1830s and reached new records in the early 1850s, when more than 13,000 landed in the peak year 1853-4.<sup>66</sup> After that numbers dropped, but Chinese immigration achieved new momentum in the 1860s, by which time the Chinese constituted about sixty-five per cent of Singapore's total population.

Until the middle of the century the Malays were the second largest community, the majority of them country dwellers,

<sup>61</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, vii (1853), 74.

<sup>62</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 373.

<sup>63</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 12 February 1829, quoted in *Asiatic Journal*, xxviii (September 1829), p. 357.

<sup>64</sup> *ST*, 19 August 1845.

<sup>65</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 149.

<sup>66</sup> *SFP*, 5 January 1853.

and large numbers came from the mainland, Sumatra and the islands to the south of Singapore in the 1830s.

Population of Singapore (official census figures)

These figures exclude the garrison, convicts and transitory boat population, which together numbered up to 5,000

	1824 <sup>67</sup>	1845 <sup>68</sup>	1860 <sup>69</sup>
Total	10,683	52,197	80,792
Malays	4,580	10,035	10,888
Chinese	3,317	32,132	50,043
Indians	756	5,198	12,971
Bugis	1,925	1,971	906
Europeans	74	336	466

Singapore did not attract Indian immigrants as quickly as early Penang, although one prominent Indian merchant, Naraina Pillay, came from Penang to Singapore in 1819. Apart from the garrison and camp followers, there were only 132 Indians in Singapore in 1823 out of a population of nearly 5,000.<sup>70</sup> In 1845 they numbered less than ten per cent of the population, but their numbers gradually increased until by 1860 they had displaced the Malays as the second largest community in Singapore. The vast majority of them were south Indian labourers and petty traders, but there were seventeen Indian merchants of some standing in Singapore in 1849,<sup>71</sup> and by the 1860s there were substantial Parsee, Bengali and Tamil merchant houses.

Arab merchants appeared in Singapore soon after the station was established but did not increase to form the substantial proportion of the population which Raffles predicted. The first Armenian, Aristarchus Moses, arrived in Singapore in 1820, and the first Bagdad Jew, Abraham Solomon, in 1836, but the big influx of middle east Jews did not come until the 1870s.

The European population was very small, although the Company's restrictions on European immigration were never

<sup>67</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, ix (1855), 468-9.

<sup>68</sup> *SFP*, 19 August 1845.

<sup>69</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1861.

<sup>70</sup> Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, p. 175.

<sup>71</sup> *JIA*, iv (1850), 106.

enforced in Singapore. The first official query as to the status of Europeans in Singapore was raised in March 1827, soon after the Straits Settlements were united, when the Penang authorities called on all Europeans in Singapore to give particulars of their date of arrival, licence of residence and occupation.<sup>72</sup> Few could produce licences, but no action was taken against any of them on the basis of this information. In 1829 the Directors warned that Europeans were liable to removal at the Company's pleasure but agreed that in practice respectable Europeans should not be discouraged from settling,<sup>73</sup> since they were the only immigrants likely to bring capital for development, and they posed no threat to social stability in islands such as Singapore, which had almost no indigenous inhabitants. John Crawford, Resident of Singapore, reported in January 1824 that of the seventy-four European residents 'not one of them can be called an "adventurer"'.<sup>74</sup> Three years later he described the small European community as 'the life and spirit of the Settlement', without whom there would be 'neither capital, enterprise, activity, confidence or order'.<sup>75</sup> Registration in the Straits became a mere formality long before Europeans came to be admitted freely to the Company's territories under the terms of the 1833 Charter Act, but in 1860, out of a total Singapore population of 81,000, they still numbered only 466, of whom 271 were adult British males.<sup>76</sup>

This tiny European minority possessed wealth and influence out of proportion to its numbers. They provided nearly all the capital for trading in the Straits, they founded and dominated the Singapore and Penang chambers of commerce, and they were the only community interested in promoting constitutional reform. All the Straits newspapers under the Indian regime were English-language journals with British editors. The grand juries and municipal councils were almost exclusively a European domain. Small though their numbers were, the well-to-do European merchants outnumbered senior officials. They were

<sup>72</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, ix (1855), 60-1.

<sup>73</sup> Directors to Fullerton, September 1829, SSR, C 6.

<sup>74</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, ix (1855), 468-9.

<sup>75</sup> J. Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina* (London, 1828, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), ii, 383.

<sup>76</sup> *SFP*, 3, 10 January 1861; *ST*, 11 May 1861.

wealthier, lived at a higher standard and outshone officials in social entertaining.

A tiny handful among the European population in the Straits led the way in seeking constitutional change, which would give them the political power which they felt their growing economic standing justified. The most ambitious and persistent agitator was a merchant, William Henry Read.<sup>77</sup> Read was born in Scotland in the week that Raffles first hoisted the British flag in Singapore, and his fortunes were closely linked with the settlement throughout his life. His father, Charles Rideout Read, who came to Singapore in 1822 as a partner in A. L. Johnston & Company, was one of the most active and influential merchants until he retired to Britain in 1842. William Henry Read arrived in Singapore in 1841 to take over his father's partnership, and Alexander Laurie Johnston, one of the earliest and most outstanding settlers in Singapore, retired to England two months after young Read's arrival. In his first years Read and his bachelor friends did much to brighten the rather tedious social life of Singapore. A keen rider himself, Read organized the first horse races in 1843, and for many years he presided over the annual new year's day sea sports. A tiny man, he was a great favourite as Miss Petowker, leading lady in most of the amateur theatricals, a 'lady' with 'the smallest waist and smallest foot of any in Singapore'.<sup>78</sup> But as senior partner of Singapore's premier firm at an age when most of his contemporaries were still clerks and junior assistants, Read was called on to take part in more serious activities. One of the most generous and public-spirited men in the settlement, he was for many years trustee of the Singapore Institution school and a founder member of the sailors' home committee. He was treasurer of the first public library, which was founded in 1844, and the second member to be initiated as a freemason when the Singapore lodge was opened the following year. In 1846 he was elected to the committee of the Singapore chamber of

<sup>77</sup> WILLIAM HENRY MACLEOD READ (1819-1909). Arrived in Singapore, 1841; chairman, Singapore chamber of commerce, 1865; first non-official member of legislative council, 1867; Dutch consul, 1857-85; retired to England, 1887. Obituary notices, *ST*, 4 June 1909; *SFP*, 5 June 1909.

<sup>78</sup> R. Braddell in W. Makepeace, G. E. Brooke, R. Braddell (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore* (London, 1921), ii, 383.

commerce, and later became its chairman. He acted frequently as foreman of the grand jury, and when the Volunteer Corps was formed in 1854 he was the first to enrol. Read was Dutch consul for twenty-eight years, from 1857 to 1885. He was the first non-official member of the legislative council in 1867 and leader of the European mercantile community until he retired to Britain in 1887. Even after that he maintained his link with the Straits, and when he died in 1909 at the age of ninety-one he was lamented in Singapore as 'the father of the Colony'.<sup>79</sup> In 1901 he published a book of memoirs under the title *Play and politics: reminiscences of Malaya by an Old Resident*, disconnected and inaccurate trifles, based upon his own failing memory. Read does not appear to have made a fortune, perhaps as his admirers suggested because of his selfless devotion to public affairs,<sup>80</sup> but more probably because of his political miscalculations in supporting losing causes. Unwise speculation late in life left him a poor man.

The other two most prominent public figures in Singapore in the middle years of the century were Abraham Logan,<sup>81</sup> editor of the *Singapore Free Press*, and Robin Carr Woods,<sup>82</sup> editor of the rival *Straits Times*. Abraham Logan, who was born in Scotland in 1816, had some legal training but no formal qualifications. He came to Penang in 1839, was admitted as a law agent and later practised as a lawyer in Singapore from 1842 to 1867. He became editor of the *Singapore Free Press* in 1846 and continued as proprietor-editor until 1865. As a lawyer, newspaper editor and for eighteen years secretary of the Singapore chamber of commerce, Abraham Logan played a dominant role in local politics, until he sold the *Free Press* in 1865, gave up his work with the chamber of commerce in

<sup>79</sup> *ST*, 4 June 1909.

<sup>80</sup> C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, 1902, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), i, 369.

<sup>81</sup> ABRAHAM LOGAN (1816-73). Born in Scotland; read law in Edinburgh; law agent in Penang, 1839; law agent Singapore, 1842-67, in partnership with younger brother, J. R. Logan, 1842-53, and with T. Braddell, 1862-7; secretary, Singapore chamber of commerce, 1850-68; retired to Penang, 1869.

<sup>82</sup> ROBIN CARR WOODS (1816-75). Law agent in Singapore, 1849; called to bar in England, 1863; acting attorney general, 1870; senior puisne judge, 1875; *ST*, 16 March 1875; R. Braddell in Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, i, 198, Makepeace, *ibid.*, ii, 281-2.

1868 and retired the next year to Penang, where he died in 1873.

Abraham Logan's younger brother, James Richardson Logan, who was also a law agent, took over the *Penang Gazette* in 1853 and transformed it into an influential newspaper. The younger Logan was shy and retiring but a man of talent and wide interests. At considerable personal expense, he founded and edited the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, popularly known as *Logan's Journal*, which he produced from 1847 to 1859. His main interest was in ethnography and physical geography and he published accounts of his explorations of the western coastal regions of the Malay peninsula in his journal. He died in Penang in 1869 as a result of malaria contracted during one of these expeditions, and a public statue was erected in his honour. Logan threw himself with equal enthusiasm into editing the *Penang Gazette*. He was in close touch with his brother, Abraham, so that during the crucial years of the 1850s and early 1860s, when the demand for constitutional reform reached its peak, the Logan brothers were in a dominant position to influence and direct public opinion through their newspapers.

Robin Woods had spent five years as a journalist in Bombay before he came to Singapore in 1845, to start the *Straits Times*, which he continued to edit until 1861. He was an overbearing, self-important little man and his pretensions and flowery verbosity tempted the young mercantile assistants to indulge in practical jokes at his expense. In June 1846 Read and his friends induced a lad to rush into Woods's office dripping wet, with a tale that he had swum ashore from an American ship passing through the harbour and carried a letter from the skipper giving the prices reached at the recent opium sales in Calcutta. To the delighted derision of the merchants and the *Free Press*, Woods swallowed this improbable story and printed the dramatic figures. He then amused his tormentors still further by claiming this was a plot designed to spread panic among the commercial community of Singapore, and offering a reward of fifty dollars for the unmasking of the dastardly 'criminals', whom he pledged to see condemned to transportation.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *ST*, 17 June 1846.



Woods's opportunity for revenge came a few years later when the *Free Press* carelessly reprinted an article from an English journal about Sir James Brooke's activities in Sarawak, which contained damaging references to an Englishman named Miles then resident in Singapore. With great relish Woods acted as Miles's lawyer in prosecuting Logan for libel.<sup>84</sup>

In an effort to increase the circulation of his newspaper, Woods launched an attack in 1849 upon Sir James Brooke's campaign against pirates in Borneo, accusing him of slaughtering innocent Dyaks.<sup>85</sup> Woods stirred up a demand for a commission of enquiry to be held in Singapore in 1854, as a result of which Brooke was acquitted. This episode earned Woods the enmity and resentment of nearly all the European mercantile community, but it achieved the object of boosting sales. Woods then sought to improve his public reputation. He contributed generously to schools and hospitals, played an energetic part in political meetings and showed great zest and efficiency as a municipal commissioner. He was called to the bar in England in 1863, acted as attorney general of Singapore in 1870 and was appointed senior puisne judge in 1875 but died a few months later.

Read, Abraham Logan and Woods were the three most energetic public figures in Singapore among a politically alert European minority. The doyen of the European merchants until the mid-1850s was John Purvis, who came to Singapore from Canton to set up his firm in 1822 and was still presiding over public meetings forty years later. Another early arrival was Alexander Guthrie, who settled in Singapore in 1820 and founded the firm of Guthries. In 1846 he was the chairman of the Singapore chamber of commerce, but retired to London in 1847 to conduct the British end of his business. He handed over his work in Singapore to his nephew, James Guthrie, who came to Singapore in 1829 when he was fifteen years old, became head of the firm on his uncle's return to England, retired himself in 1876 and died in England in 1900. Guthries were one of the most flourishing Singapore companies, and Thomas Scott, a partner in the firm for forty-five years, was one of the first members of the legislative council set up in 1867.

<sup>84</sup> *ST*, 14 October 1851.

<sup>85</sup> *ST*, 23 May 1849.

Another prominent family were the d'Almeidas. Dr Jozé d'Almeida, a former surgeon on a Portuguese warship, came to Singapore from Macao in 1825 to set up a dispensary. Later he built up a business dealing in Chinese goods and silk, which at the time of his death in 1850 was one of the leading firms of Singapore. Jozé d'Almeida, who was knighted in Portugal in 1842, was one of the pacemakers of Singapore society, gregarious and sociable, noted for his lavish parties. He had about twenty children, so that by the middle of the century the ramifications of the d'Almeida family spread widely through the small European community. Every European in Singapore attended his funeral, and Governor Butterworth was one of the pallbearers.<sup>86</sup> Sir Jozé's business then passed to two sons, Joaquim and José. They were very active in public affairs, particularly Joaquim, who was a keen participant in public meetings in the 1840s, became a naturalized British citizen in 1853, and was chairman of the Singapore chamber of commerce in 1858. But the d'Almeida brothers made a bad combination in business. Joaquim was over-optimistic and speculative, while José was too cautious, and the firm went bankrupt in 1864. Joaquim went to England, where he died in 1870, while José remained in Singapore and died in 1894 at the age of eighty-one.

Before the arrival of the first steamships in the Straits in 1845, the pace of commercial life among the European community was leisurely and they were in general a self-contained, inward-looking group, cut off from Europe. Sailing ships coming via the Cape of Good Hope took four months to reach the Straits from England, and mail which came by the expensive, uncertain 'overland' service, transhipped in Egypt and brought across the Suez isthmus by camel, seldom reached Penang in less than two months and sometimes took four or five. The result was that Europeans were out of touch with Britain. It was too expensive and time-consuming for them to visit Europe regularly, and most British merchants expected to spend their whole career in the East and return to England only on retirement. This had advantages. The small European society of Singapore

<sup>86</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1851.

was a friendly hospitable group and enjoyed a high reputation for commercial honesty and social respectability, compared with other European settlements in the East. They were delighted to welcome strangers and visitors from Europe, and during the first Opium War, when the troops assembled in Singapore for the China expedition and many naval ships called at the port, the social life of the ruling community was very gay.

The opening of regular steamship communications between Europe and the Straits speeded up commercial activity and changed the way of life and attitude of mind among the European mercantile community. In 1845 the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company began a regular monthly steamship service to carry mails to Hong Kong, via Penang and Singapore. The English mail brought by the first of these steamers, the *Lady Mary Wood*, which reached Penang in August 1845, had taken only thirty-nine days,<sup>87</sup> whereas a sailing ship which arrived from Glasgow that same month was considered to have achieved a remarkably fast passage of ninety-four days.<sup>88</sup> From 1853 the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company ran a twice-monthly mail service, and in September 1854 mail from London was delivered in Singapore in a record time of thirty-four days. When the Suez railway was opened in 1858 to replace the former camel service, the transport of mail became more reliable, and by 1865 there were complaints if the mail from England took more than five weeks to reach Singapore.<sup>89</sup> Steamers also linked the Straits with Calcutta from the 1840s. The first steamer to journey from Calcutta to the Straits, the *Fire Queen*, reached Penang in February 1845 after an eight-day voyage, and in 1846 a regular monthly steam service between Calcutta and the Straits Settlements was inaugurated.

Fast steamship communications with Europe produced marked social changes in the British community in the Straits. Some could afford to visit England periodically, and for all Europeans steamships brought up-to-date newspapers, regular letters and new books for the recently established library. New

<sup>87</sup> *ST*, 5 August 1845; B. Cable, *A Hundred Year History of the P. & O. (Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company), 1837-1937* (London, 1937), pp. 53-64.

<sup>88</sup> *ST*, 12 August 1845.

<sup>89</sup> *ST*, 9 December 1865.

arrivals could keep their links with 'home'. The old-established residents deplored how the homogeneous, free-and-easy society, with its special Singapore flavour, was giving way to a middle-class society transplanted from England, more formal, stiff and conscious of its Britishness.<sup>90</sup> The expatriate western community, in touch with family, friends and news from their homeland, was less interested in opening doors to visitors from Europe. The growth of commercial activity and expansion of the western population also weakened the unity of the European society in Singapore. One naval officer visiting Singapore in 1846 complained that the merchants were too busy making money to entertain visitors.<sup>91</sup>

The European community in Singapore looked increasingly to the west for the style of their entertainment and social life. The opening of a new town hall in 1861 renewed interest in amateur theatricals among European men, although women actresses were not seen on the Singapore stage until the 1880s. The Teutonia club, founded in 1856 by the growing German community, provided a centre for musical entertainment, and the Tanglin club established in 1865 became a centre of European social life.

On the eve of the transfer to colonial rule in 1867 European society in Singapore was staid, respectable, narrow-minded, reflecting the attitudes and values of mid-Victorian middle-class England. Social contact with other communities was superficial, and Eurasians were held in contempt, however remote their Asian connection might be.<sup>92</sup> Social life was becoming more sophisticated, snobbish and exclusively western, and old-timers regretted the passing of the early, informal days<sup>93</sup> when wealth, race and colour were of little account. There was a growing tendency for the community in Singapore to split into cliques, even within their racial divisions. Rich Chinese and Europeans alike still enjoyed their evening drives on the esplanade, or Scandal Point as it was known. But there was little mingling elsewhere. Even the new year's day sea sports,

<sup>90</sup> *SFP*, 1 January 1846.

<sup>91</sup> F. S. Marryat, *Borneo and the Indian Archipelago* (London, 1848), p. 213.

<sup>92</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, pp. 287-8.

<sup>93</sup> J. D. Ross, *Sixty Years: Life and Adventure in the Far East* (London, 1911), i, 58-9.

first held in 1834, when Asians and Europeans took part in the competitions, and still commended by the *Straits Times* in 1861 as tending 'better than anything else to promote good feeling and harmony between the various classes of this community',<sup>94</sup> degenerated within a few years into 'a mercenary affair on the part of the natives and a somewhat absurd and tiresome spectacle to the European'.<sup>95</sup>

The style of living among the European merchants of Singapore was lavish compared with that of middle-grade businessmen in England, but few if any of them appear to have accumulated great wealth, and most of them worked out their days in Singapore and retired with only a modest competence. In 1867 the *Straits Times* described European mercantile life as 'a long drudgery which men enter upon in their youth and leave in their old age',<sup>96</sup> attributing this mainly to the custom of granting credit at great risk. While the success story of Singapore as a port was spectacular, the trade returns were deceptive since the bulk of trade was entrepôt. It meant big profits for British manufacturers in England, but as the *Singapore Free Press* commented in 1860, for the individual European merchant in Singapore the fluctuating entrepôt trade was 'only very moderately prosperous and at times the very reverse'.<sup>97</sup>

Most of the prominent Chinese merchants in the early days of Singapore came from Malacca. The most powerful in the formative years of the settlement was Chua Chong Long, born in 1788, the son of the Kapitan China of Dutch Malacca. Chua Chong Long could speak English and was already a rich man when he moved to Singapore, where he used to entertain British officials and merchants to western-style dinners on a lavish scale. He wielded great influence in Singapore until he left for China in 1836 and was murdered in Macao two years later. His leadership of the Hokkien community in Singapore passed to two Malacca-born Babas, Tan Tock Seng and Tan Kim Seng, who shared the same surname but do not appear to have been related.

Tan Tock Seng, who was born in Malacca in 1798, came to

<sup>94</sup> *ST*, 5 January 1861.

<sup>96</sup> *ST*, 10 January 1867.

<sup>95</sup> *ST*, 14 January 1865.

<sup>97</sup> *SFP*, 1 November 1860.

Singapore as a penniless vegetable seller in 1819 and rose to be one of the wealthiest merchants and philanthropists in the Straits Settlements. In 1844 he became the first Asian justice of the peace in the Straits. Tan Tock Seng died in 1850, but his son, Tan Kim Ching, who was born in Singapore in 1829 and lived until 1892, later became head of the Hokkien Huay-kuan association in Singapore. He was known to the Straits-born Chinese community in Singapore as Kapitan China. Tan Kim Ching came under a cloud in 1864 when he went bankrupt and was charged with fraud by a Hong Kong firm,<sup>98</sup> but he survived this scandal to become a leader in the shipping business in Singapore. He was appointed a justice of the peace in 1872,<sup>99</sup> and acted for many years as consul for Siam.

Tan Kim Seng, a third-generation Hokkien Baba, was born of humble family in Malacca in 1805, but founded the firm of Kim Seng & Company and amassed a large fortune in Singapore in trade and property. After Tan Tock Seng's death, Kim Seng became acknowledged leader of the Straits-born Chinese in Singapore and in Malacca, where he was appointed *Teng-chu* of the temple. He was highly respected by the Straits government, who made him a justice of the peace in 1850 and on many occasions commended his philanthropy. Kim Seng frequently entertained the Europeans of Singapore to dinners and in 1861 gave a 'sumptuous ball' to 'the élite of the society of Singapore', at which he made a speech in appreciation of 'the benefits he had derived during his sojourn in the dominions of Queen Victoria'.<sup>100</sup> When he died in Malacca in 1864 he was reputed to be worth \$2,000,000.<sup>101</sup> His son, Tan Beng Swee, born in 1828, took over the firm of Kim Seng & Company. Like his father, he became *Teng-chu* of the Cheng Hoon temple in Malacca in 1866 and was made a justice of the peace in 1867.<sup>102</sup>

The Malacca-born Chinese had an initial advantage in their knowledge of local trade and languages and their dealings with Europeans, but their China-born counterparts, who always

<sup>98</sup> SSR, W 50, Item 349.

<sup>99</sup> Wong Choon San, *Chinese Kapitans*, p. 36; Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (London, 1923, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1966), pp. 92-3.

<sup>100</sup> SFP, 18 April 1861.

<sup>101</sup> SFP, 17 March 1864.

<sup>102</sup> Wong Choon San, *Chinese Kapitans*, p. 33.

had a reputation for greater energy and acumen, began to challenge the supremacy of the Straits-born in Singapore. In the early 1830s it was rumoured that Tan Che Sang, who was born in Canton in 1763 and accumulated money in Riau and Penang before he moved to Singapore, was richer even than Chua Chong Long. He had a reputation as a miser and did not give the lavish public entertainments for which Chong Long was famous. The European community knew little about Tan Che Sang, but he boasted he had such influence with the Chinese in Singapore that he could have all the westerners driven out at one word. When he died in 1836 an immense crowd said to number between 10,000 and 15,000 people followed his funeral.

Of the China-born immigrants, the two men most trusted by the Straits authorities in the middle years of the century were Seah Eu Chin and Hoo Ah Kay. Seah Eu Chin, the son of a minor mandarin, was a Teochew, born in Kwangtung in 1805. He could read and write Chinese and worked for some years as a clerk aboard a junk in southeast Asian waters, until he settled down in Singapore in 1830 as a commission agent and ships' chandler. He invested much of his profit in land and was probably the first to finance large-scale gambier and pepper planting in Singapore. Seah Eu Chin joined the Singapore chamber of commerce in 1840,<sup>103</sup> he was appointed a justice of the peace, was called frequently as a grand jurymen and in 1853 was one of the first Singapore Chinese to become a naturalized British subject. The government used him as a go-between with the Teochew community during Chinese riots in Singapore in 1854,<sup>104</sup> and in the late 1850s and early 1860s the Recorder of Singapore often advised Chinese litigants to refer their cases to him. After retiring from business in 1864, he devoted the remaining nineteen years of his life to studying Chinese literature, developing a scholarly bent which was then almost unique among the Chinese community in Singapore.

Hoo Ah Kay, who was more commonly known as Whampoa, a nickname derived from his birthplace, was a Cantonese and came to Singapore in 1830 at the age of fifteen to help in his

<sup>103</sup> Song Ong Siang, *Chinese in Singapore*, p. 20.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

father's ships' chandling business. Whampoa was an intelligent youth who could read and write Chinese and soon learned to speak English. His firm prospered and in 1853 Whampoa set up as a commission agent, auctioneer and general dealer, with a big store which sold everything from millinery and jewellery to groceries, wines, Japanese and Chinese goods.<sup>105</sup> He owned the largest bakery in Singapore and in 1854 opened the first ice house. This particular venture failed, but fortune smiled on most of his enterprises, particularly on his property deals, and he was reputed even in the 1840s to be the richest Chinese merchant in Singapore.<sup>106</sup> Whampoa was a charitable and philanthropic man. He rose to higher political office than any other Chinese in Singapore in the nineteenth century, being appointed a member of the legislative council in 1869 and an extraordinary member of the executive council a few years later. When he died in 1880 he was, as Sir Roland Braddell later said, 'the most respected and best-liked Chinaman who has ever been in Singapore'.<sup>107</sup> He also acted as Russian vice-consul in Singapore,<sup>108</sup> the only Asian to represent a European power.

Of all the Singapore Chinese Whampoa was the best known among the European community, and he loved to welcome westerners to admire his curiosities, his huge lily with leaves over eleven feet in diameter, the gift of the regent of Siam, and his cognac-drinking orang-utan.<sup>109</sup> He would entertain his European guests to dinner in western fashion, with silver cutlery and English china,<sup>110</sup> and in his own house, which was unusual among the Singapore Chinese at that time. He delighted particularly in the company of naval officers and merchant navy captains, and in 1857 had Admiral Sir Henry Keppel as his house guest.<sup>111</sup> John Turnbull Thomson, the government surveyor, who knew Whampoa well, commented,

<sup>105</sup> ST, 8 August 1853.

<sup>106</sup> Marryat, *Borneo*, p. 217.

<sup>107</sup> R. Braddell in Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years*, ii, 498.

<sup>108</sup> SSR, R 41, p. 232.

<sup>109</sup> O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), p. 349; J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, pp. 307-11; A. Anson, *About Others and Myself, 1745-1920* (London, 1920), p. 301; H. Keppel, *A Sailor's Life under Four Sovereigns* (London, 1899), iii, 13; Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, p. 40; Song Ong Siang, *Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 51-6.

<sup>110</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, p. 309.

<sup>111</sup> Keppel, *Sailor's Life*, iii, 13-14.



'he had acquired an English sailor's habits of thought and style of conversation. These at times, though manly and jolly, were more bluff than polished.'<sup>112</sup> Nevertheless he kept his allegiance to Chinese customs, and like all the Singapore Chinese in the mid-nineteenth century, continued to wear Chinese dress, to shave his head and wear a pigtail.<sup>113</sup> He sent his eldest son to school in England in 1847 but was so shocked when the westernized youth returned shorn of his pigtail and professing to be a presbyterian, that Whampoa immediately packed the boy off to Canton to grow his hair and reorientate his ideas.<sup>114</sup>

Outwardly the wealthy Chinese merchants were always co-operative with the Straits authorities, and Whampoa in particular cultivated the friendship of the British.<sup>115</sup> Often the merchants tended to league themselves with the authorities against the rank and file of their own countrymen. At a public meeting held in Penang in 1853 to discuss new municipal legislation, the Chinese merchants defeated a motion by a leading European to lower the minimum qualification for voting and election to the municipal committee, on the grounds that this would let in undesirable persons, most of them Chinese.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, three years later the Penang Chinese as a united body defeated a motion which attempted to restrict membership of the municipal committee to people who were literate in English, and would have excluded many of the most prominent Chinese merchants.<sup>117</sup>

There was a great gulf in the standard of living and the way of life between these prosperous merchants and the hordes of Chinese immigrant labourers. Most Straits-born Chinese and many of the well-to-do Hokkien and Teochew shopkeepers settled down to permanent family life in the Straits. Indeed many of the most successful dared not return to live in China, for until 1860, when emigration was legalized, Chinese returning from the Straits with large fortunes had no protection in law from the extortion of the mandarinates. In the Straits, the Hokkien and Teochew communities were most settled, the

<sup>112</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, p. 308.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>114</sup> Keppel, *Sailor's Life*, ii, 80.

<sup>115</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 253-5.

<sup>116</sup> *PG*, 3 September in *SFP*, 16 September 1853.

<sup>117</sup> *PG*, 30 August in *SFP*, 4 September 1856.

Hakkas less inclined to put down roots and the Cantonese most restless of all.<sup>118</sup> In 1852 legislation was passed permitting the naturalization of Chinese settlers,<sup>119</sup> and several leading Chinese merchants became naturalized British subjects. They were probably inspired less by loyalty to the Straits Settlements than by the desire to secure protection for themselves and their ships on the China coast.<sup>120</sup> After 1857 naturalization was confined to those born in the Straits Settlements and their children,<sup>121</sup> while trouble-makers were refused naturalization.<sup>122</sup>

The majority of the immigrants were not interested in acquiring British citizenship. Most planned to make enough money to return to China after three or four years, but probably only one or two in every ten achieved this ambition.<sup>123</sup> The rest of them stayed on for years, trapped in a state of poverty, usually through addiction to opium or bad luck in gambling, but most of those who did not die young eventually returned home. There were few elderly Chinese to be seen in Singapore, even in the last years of Indian rule.<sup>124</sup>

In settlements where the government provided few social services, the rich Chinese were noted for their philanthropy. Singapore's first pauper hospital was provided by Tan Tock Seng and enlarged by his heirs.<sup>125</sup> It was maintained chiefly by donations from the leading Chinese merchants and the opium tax farmers.<sup>126</sup> Tan Kim Seng gave the Singapore authorities \$13,000 in 1857 for a regular water supply for the town, which Governor Blundell commended as a 'very handsome instance of patriotic liberality'.<sup>127</sup> Tan Kim Seng also gave \$3,000 to build an iron bridge over the Malacca river to replace a decrepit wooden one,<sup>128</sup> and he was generous in his contributions to the

<sup>118</sup> Seah Eu Chin, 'The Chinese in Singapore: general sketch of the numbers, tribes and avocations of the Chinese in Singapore', *JIA*, ii (1848), 283-9.

<sup>119</sup> Indian Act XXX of 1852.

<sup>120</sup> *SFP*, 29 December 1859, 31 August 1865; SSR, V 40, p. 427.

<sup>121</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 45.

<sup>122</sup> SSR, V 40, p. 320.

<sup>123</sup> Seah Eu Chin, *JIA*, ii (1848), 283-9.

<sup>124</sup> *SFP*, 29 December 1859.

<sup>125</sup> SSR, S 20, Item 20; SSR, S 23, Item 220; SSR, S 26, Item 80; SSR, R 33, pp. 19-21; Song Ong Siang, *Chinese in Singapore*, pp. 46, 52.

<sup>126</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 220; *SFP*, 19 June 1856.

<sup>127</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 265-6; SSR, S 26, Item 40; W. H. Read, *Play and Politics: Reminiscences of Malaya by an Old Resident* (London, 1901), pp. 117-24.

<sup>128</sup> SSR, R 33, p. 139; SSR, V 27, p. 242.

Singapore Institution school. The wealthy Chinese merchants took the lead in financing expensive processions and *wayangs*, or theatrical performances, and the licence fees for such entertainments went a long way to pay for the upkeep of hospitals,<sup>129</sup> and sometimes for drainage and other public works.<sup>130</sup>

Unlike Georgetown and Malacca, Singapore town was based upon a plan, laid down by Raffles in 1822, in which the different communities were allotted their own districts.<sup>131</sup> The Singapore river was the heart of the town. The east bank, 'the Mayfair of Singapore',<sup>132</sup> was reserved for government and the European community, the west bank for the commercial centre, based upon Commercial Square (the modern Raffles Place), with the merchants' warehouses backing from the Square on to the sea. Behind the commercial sector was the Chinese part of the town, divided among the various tribes, while the Indians were allotted land up-river. In the early days the leading European merchants had their houses along the sea front, on Beach Road, in the eastern part of the town.

The followers of the sultan of Singapore and the Temenggong of Johore, from whom the East India Company had acquired Singapore, were settled outside the town area. Sultan Hussein's people lived at Kampong Glam, a fifty-acre site, on the eastern outskirts of the town, with the Bugis kampong adjoining. The Temenggong's village, originally sited near the mouth of the Singapore river, was moved by Raffles in 1823 to a larger land reserve of 200 acres at Telok Blangah, about three miles west of the town centre.

Within a few years of its foundation, regular streets of brick houses with red-tiled roofs replaced the original wooden structures in the urban area, and by 1827 wooden, attap-roofed houses were to be found only on the outskirts.<sup>133</sup> But the town lacked public buildings. In the 1820s merchants' stores or private houses were used as government offices,<sup>134</sup> while the Resident lived in a frail bungalow on Government Hill, which

<sup>129</sup> SSR, BB 111, Item 80.

<sup>130</sup> SSR, V 29, p. 118.

<sup>131</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, vii (1853), 339, *JIA*, viii (1854), 100-8.

<sup>132</sup> Marryat, *Borneo*, p. 95.

<sup>133</sup> Crawford, *Embassy*, ii, 387.

<sup>134</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, ix (1855), 475.

Raffles had built in a fortnight and which served as Government House until it was demolished in 1857.

By the late 1830s the official and European residential part of Singapore town was becoming more stylish. In 1833 George Drumgold Coleman, a talented Irish architect and one of the early settlers in Singapore, was appointed as superintendent of public works. The first official to employ convicts on a big scale outside the jail for building, road work and land reclamation, Coleman constructed roads along the sea front and built many elegant private houses. He designed the first St Andrew's church and completed a court house in 1839. When Coleman died in 1844 he left a legacy of fine public and private buildings and of town development in Singapore. John Turnbull Thomson, the government surveyor, arriving in Singapore for the first time in 1838, commented on the delightful change from Batavia.<sup>135</sup> Singapore town with its lovely setting, surrounded by virgin forest, was one of the beauty spots of the East, and in 1846 Governor Butterworth assured the Singapore grand jurymen that they lived in the cleanest town in the East.<sup>136</sup>

Parts of Singapore were unattractive and dirty. There were swamps in several districts and many of the main streets flooded regularly at high tide.<sup>137</sup> The grand jury raised the question of filth and defective drainage at every session.<sup>138</sup> Dead ponies were left to rot on the beach,<sup>139</sup> and the jail was particularly unsavoury for, situated in the middle of the town, much of the city's refuse was thrown into the swamp in front of it.<sup>140</sup> Fire was a great hazard, not only in the attap huts but among the godowns in the Chinese sector, and fire gave the perfect cover for looting. In March 1846, when fire gutted the godowns and houses of some prosperous Chinese merchants, some of them stood by with drawn swords while thieves ransacked neighbouring houses that had been abandoned.<sup>141</sup> A fire brigade was formed soon afterwards but was powerless to cope with a big fire in June 1846 because of a lack of water.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>135</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, p. 14.

<sup>136</sup> *SFP*, 30 April 1846.

<sup>137</sup> *ST*, 18 November 1845.

<sup>138</sup> *SFP*, 30 April 1846; *SFP*, 19 April 1849; *SFP*, 26 September 1851; *ST*, 10 August 1852.

<sup>139</sup> *ST*, 5 August 1845.

<sup>140</sup> *ST*, 1 April 1846.

<sup>141</sup> *ST*, monthly summary, March 1846.

<sup>142</sup> *SFP*, 30 April 1846; *ST*, 1 July 1846.

After that the government dug wells in all the main streets as a precaution in case of fire,<sup>143</sup> but these were no use in fighting a disastrous fire in February 1847 which destroyed nearly 300 houses in Kampong Glam and at one point threatened to engulf all the houses of the wealthy European merchants along the sea front.<sup>144</sup> The danger diminished as flimsy buildings were replaced by more solid structures, until fires became a rarity. They were never a serious problem in the central commercial quarter, and a fire which burned down a European godown in 1865 and seriously damaged several more was the first to occur in the European section of the town since its foundation.<sup>145</sup>

By the 1840s there were many complaints of congestion on the Singapore river where the merchants had their godowns, but the established firms were reluctant to move to the more spacious New Harbour, the present-day Keppel Harbour. Major William Farquhar, the first Resident of Singapore, had urged the advantages of New Harbour in 1819, but the town developed round the river, where the first settlement was made. The advent of steamers, requiring deep berths and coal, made a move to New Harbour necessary. The P. & O. steamship company was the first to establish itself there in 1852 and other big firms followed in the next few years.

In 1845 a road was constructed through to the Johore Straits, and by that time several roads extended into the interior, giving access to the hitherto isolated plantations in the centre of the island.<sup>146</sup> European merchants began to move to the suburbs or to country estates on the hill slopes surrounding the town. James Guthrie and William W. Ker built houses by the sea at Telok Blangah, but most moved inland to the Tanglin area where the road approaches were better. Some developed nutmeg plantations, such as Thomas Oxley's at Killiney and Charles Carnie's at Cairnhill (Carnie's Hill).<sup>147</sup> Living in the country was becoming safer, by the early 1850s the town was expanding rapidly and rents rose steeply during a land boom when nearly all the town plots were taken up.

<sup>143</sup> *ST*, 22 July 1846.

<sup>144</sup> Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, ii, 460-1.

<sup>145</sup> *ST*, 7, 14 January 1846.

<sup>146</sup> *SFP*, 1 January 1846.

<sup>147</sup> C. A. Gibson-Hill, 'Singapore: notes on the history of the Old Strait, 1580-1850', *JMBRAS*, xxvii, no. 1 (1954), 200-1.

The increased prosperity and energetic building in the private sector made the government's inactivity in undertaking works of public improvement stand out all the more sharply. In 1854 the Singapore grand jury, complaining that the whole town was polluted with the stench of uncleaned drains, bemoaned the lack of funds for providing amenities: 'This parsimony is one of the greatest misfortunes of the Settlement.'<sup>148</sup> But Calcutta, refusing to advance money to the Singapore municipal committee for drainage schemes without guaranteed payment of interest, described Singapore as a town 'which is wholly untaxed except for its own purposes' and not deserving subsidies from the general revenue.<sup>149</sup> No means could be found to provide the guarantees. Calcutta refused to sanction spending Rs. 30,000 to build a new bridge near the mouth of the Singapore river or to lend money to repair the two existing bridges, which could not cope with the congestion of traffic and were in a dangerous state of repair.<sup>150</sup> Traffic jams and reckless driving led to many accidents and casualties in Singapore in the mid-1850s, and the municipal commissioners found it quite impossible to enforce any rule about keeping to one side of the road.<sup>151</sup>

The *Straits Times* painted a gloomy picture of Singapore town in 1856. Filth was thrown on the roads, gutters were uncleaned and everywhere there were pools of stagnant water. Carcasses of dogs, cats and horses littered the roadsides, and the town was full of beggars and drunken sailors.<sup>152</sup> Convicts and cattle were buried near the town and often so shallowly that dogs scraped away the earth and exposed rotting corpses.<sup>153</sup>

Contrasting with the merchants' fine houses and new godowns, Singapore in the mid-1850s still lacked the public buildings normally associated with a flourishing port and administrative centre. The building constructed by Coleman as a court house was never used as such, but became the treasury and Resident Councillor's office, while the court was relegated to an adjacent small building. The Recorder com-

<sup>148</sup> *SFP*, 1 December 1854.

<sup>149</sup> SSR, S 22, Item 51; SSR, S 23, Item 64; SSR, S 25, Item 169.

<sup>150</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 98-104; SSR, V 22, p. 261; SSR, V 23, pp. 214-16.

<sup>151</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 463.

<sup>152</sup> *ST*, 16 December 1856.

<sup>153</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 211; SSR, W 25, Item 296; SSR, S 25, Item 154.

plained it was 'a mere shed', squeezed between the government offices and a shipbuilding yard, from which the noise often drowned the proceedings, while the stench was overpowering.<sup>154</sup> A new court house was sanctioned in 1855 but not built for several years.

With the outbreak of the Mutiny in India in 1857, the Straits authorities were ordered to call a halt to their public works programmes.<sup>155</sup> No further work was done on a new Government House, which the government of India had sanctioned in 1856,<sup>156</sup> and Calcutta refused to advance money to complete the town hall, of which the foundation stone was laid in 1855. After the money raised by the original public subscription ran out, the building stood half-finished until a further subscription of \$10,000 was raised in 1859.<sup>157</sup> The gift made by Tan Kim Seng in 1857 of \$13,000 to provide a water supply for Singapore proved an embarrassment, because the plans drawn up in 1862 involved an expenditure of about \$58,000. Calcutta, the Straits authorities and the Singapore municipality wrangled for years over the cost, and the matter was passed on to the colonial administration. Agreement was finally reached in 1879.<sup>158</sup> The scheme was very expensive, and Tan Kim Seng's donation itself was eventually used to construct a fountain.

While the public works programme stood still in the late 1850s, the private building boom continued in Singapore, and the price of land, labour and materials rose steeply.<sup>159</sup> The first part-elected municipal committee tackled the problems of the town with great vigour in 1858 and during their year of office raised some main streets to free them from flooding, cleared up

<sup>154</sup> *SFP*, 1 December 1854.

<sup>155</sup> *SSR*, S 25, Item 155; *SSR*, U 34, pp. 104-6; *SSR*, R 32, pp. 160-2.

<sup>156</sup> *SSR*, S 23, Item 162; *SSR*, R 33, p. 166.

<sup>157</sup> *ST*, 13 March 1855; *ST*, 2 April 1859; *SSR*, W 27, Items 162, 184.

<sup>158</sup> *SSR*, R 32, p. 265; *SSR*, V 29, pp. 61-2; *SSR*, R 36, p. 164; *SSR*, R 43, pp. 149-50; *ST*, 12 November 1859; *SFP*, 16 January 1862, 12 January 1865; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1863-4*; W. H. Read (ed.), *Singapore Water Supply: Copies of Sundry Papers etc. 1859-79* (Singapore, 1879), *passim*; Read, *Play and Politics*, pp. 117-24; Song Ong Siang, *Chinese in Singapore*, p. 49.

<sup>159</sup> *SSR*, R 35, pp. 153-60; *SSR*, V 26, pp. 267-8, 283-4; *SSR*, W 30, Item 254; *SFP*, 7 January 1858, 5 January 1859, 6 December 1860.

much of the filth and stench of which people had complained for years, and ordered three iron bridges to replace the shaky, old ones.<sup>160</sup> As restrictions on public works expenditure were relaxed in the 1860s, there was a spate of official building and road construction. A general hospital and a lunatic asylum were built,<sup>161</sup> and land to the seaward of Commercial Square was reclaimed between 1861 and 1864 and protected by a sea wall. Now known as Collyer Quay, after Colonel Collyer, the engineer responsible for the work, by 1866 it carried a line of buildings, 'one of the sights of the Far East'.<sup>162</sup> The town hall was completed in 1861 and St Andrew's church, now a cathedral, was finished and consecrated the following year. The building which housed the court was converted into a post office in 1864 and a more imposing court house begun. A private gas company, the first to be formed to bring any public amenity to the Straits Settlements, replaced the feeble oil lights in Singapore's main streets by gas lighting in 1864.<sup>163</sup> By 1867 the main roads to the country were finished, and there were at that time twenty-eight police stations and eighteen villages on Singapore island.

In the last years of Indian rule Singapore town was beginning to take on a more imposing appearance. On the east bank of the river stood Coleman's government offices, the new town hall, Raffles Institution and St Andrew's church. The bustling commercial part of the town on the west bank of the river contrasted with the spacious green-lawned government quarter opposite. Although big ships used New Harbour, three-quarters of all shipping business was still done at Boat Quay in the heart of the town in 1864. In the background were hills covered with orchards and topped with fine bungalows, and Fort Canning towering over the town. Several of the fine houses in Beach Road had been converted into hotels, and most of the well-to-do Europeans and some of the wealthy Chinese had moved to the country. Only in a few places did the town stretch more than a

<sup>160</sup> SSR, W 31, Item 346.

<sup>161</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 286-7; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*.

<sup>162</sup> R. Braddell in Makepeace et al., *One Hundred Years*, ii, 502.

<sup>163</sup> SSR, W 33, Item 32; *ST*, 17 August 1861, 18 June 1864; *SFP*, 12 January 1865; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1863-4*.



mile from the waterfront, and there were no straggling suburbs,<sup>164</sup> but many Europeans lived about two miles from the town centre in bungalows with an acre or two of garden. Some lived as much as four miles from the town centre in orchards or small estates. Usually there was a belt of jungle between these estates and the pepper and gambier plantations of the interior. The European population took great pride in the beauty of their part of the town and its surroundings, with well-tended gardens and lovely roads through wild jungle to government bungalows at Seletar, Changi and other outlying spots. As John Cameron wrote in 1864, 'for forty-five years have the hands of man been busy accumulating wealth on its bosom and yet scarce a scar is visible'.<sup>165</sup>

Shortage of labour was one of the main problems in the Straits Settlements throughout the nineteenth century. The Malay population, both indigenous and immigrant, concentrated on fishing and small-scale subsistence farming and rarely went into commerce or sought work as hired labourers. Most Malays did not adapt to organized labour and were not sought after by plantation owners. Consequently they were paid low wages compared with other employees. In 1846 a Malay labourer in Singapore earned only \$2.50 to \$4.50 a month, compared with \$3 to \$5 for an Indian labourer and \$4 to \$6 for a Chinese, while a Malay skilled artisan received only \$5 a month, compared with \$8 for an Indian and \$15 for a Chinese.<sup>166</sup> Javanese were hardy workers, and in Singapore most labourers on European estates were Javanese or Boyanese, the latter, of whom there were 720 males in Singapore in 1849, being particularly welcome since they were considered very honest if slow.<sup>167</sup> Some Javanese who landed at Penang on their way back from pilgrimage to Mecca in debt to the ship's

<sup>164</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 73.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>166</sup> *SFP*, 10 December 1846.

<sup>167</sup> J. T. Thomson, 'General Report on the Residency of Singapore, drawn up principally with a view of illustrating its agricultural statistics', *JIA*, iii (1849), 744-55; T. Oxley, 'Some Account of the Nutmeg and its Cultivation', *JIA*, ii (1848), 651-2; J. Vredenburg, 'Bawean Migrations', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, cxx (1964), 115-16. The Boyanese came from the island of Bawean, off Java.

master, were handed over to work as labourers to planters who paid off their debt.<sup>168</sup> But it was difficult to import Javanese and Boyanese labourers on a large scale.

Chinese were the most esteemed workers, but they preferred to work on their own account or hire their services to their own countrymen and were rarely willing to work on European estates except under Chinese contractors. Although emigration from China was illegal before 1860, youths from the south-eastern provinces came in their thousands to the Straits Settlements.

While conditions on the junks which plied from China to the Straits were not as bad as the hell ships which took Chinese emigrants to the American continent, and a larger proportion of labourers came of their own free will to Malaya, many of them were drugged or kidnapped,<sup>169</sup> and the voyage to Singapore was a frightful experience. Battered down in overcrowded holds, hundreds died before they reached the Straits Settlements. When the immigrants, or *sinkhehs*, arrived, they were handed over to Chinese employers who paid their passage money. In return the employer obtained full right to their labour for a period usually of one year, during which the *sinkhehs* were fed, clothed, housed and given a small allowance. Singapore gambier and pepper planters often paid five or six times the passage money for new hands, so that it was a more profitable speculation for a junk to take on twice its complement of passengers and risk losing half on the voyage.<sup>170</sup> Bodies were often discovered in Singapore harbour, roped together and presumably thrown overboard to avoid the expense of burial,<sup>171</sup> and in April 1863 a junk arrived in Singapore from Macao with only 120 of its 300 passengers still alive.<sup>172</sup> Labourers who were not immediately hired were kept confined in the suffocation of the holds, where they sometimes died.

Raffles made a regulation in 1823 requiring labour contracts to be registered in front of a magistrate, but this was never enforced. Fullerton was shocked at the conditions under which

<sup>168</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 300.

<sup>169</sup> *SFP*, 21 April 1859; *SSR*, W 36, Item 323; *SSR*, V 32, pp. 169-70.

<sup>170</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 42.

<sup>171</sup> *SFP*, 13 May 1858.

<sup>172</sup> *SSR*, V 37, p. 155.

labourers were transported to Penang and would have liked to control the traffic,<sup>173</sup> but European and Chinese merchants opposed any form of check on the immigration of able-bodied labourers.

The difficulty in procuring or organizing other supplies of labour brought the big, European-owned spice and sugar plantations of Penang and Province Wellesley to depend mainly on south Indian labourers, who provided cheap labour and were easy to discipline. Unlike China, the government of India put no restrictions on free emigration but it prohibited emigration of indentured labourers, except to certain countries, such as Mauritius, for which the traffic was supervised and controlled. The Straits Settlements were not included, and the recruitment of indentured labour for the Straits was illegal until 1864 and only brought under government supervision in 1872. The prohibition did not prevent recruitment but merely encouraged abuses, since it put the trade in the hands of unscrupulous touts and speculators. Indian emigrants to the Straits had to pay their own passages, which meant in practice borrowing the fare and pledging their labour under contracts which were subject to no official supervision. Normally such contracts ran for three years during which the labourer worked for pitifully low wages, which were subject to deductions for sickness, fines and debts, so that the contract was more often than not perpetuated into virtual slavery.<sup>174</sup> Few lived to return to India, and the death rate up to the 1860s was probably eighty to ninety per cent.<sup>175</sup>

From the mid-1860s conditions among Indian labourers began to improve with the spread of the *kangani* system, whereby *kanganis*, or foremen, were sent to India from Straits plantations to recruit labour. *Kanganis* were responsible to their employer for recruiting healthy men and they advanced money to finance passages for emigrants and their families. Perhaps a thousand labourers came from India under the *kangani* system each year in the late 1860s.<sup>176</sup>

Nearly all Indian immigrants disembarked at Penang, and

<sup>173</sup> *Burney Papers* (Bangkok, 1910-14), ii, pt 1, p. 213.

<sup>174</sup> Sandhu, *Indians in Malaya*, pp. 75-84.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 95-6.

most labourers at that period went to the Province Wellesley estates. There are no reliable statistics but it is probable that 1,800 Indian labourers arrived each year in the Straits Settlements in the 1840s, rising to 2,000 a year in the early 1850s, and to between 4,000 and 8,000 a year in the 1860s.<sup>177</sup> The total number of Indian immigrants, free and indentured, commercial and agricultural, probably rose from about 3,000 a year in the 1840s to about 9,000 or 10,000 in the later 1860s.<sup>178</sup> But the Indian population in the Straits did not expand so rapidly, partly because of the high death rate and partly because most of those who survived and prospered returned to India to settle. The majority of the Indian immigrants were young adult males and very few Indian women came to the Straits until the 1860s.

South Indians, particularly Muslims, merged easily with the Malay population, and Indo-Malay marriages produced a class known as Jawi-pekans, who were particularly numerous in Penang, where they had a reputation in the early years for being smart and quick-witted as traders. Over the years many Indian convicts, released in the Straits at the end of their term, married Malay girls and settled down. The influx of this criminal element changed the character of the Jawi-pekans, who became unruly and often caused trouble during religious festivals.

Some enterprising individual Indians moved into the Larut tin-mining district of Perak in the 1850s, but Indians did not move into the Malay states in large numbers until the western states came under British protection in the 1870s.<sup>179</sup> Most of those who went to the interior before that time were kidnapped or forcibly diverted to Perak, and this virtual slave trade, often involving young boys, became so bad that in 1864 the government of India contemplated prohibiting emigration to the Straits altogether, but bowed to Governor Cavenagh's protests that this would ruin Penang and Province Wellesley.<sup>180</sup>

Despite the considerable immigration into the Straits Settlements, shortage of labour grew more acute with the expansion of

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, App. 1, p. 304.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, App. 3, pp. 310-11.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>180</sup> SSR, S 29, Item 114; SSR, R 44, pp. 163-4.

the economy. Between 1852 and 1854, for instance, labour costs rose thirty per cent,<sup>181</sup> and the government came to rely almost entirely on convict labour for the construction of public works.<sup>182</sup>

In 1788 the government of India began the transportation of convicts who were sentenced to more than seven years' imprisonment, and the first government convicts were sent to Penang in 1790. Malacca and Singapore also became convict stations from 1825, and Singapore quickly became the major convict centre in the Straits. There was more work for convicts to do there, and it was less easy for Indian convicts to escape into a community where the Indian population was so much smaller than it was in Penang. By 1841 the Straits Settlements were 'the Sydney convict settlements of India',<sup>183</sup> for there were between 1,100 and 1,200 Indian convicts in Singapore alone. By 1845 the number had risen to 1,500.<sup>184</sup>

In the early years convicts were essential to the economy of the Straits Settlements as a steady supply of cheap labour, and in the first half of the century the European community raised no objection to receiving Indian convicts,<sup>185</sup> although some argued that convict labour was inefficient, slow and ill-supervised, and there were complaints about convicts 'who sleep during the hours of labour and dance all night'.<sup>186</sup> But there was fierce objection to the transportation of Chinese convicts from Hong Kong, who, with the connivance of the secret societies, could easily escape into the general community. Chinese convicts were often shipped on ordinary passenger or cargo vessels, such as the *General Wood*, which sailed from Hong Kong for Singapore in January 1848 carrying ninety-three Chinese convicts. Within sight of Singapore they rose, murdered the captain, kidnapped the three European passengers and forced the crew to set sail for China. The ship

<sup>181</sup> *ST*, 27 June 1854.

<sup>182</sup> For detailed discussion of the convict question see C. M. Turnbull, 'Convicts in the Straits Settlements, 1826-67', *JMBRAS*, xliii, no. 1 (1970).

<sup>183</sup> J. Low, quoted in Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, i, 364.

<sup>184</sup> *ST*, 19 August 1845.

<sup>185</sup> G. F. Davidson, *Trade and Travel in the Far East* (London, 1846), p. 43.

<sup>186</sup> *ST*, 18, 25 March 1846.

ran aground, and Malays from a nearby island rescued the passengers and crew, killed some of the convicts and sent twenty-three captives back to Singapore.<sup>187</sup> This incident and the trial which followed provided a sensation in Singapore,<sup>188</sup> and led to appeals from the press and grand juries to stop transportation from Hong Kong.<sup>189</sup> The *Free Press* complained in 1851 that the Straits Settlements were 'the common sewer . . . for all the scum and refuse of the populations of nearly the whole British possessions in the East',<sup>190</sup> but it was only in 1856, after several years of agitation, that the transportation of Chinese convicts to the Straits was abandoned.<sup>191</sup>

There was no comparable fear of Indian convicts, who were allowed a freedom which astonished outside visitors.<sup>192</sup> Indian convicts often worked on roads and buildings without guards and sometimes were employed as domestic servants or in government offices. Initially this lax supervision was because the government lacked money to provide adequate guards, and long-term convicts with satisfactory records were appointed as petty officers in charge of other convicts.

Over the years a body of regulations was built up.<sup>193</sup> Convicts were divided into six classes. Class six comprised invalids, old men and most women convicts. The fifth class covered particularly violent prisoners and those demoted from other grades. Most convicts started in the fourth class, working in light irons. On good behaviour they were promoted to the third class, where they could work outside prison without irons and received a small wage. After a number of years' satisfactory service they reached the second class, where they could work as petty officers or peons in government departments, and finally they reached the first class, where they lived at liberty as ticket-of-leave men, provided they found someone to stand surety for

<sup>187</sup> *ST*, 19 February 1848.

<sup>188</sup> *ST*, 3, 24 May 1848; J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, pp. 285-91.

<sup>189</sup> *ST*, 4 March 1851.

<sup>190</sup> *SFP*, 25 July 1851.

<sup>191</sup> *ST*, 15 June 1852; *ST*, 3 July 1855; SSR, S 23, Items 39, 189; India to Directors, 16 August, 18 October 1856, IO, Letters from India and Bengal, vols. 105, 107; Directors to India, 8 April 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 104; *SFP*, 6 November 1856.

<sup>192</sup> T. Walrond (ed.), *Letters and Journals of James Eighth Earl of Elgin* (London, 1872), p. 189.

<sup>193</sup> Regulations of 16 February 1855, SSR, S 28, Item 112.

their good behaviour and reported for muster once a month.<sup>194</sup>

While the convict system was born of necessity, it soon came to be regarded with pride by administrators in the Straits,<sup>195</sup> for it was more advanced and enlightened than prison practice in Britain or her other overseas dependencies. Convicts were trained in useful trades, with a view to making them more productive as convict artificers and to furnishing them with the means to earn their living after their release. So acute was the shortage of Indian women that women convicts were in great demand as wives, and such care was devoted to providing for their future and releasing them to marry that the Resident Councillor of Penang complained in 1861 that the most hardened murderers never had to spend more than two or three years in jail.<sup>196</sup>

Despite the freedom granted them, very few Indian convicts absconded, and those who did were invariably given up by Chinese and Malays to claim the rewards on their heads.<sup>197</sup> A group of twenty-five convicts were trusted to accompany the first organized tiger hunt in Singapore in 1840, and from that time convicts were often taken on tiger shoots.<sup>198</sup> In 1860 Governor Cavenagh began sending out unsupervised first-class convicts in armed bands of half a dozen to hunt tigers.<sup>199</sup>

In the early days the European merchants complained mainly about the expense of keeping convicts,<sup>200</sup> but by 1855 the merchants began to look at transportation as a security threat to the Straits. These fears grew after the Indian Mutiny, when Calcutta sent mutineers and other dangerous prisoners from maximum security Indian jails to the open prisons of the Straits.<sup>201</sup> By that time the government of India had already

<sup>194</sup> J. F. A. McNair and W. D. Bayliss, *Prisoners their own Warders* (London, 1899). McNair came to Singapore in 1856 as Executive Engineer and Superintendent of Convicts. He was appointed first Colonial Engineer in 1867 and retired in 1884.

<sup>195</sup> McNair, *Prisoners*, passim; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 271-2.

<sup>196</sup> SSR, DD 34, Item 86.

<sup>197</sup> SSR, DD 26, Item 166; SSR, S 25, Item 220.

<sup>198</sup> ST, 13 June 1849.

<sup>199</sup> SSR, W 33, Item 57.

<sup>200</sup> SFP, 29 July 1841, 25 July, 26 September 1851.

<sup>201</sup> SSR, S 25, Items 229, 348, 354; SSR, R 32, pp. 92-4, 197-205, 246-7; SSR, V 23, p. 316; SSR, U 34, p. 223; SFP, 10 September, 19 November, 10 December 1857, 7, 14 January 1858; ST, 24 November, 15 December 1857; PG, 19 December 1857, 31 December 1857.

decided to revive an earlier project for establishing a penal settlement on the Andaman Islands and proposed to send dangerous criminals and mutineers there in future.<sup>202</sup> The decision was welcomed in Singapore by the merchants, the grand jury and the Recorder,<sup>203</sup> but for the Straits authorities the question of withdrawing the convicts hinged on the value of convict labour. McNair, the superintendent of convicts in Singapore, claimed in 1859 that convicts were 'still a positive advantage to this colony',<sup>204</sup> and Governor Cavenagh was afraid labour rates would soar once convicts disappeared. He wanted first to rush through a programme for draining swamps, building lighthouses and other public works.<sup>205</sup> Both the grand jury and the *Singapore Free Press* echoed Cavenagh's fears about the rising cost of labour and asked that the convicts should be withdrawn gradually.<sup>206</sup>

Since the value of convict labour could only be calculated on a theoretical basis, it is impossible to gauge whether the convicts were a burden or a benefit to the Straits in the final years of Indian rule. The press usually argued that convict labour was wasteful and inefficient,<sup>207</sup> a view that was supported by John Crawford and other former residents of the Straits in London.<sup>208</sup> Governors and officials, particularly those in charge of convicts, took a different view and considered convict labour economically profitable.<sup>209</sup> Their work was essential during the years of economy which followed the Mutiny,<sup>210</sup> and they were

<sup>202</sup> Directors to India, 8 April 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 104; SSR, S 25, Items 384, 354; N. Tarling, 'Pirates and Convicts: British interest in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the mid-nineteenth century', *Journal of Indian History*, xxxviii, no. 3 (1960), 522-6.

<sup>203</sup> SSR, V 24, pp. 69-70; SSR, W 26, Items 17, 40; *ST*, 16 January, 24 April 1858.

<sup>204</sup> SSR, W 30, Item 208.

<sup>205</sup> SSR, V 27, pp. 278-9; SSR, R 36, pp. 149-50; SSR, V 29, pp. 194-205.

<sup>206</sup> SSR, W 33, Item 89; *SFP*, 16 February, 1 March 1860.

<sup>207</sup> *ST*, 5 January 1861; *SFP*, 11 September 1862, 28 April 1864, 25 January 1866; *PG*, 23 April in *SFP*, 12 May 1864.

<sup>208</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, p. 628, a memorandum by J. Crawford subsequently published as *Suggestions for the Future Administration of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca* (London, 1861); PP, C[3672], 1866, lii, pp. 720-2.

<sup>209</sup> SSR, W 30, Item 208; SSR, DD 33, Item 70; SSR, DD 34, Item 86; SSR, W 39, Item 24; SSR, W 42, Item 220; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1858-9*.

<sup>210</sup> SSR, V 35, p. 59; SSR, W 41, Item 25.



invaluable in carrying out tasks which contractors and free labourers refused to undertake, such as building police stations in the wilds of Province Wellesley.<sup>211</sup>

All further transportation to the Straits was stopped in 1860.<sup>212</sup> The colonial office agreed to the government of India leaving the remaining convicts in the Straits, on the understanding that they should be withdrawn on two years' notice,<sup>213</sup> and the last Indian convicts were removed in 1873, six years after the Straits Settlements were transferred to colonial rule.

There are no statistics to show how far convicts and ex-convicts were directly involved in crime, but there was a subtle spread of criminal influence through the comparative freedom of the convict community, its contacts with the general public in religious celebrations, and the eventual release of convicts in the Straits, for until 1859 Calcutta did not provide return passages to India. Unlike the majority of Indian immigrants, most convicts came from northern India, and they included a variety of castes. Some were political prisoners, a few of high standing, but the bulk were thieves and murderers.

Apart from convicts, and the garrison with their camp followers, who during this period were drawn from Madras, the majority of Indian immigrants lived in the rural areas. With the exception of the Jawi-pekans they gave relatively little trouble to the authorities, but, essential though they were to the economy of the Straits, they did not arouse the same feeling of reluctant, exasperated admiration as the Chinese did among the Straits officials and leading western merchants. As Cameron wrote in 1864, the Indians were 'industrious and persevering and consequently valuable to the settlement but they have failed to obtain any measure of goodwill either from the Europeans or the other native races in the Straits'.<sup>214</sup>

Disparity of numbers between the sexes of the immigrant communities was a constant feature throughout this period

<sup>211</sup> SSR, DD 33, Item 70; SSR, DD 34, Item 86.

<sup>212</sup> Act XXXV of 1860; SSR, S 28, Item 193; Wood to India, 2 September 1859, NAI, Judicial Consultations, 16; Wood to India, 16 February 1861, IO, Judicial Despatches to India, vol. 4; *SFP*, 10 January 1861.

<sup>213</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, pp. 613-14, 615-16, 618-20.

<sup>214</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 147.

in the Straits Settlements and a source of grave concern to the authorities. The Malay, Bugis and Eurasian communities were well-balanced, but men outnumbered women among the Europeans by about two to one, and the discrepancy among the Indians and Chinese was enormous. The Chinese male population of Singapore numbered nearly 24,000 in 1849, compared with 1,451 women, few of whom were pure-blooded Chinese,<sup>215</sup> and in 1864 there was still only one Chinese woman to fifteen men.<sup>216</sup>

The government regarded this situation as socially and economically unhealthy, particularly among the Chinese. It encouraged shifting, rootless Chinese youths to become involved in crime and opened opportunities for the secret societies to thrive on prostitution. The authorities would have preferred Chinese immigrants to bring their families and settle permanently, investing their energies and their earnings in the settlements. The government was concerned about the drain of money which could have been used to develop the settlements. In a good year in the 1840s Chinese in Singapore consigned about \$70,000 in remittances to their families in China,<sup>217</sup> and by 1857 the amount had risen to \$250,000 or £60,000.<sup>218</sup>

Various solutions were suggested but none was tried out. In 1856 European merchants in Singapore offered to pay a bonus for Chinese to bring their wives to Singapore.<sup>219</sup> Five years later Governor Cavenagh suggested legalizing gambling and using part of the licence money to subsidize Chinese female immigration, thus weaning Chinese men from the gambling table to 'the comforts of a home' and providing a permanent resident labour force, 'a large body of contented as well as intelligent and industrious men'.<sup>220</sup> When the Chinese government relaxed its laws and permitted free emigration in 1860, it was hoped that respectable Chinese women would come to the Straits Settlements in large numbers.<sup>221</sup> This did not happen. Most of the young immigrants had no ambition to

<sup>215</sup> *JIA*, iv (1850), 106.

<sup>217</sup> *JIA*, i (1846), 35-7.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> *SFP*, 12 May 1859, 12 January, 25 October, 29 November 1860.

<sup>216</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 140.

<sup>218</sup> *SFP*, 16 April 1857.

<sup>220</sup> *SSR*, R 38, pp. 267-9.

settle permanently. A family would merely have been a brake on their endeavour to make their fortune and depart.

During a rebellion in Amoy in 1853 some wives and families came to join their husbands in Singapore temporarily.<sup>222</sup> But most of the Chinese women who came to the Straits were young girls sold into prostitution.<sup>223</sup> A correspondent to the *Free Press* complained in December 1863 that anyone could buy 'one . . . or one hundred [Chinese] women in the vicinity of the principal police station, at prices ranging from one hundred to four hundred dollars each'.<sup>224</sup> When a troopship arrived in Singapore *en route* from Hong Kong to India in 1865 carrying some young Chinese girl camp followers, a crowd of would-be purchasers besieged the court house in response to rumours that the government intended to auction them off.<sup>225</sup> The press called for an investigation into the traffic in women and girls in 1864,<sup>226</sup> but no attempt was made to control the trade until colonial times.

By 1860 the Straits Settlements had a total population of nearly 274,000. Penang (including Province Wellesley) was the most populous settlement with nearly 125,000 people, followed by Singapore with 81,000 and Malacca with 68,000.<sup>227</sup> In the remaining few years of Indian rule the population expanded rapidly in Singapore and Penang. The Malay population were settled and rooted, the Europeans usually spent their adult working life in the Straits, but the Indians and Chinese were floating, transitory communities. While population figures steadily increased, the individuals comprising the population changed rapidly. Fourteen thousand Chinese immigrants arrived in Singapore in 1863-4 but probably nine thousand others returned to China.<sup>228</sup> Of the three settlements, Singapore had the largest proportion of adults, the biggest floating population and the greatest disparity between the numbers of men and women.

<sup>222</sup> *SFP*, 6 January 1854.

<sup>223</sup> *SFP*, 19 November, 3 December 1863; Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 140.

<sup>224</sup> *SFP*, 3 December 1863, letter to Editor by 'A'.

<sup>225</sup> *SFP*, 6 April 1865.

<sup>226</sup> *SFP*, 21 January 1864.

<sup>227</sup> *SFP*, 17 January 1861.

<sup>228</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 140.

## CHAPTER II

# The Structure of Government

### EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIARY

IN COMMON with the other minor Indian presidencies of Madras and Bombay, the Straits Settlements in 1826 had a Governor and council responsible to the Governor General in Calcutta. In turn the Governor General was subordinate to the Court of Directors of the East India Company, and to the Board of Control, established under the terms of Pitt's India Act of 1784, as the dual government of the Company in London. The Straits Settlements council consisted of the Governor, and the senior official, or Resident Councillor, of each of the three settlements. Robert Fullerton,<sup>1</sup> who was appointed Governor of Penang in 1824, became the first Governor of the united Straits Settlements. In his vigorous efforts to organize the Straits Settlements into one unit, Fullerton was supported by a civil service headed by eighteen other regular covenanted officials of the Company. Under the terms of a royal charter granted in 1807 a Recorder was appointed by the crown to preside over a court in Penang in conjunction with the Governor and senior councillor, and in 1826 a second charter extended the jurisdiction of this court to Malacca and Singapore.

While Penang had held the status of a presidency since 1805, the government of India considered it to be inferior to the presidencies of Bombay and Madras. The Directors, bemoaning the great expense of Penang, cautioned the Governor in 1815, 'The disproportion appears to arise from a very erroneous idea of approximating your Presidency more closely with those of our other Indian governments.'<sup>2</sup> Madras and Bombay had

<sup>1</sup> ROBERT FULLERTON (1773-1831). Born in Scotland; served in Madras, 1789-1820; member of Madras Council, 1813-20; Governor of Penang, 1824-7; Governor Straits Settlements, 1827-30; returned to Britain, 1830.

<sup>2</sup> C. D. Cowan, 'Early Penang and the Rise of Singapore, 1805-32', *JMBRAS*, xxiii, no. 2 (1950), 5B.

inherited considerable legislative powers, but the Penang presidency council created in 1805 was given no powers to frame its own laws.

The Company hoped to make the Penang presidency pay its own way by uniting the Straits Settlements, but they continued to be a drain upon the Company's general revenues at a time of acute financial crisis in India itself. As a result of a costly war in Burma, the Company's accounts for the financial year 1825-6 showed a deficit of over £3,000,000, and the Directors feared these financial troubles might be used by parliament to refuse to renew the Company's charter when it expired in 1833. Only drastic economy could save the East India Company, and Lord William Bentinck arrived in India as Governor General in 1828 with a programme of financial retrenchment. The administration of the Straits Settlements offered obvious scope for economies, and in 1829 the Directors decided to abolish the presidency and bring the Straits Settlements under the control of the Bengal presidency.<sup>3</sup> They considered the administration of the Straits so uncomplicated and so unimportant that they were prepared to convert the three stations into separate residencies, each supervised by subordinate officials in direct contact with Bengal. Bentinck did not favour so drastic a change. He visited Penang in 1829 and decided to retain the settlements as one unit, to be administered from Penang by a Resident. The establishment of covenanted officials was reduced from nineteen to eight: the Resident; a first Assistant, stationed in Singapore; two deputy Residents, one in Penang and the second in Malacca; and four Assistants, one each in Singapore, Malacca, Penang and Province Wellesley. The rest of the administration was to be carried out by uncovenanted officials appointed locally.

When Fullerton submitted details of the civil establishment as finally revised in 1830, he warned the Governor General that the schedule was 'founded on the laudable desire of meeting the existing views of economy rather than the conviction that it will prove adequate for the efficient performance of the duties

<sup>3</sup> Directors to Fullerton, 15 April 1829, SSR, C 6; Cowan, *JMBRAS*, xxiii, no. 2 (1950), 16-17; J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iv (1850), 360-1.

required'.<sup>4</sup> But the establishment laid down in 1830 survived almost unchanged up to the time of the transfer of the settlements to the colonial office thirty-seven years later. The reorganization of the Straits Settlements played its part in helping to save the Company and to secure the renewal of its charter in 1833, but in the process the 'clipping Dutchman', as Bentinck was dubbed, left an organization which was inadequate to cope with the future expansion of trade and population.

The retrenchment and reorganization of 1830 also weakened the executive administration in the Straits Settlements by abolishing the executive council and bringing the settlements into the overgrown presidency of Bengal, which already stretched from Delhi to Tenasserim, and was ill-prepared to take in extra territory, particularly a region so different in character as the Straits Settlements. It would be wrong, however, to exaggerate the blow to the Straits' legislative functions, since the reduction of status in 1830 abolished only a potential legislative power which had never been allowed to take root.

The most immediate result of the abolition of the presidency was to produce a judicial crisis. The office and title of Governor and Resident Councillor disappeared with the presidency and its council in June 1830, and since there was no incumbent Recorder, Fullerton held that no-one was legally entitled to administer justice until a new charter was granted.<sup>5</sup> He closed the courts and dismissed the establishment of peons, writers and oath-takers.

The absence of a Recorder arose from difficulty in administering the judicial charter of 1826. Under the terms of this charter the Recorder kept his headquarters in Penang but was to travel on circuit, judging cases at each station in conjunction with the Governor and Resident Councillor. This arrangement immediately caused trouble. Since the death of the last Recorder of Penang in 1824, Fullerton and his senior councillor had administered the courts without professional help and apparently to the satisfaction of the residents. The arrival in 1827 of Sir John Claridge, first Recorder of the Straits Settlements, put an end to this period of calm. Within two months of assuming

<sup>4</sup> SSR, U 4, Item 294.

<sup>5</sup> SSR, Z 6, pp. 20-31.

office, the new Recorder adjourned the court in Penang in protest because his lay colleagues were not attending court and leaving all the work to him and his small staff. Arguments about the type of ship on which he was entitled to travel when proceeding on circuit and disputes about his eligibility for passages at government expense, threatened the breakdown of the judicial system altogether. Claridge refused to leave Penang on circuit, and Fullerton was forced to hold assizes himself in Singapore and Malacca. In 1828 Claridge went to Calcutta to complain about Fullerton's behaviour, but this visit achieved nothing, and the relationship between Governor and Recorder became more strained after Claridge's return.<sup>6</sup> In response to persistent complaints from Fullerton, Claridge was recalled in 1829, to face charges of insubordination,<sup>7</sup> and the Governor was left in sole control of the judicial establishment. Despite the Recorder's subsequent acquittal, and his frequent applications and entreaties, culminating in a final appeal on his behalf by Gladstone to the British parliament in 1845,<sup>8</sup> the unfortunate Claridge never succeeded in obtaining another post.

Fullerton's interpretation of the legal position and his closure of the courts in 1830 produced chaos. The jails were full of prisoners awaiting trial, and business threatened to come to a standstill, particularly in the thriving commercial centre of Singapore, where the first Assistant in desperation opened his own court, but had to close it when the acting registrar ruled it was illegal. By September 1831 the situation was so bad that the English-speaking merchants of Singapore and Penang drew

<sup>6</sup> J. W. N. Kyshe, *Cases Heard and Determined in H.M. Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements, 1808-84* (Singapore, 1885), vol. i, pp. lvi-lvii, lxii, lxiv-lxvi; Claridge to Fullerton, 5 May 1828, and Fullerton to Claridge, 6 July 1828, SSR, A 24; Minutes of Governor in Council, 20 July 1828, Fullerton to Claridge, 1 October 1828, Minutes of Recorder in Council, 8 October 1828, SSR, Z 2; Recorder to Grand Jury Singapore, 16 February 1829, SSR, Z 3, in *Asiatic Journal*, xxviii (1829), 355-7; Claridge to Fullerton, 6 March 1829, SSR, Z 3.

<sup>7</sup> Fullerton to Directors, 7 December 1827, 12 February, 12 May, 25 July 1828, Directors to Fullerton, 15 April 1829, SSR, C 6; J. T. Claridge, *A Statement relating to the Appointment of Sir John Thomas Claridge to the Recordership of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca* (London, 1835).

<sup>8</sup> Kyshe, *Cases*, vol. i, p. lxviii; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. C, 1848, cols. 812-16.

up petitions to the British parliament.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile the Directors ruled that Fullerton's interpretation was wrong and the courts should not have been closed. They were reopened in April 1832.<sup>10</sup> To avoid further doubts, the titles of Governor and Resident Councillor was resurrected, but in name only. The Resident assumed the title of Governor, while his first Assistant and deputy Residents took up the old designation of Resident Councillors. This was a technical convenience, and the grandiose titles reflected no restoration of real power. The Governor of the Straits Settlements during the remaining years of Indian rule was in practice a mere Resident and ranked low in the Indian civil service hierarchy, while the title of Resident Councillor was a misnomer since the council had disappeared.

The abolition of the presidency in 1830 created only a short-lived judicial crisis but it inflicted lasting damage on the efficiency of the civil service. Even more important were the effects of the Charter Act of 1833, which renewed the East India Company's charter for another twenty years but abolished the Company's monopoly of the China trade, thus destroying its interest in the Straits Settlements. At the same time the Charter Act sought to strengthen the government of India by transferring power from the outlying provinces into the hands of the Governor General in Calcutta. While the Straits Settlements were not directly concerned with the immense internal problems which beset India or with the fate of Indian institutions and traditions, the attempts to strengthen the central government in Calcutta proved vitally important to the Company's eastern settlements. During the parliamentary debate which preceded the renewal of the Company's charter, Macaulay said, 'We are trying . . . to give a good government to a people to whom we cannot give a free government.'<sup>11</sup> The Company's unwieldy dual government, with ultimate control in

<sup>9</sup> *Singapore Chronicle*, 13 October, 24 November 1831; Kyshe, *Cases*, vol. i, p. lxviii.

<sup>10</sup> SSR, M 6, pp. 42-51; Bengal to Resident, 14 February 1832, SSR, S 2; NAI, Public Consultations, 20 February 1832, no. 42; SSR, Z 7, p. 163; Resident to Bengal, 30 April 1832, SSR, R 1; J. Anderson, 'On the Administration of Justice in the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca, and the Government of Penang, Singapore and Malacca', *Asiatic Journal*, xxxi (1840), 249.

<sup>11</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser., xix, 512-13, quoted in *Cambridge History of India*, vi, 3.



the hands of the Court of Directors and the Board of Control, remained almost unchanged by the Charter Act of 1833. Bentinck's demands for firm centralized control within India itself were met by the transfer of the legislative powers of the minor presidency councils to the Governor General's council in Calcutta, augmented for legislative purposes by a 'law member' appointed from England. The result was over-centralization in legislation and administration, the concerns of the outlying provinces becoming increasingly submerged in the growing problems of the Bengal presidency, while reliance upon the cumbersome home government of the Company in the days of sail made administration slow. The territories to suffer most from the growing inefficiency in administration were those like the Straits Settlements, whose communication links with the seat of government were weakest and whose problems were most divorced from those of Calcutta.

The Straits Governors, stripped of most of the executive powers previously attached to their office, lacked the support of a local legislative council, which could have provided protection against irresponsible opposition from the merchant community and strengthened their hand in negotiating with Calcutta. They faced strong rivals in the Recorders, who enjoyed a high degree of personal independence, although the judiciary as a whole was controlled by the Straits authorities. With the support only of a weak civil service, the Governor's administration became decreasingly effective in dealing with increasingly complex problems. After 1830 the Governors of the Straits had no direct contact with the Directors or the Board of Control in London: all correspondence had to pass through Calcutta. Most transactions in the Straits became known in London through the quarterly narratives submitted to Calcutta. These were often years in arrear, so that it might be three or four years before the Directors were aware of what had happened or able to reverse a decision made in Calcutta. In commenting on nearly every narrative of the proceedings of the Straits Settlements, the Directors complained that Calcutta was not keeping them informed of decisions affecting the Straits. Open to pressure in parliament and more conscious of the general demands of British trade than the government of India,

the Directors often supported the Straits Settlements against the enforcement of damaging Indian legislation, but the machinery of the Court of Directors worked slowly, even on questions which they themselves considered urgent. As the Company's trade privileges shrank with each renewal of its charter, the Directors became less powerful in relation to the Board of Control, until by 1853 the president of the Board was virtually a secretary of state for Indian affairs and could dictate terms to the Directors.<sup>12</sup> On the few occasions when the Board of Control came into conflict with the Directors on policy in the Straits Settlements, the president of the Board was able to overrule the Directors' caution.

In 1851 the Straits Settlements were transferred from the Bengal presidency to the direct supervision of the Governor General and the supreme government of India,<sup>13</sup> but this made little difference in practice to the administration. The changes in government in India brought about by the act renewing the Company's charter in 1853 were more important to the Straits Settlements, because they included the remodelling of the legislative council of India. The new legislative council, which came into being in May 1854, contained one member from each subordinate presidency, together with the chief justice of Calcutta and one puisne judge. The Straits Settlements had no representative on the council, but its deliberations were to be published, and the merchant community in the Straits expected that the new body would be more vigorous in promoting their interests than the old legislative department. In this they were disappointed. In 1857 the European merchants of Singapore petitioned for the Straits Settlements to be put under the direct rule of the crown, and ten years later the Settlements became a crown colony.

Meanwhile the abolition of the East India Company in 1858, and the transfer of its territories to the British crown to be administered through the India Office in London, produced little change in the relationship of the Straits Settlements with

<sup>12</sup> J. W. Kaye, *The Administration of the East India Company* (London, 1853), pp. 131-3; C. H. Philips, *The East India Company, 1784-1894* (Manchester, 1959), pp. 297-8.

<sup>13</sup> Kyshe, *Cases*, vol. i, p. lxxxix.

Calcutta or the home government. The Governor occasionally consulted the secretary of state for India independently, but only on questions of unusual importance or urgency, and the machinery at the India Office for coping with routine questions referred from Calcutta was almost as cumbersome as in the days of the Directors and the Board of Control.

The Directors of the East India Company were opposed to granting a colonial-type constitution, which would put power in the hands of British non-officials in India, possibly to the detriment of the indigenous population,<sup>14</sup> but in 1861, after the end of the Company's rule and in response to agitation in Britain and from the Bengal chamber of commerce and Calcutta press,<sup>15</sup> the Governor General's councils were remodelled, and nominated non-officials were appointed for the first time to the legislative council. No representatives were admitted from the Straits Settlements.

Before 1830 the post of Governor of the eastern presidency attracted influential and ambitious men, such as Colonel James Bannerman, a Director of the East India Company, and Robert Fullerton, a former member of the Madras council. With the abolition of presidency status and the departure of Fullerton in 1830, Straits Governors were recruited at a lower level. They were either Straits civil servants, promoted on account of seniority, or military officers of the Indian army. Of the Governors who rose from the civil service, none had served in continental India and few had any administrative experience outside of the Straits Settlements. None had any personal influence with the Directors or the Board of Control in London, nor with the Governor General and his senior officials in Calcutta. The two military men appointed as Governor were in a stronger position and their word carried more weight, since they had served in India and were known personally in Calcutta. But for them too the governorship marked a final reward in worthy but undistinguished careers. The governorship

<sup>14</sup> J. S. Mill, *Memorandum on the Improvements in the Administration of India during the Last Thirty Years* (London, 1858), pp. 111-29.

<sup>15</sup> NAI, Home Consultations Public, 15 April 1859, nos. 9-11; *ST*, 5 January 1861.

was a relatively undemanding post with no future prospects—certainly none within the framework of service in India. Only one of the Governors appointed during Indian rule achieved success later in public life. This was George Bonham, Governor of the Straits from 1836 to 1843, who was appointed Governor of Hong Kong in 1848.

Fullerton's immediate successor, Robert Ibbetson, became Governor in 1830 as the sole survivor of the officials appointed to the new Penang presidency in 1805. Ibbetson profited more than most from the rules permitting officials to own land, and when the prohibition on land ownership was extended to the Straits, he found it more profitable to give up his career than his estates. When he retired to England in 1833, his plantations were reputed to be worth £10,000 a year,<sup>16</sup> but the collapse of nutmeg cultivation in the Straits twenty years later forced him to return to Penang to earn a new livelihood planting cocoa. He was still there when the colonial regime was introduced in 1867. To Archibald Anson, the first colonial lieutenant Governor of Penang, who used to entertain Ibbetson to dinner once a week, the old man provided a never-ending source of patronizing wonderment at the slapdash and careless way in which government business had been conducted in his day. Ibbetson retired once more in 1869 and died ten years later in England at the age of ninety-two.

Ibbetson was followed by Kenneth Murchison, who made light work of his duties. After officially assuming office in December 1833, Murchison set off on the same day and on the same ship as his predecessor for a holiday in Cape Colony, leaving George Bonham, the Resident Councillor of Singapore,<sup>17</sup> to administer the Settlements. Murchison spent the major part of his period as Governor abroad, returning in June 1835 and retiring the following year, when Bonham as the most senior civil servant took over officially as Governor and retained the post until 1843, providing the first effective leadership since the departure of Fullerton.

<sup>16</sup> A. Anson, *About Others and Myself, 1745-1920* (London, 1920), p. 285.

<sup>17</sup> SAMUEL GEORGE BONHAM (1803-63). Joined East India Company as writer in Bencoolen, 1818; Assistant Resident Singapore, 1823; Resident Councillor Singapore, 1833; Governor Straits Settlements, 1836-43; Governor Hong Kong, 1848-53; created baronet 1853. *DNB*, ii, 807.

Bonham was succeeded by William John Butterworth, a colonel of the Madras army,<sup>18</sup> who was Governor from 1843 until 1855. On Butterworth's retirement his place was taken by Edmund Augustus Blundell, the most senior civil servant in the Straits,<sup>19</sup> who was Governor from 1855 to 1859. The last of the Indian Governors was another military man, Colonel Orfeur Cavenagh,<sup>20</sup> who arrived in the Straits in 1859 and administered the Settlements until they were taken over by the colonial office in 1867.

The diminished status of the Governors contributed to the strain and friction between the executive and judiciary, which troubled the political situation in the Straits Settlements throughout the Indian regime and extended into the early years of colonial rule. The charter of justice contained the germ of professional bitterness. While the Recorder was appointed and could only be dismissed by the crown and was personally almost independent of the Company, his legal judgments could be overruled by the Governor as president of the court. After 1830 the atmosphere was made tense by personal jealousy, clash of ambition and a struggle for status between the Governors and Recorders. The Recorders were usually men of education, drive and ambition, whereas the Governors after 1830 were generally mediocrities. Most of the Governors knew that the Straits Settlements marked the end of their careers, but the Recorders could look on their stay as a stepping-stone to promotion. The majority of the Recorders who served in the Straits from 1808 until the transfer to the colonial office in 1867 were promoted: one became chief justice of Calcutta, one chief justice of Bombay and three chief justice of Madras. Most of the Recorders

<sup>18</sup> WILLIAM JOHN BUTTERWORTH. Joined Madras army 1818; Lieutenant Colonel, 1841; Major General, 1854; Governor Straits Settlements, 1843-55; died in England, 1856. *ST*, 3 April 1845; *SFP*, 25 December 1856.

<sup>19</sup> EDMUND AUGUSTUS BLUNDELL. Joined Penang civil service, 1821; Commissioner of Tenasserim, 1833-43; acting Governor Straits Settlements, June 1843; Resident Councillor Malacca, 1847-9; Resident Councillor Penang, 1849-55, and acting Governor, 1851-3; Governor Straits Settlements, 1855-9; retired to England, 1859.

<sup>20</sup> ORFEUR CAVENAGH (1821-91). Town Major Fort William, 1854-9; Governor Straits Settlements, 1859-67; Major General, 1864; retired, 1867; Lieutenant General, 1874; K.C.S.I. 1881. *DIB*, p. 76; W. Makepeace, G. E. Brooke, R. Braddell (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore* (London, 1921), i, 91-4.

earned an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and obituary notices in the *London Times*. Of the Governors, only Bonham was listed in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and then as Governor of Hong Kong. With the exception of Cavenagh, the others did not even gain a mention in the *Dictionary of Indian Biography*.

For many years the Recorders received higher salaries than the Governors and much more than the Resident Councillors. In 1830 the Governor's salary was reduced to Rs. 36,000 a year, while the Recorder's remained at the figure of \$18,000 (more than Rs. 39,000) laid down by the 1826 charter.<sup>21</sup> The Governor received no increase until 1852 when his salary was raised to Rs. 42,000 a year.<sup>22</sup> The situation was very different from continental India, where from 1773 the Governor General received £25,000 a year and the councillors £10,000, compared with £8,000 for the chief justice and £6,000 for the puisne judges.<sup>23</sup> The personal relations between Recorder and Governor were also soured by jealousy. The Recorders were granted knighthoods on their appointment, an honour which none of the Governors under the Indian regime achieved during his period of office. Governors pleaded in vain that this distinction should be abolished, feeling that a sense of social superiority fostered obstinate independence in the Recorders.<sup>24</sup>

The Recorders frequently showed contempt for their lay colleagues on the bench, both Governors and Resident Councillors, as old-fashioned and out of touch with new ideas and developments in Europe. Usually the Recorders came straight from England, whereas senior covenanted officials, who under the Company's rules of leave could draw their full allowances only if they remained east of the Cape of Good Hope, invariably spent their entire career in the East, taking their infrequent vacations in Australia or Cape Colony.

These personal differences put added strain on a judicial

<sup>21</sup> India to Fullerton, 4 May 1830, SSR, C 6.

<sup>22</sup> SSR, S 19, Item 84.

<sup>23</sup> C. Ilbert, *The Government of India: a Brief Historical Survey of Parliamentary Legislation relating to India* (Oxford, 1922), p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> 'Report of Indian Law Commissioners on the Straits Settlements', p. 5, in India to Governor, 17 June 1842, SSR, S 9; Cavenagh to Secretary of State for India, 22 October 1865, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued correspondence.

system which was inherently unsound, since the Governor had authority to overrule the Recorder's legal judgments, and after 1830 the growing pressure of court business, as the Straits Settlements expanded while the judicial establishment remained the same, meant that the Resident Councillors in Singapore and Malacca had to shoulder an increasing burden of judicial administration. This concentration of judicial and executive power in the hands of the Resident Councillors was one of the most strongly criticized aspects of the whole Indian administration in the Straits Settlements. From time to time doubts were cast on the legality of courts held without the Recorder, but until 1856, when a second Recorder was appointed, the Resident Councillor transacted most of the civil business of the Singapore court, leaving only serious criminal cases for the periodic visits of the Recorder.

While the Recorders and many of the mercantile community in the Straits wanted to see the judicial power of the Governor and Resident Councillors eliminated, in the early years the Governors argued for the abolition of the judiciary. The stormy interlude with Claridge led Fullerton in February 1829 to describe the Recorder's court as 'more expensive and worse adapted than any system which could be devised',<sup>25</sup> and to suggest that it should be replaced by courts over which the Governor or Resident Councillors should preside, if necessary with the help of merchant assessors.<sup>26</sup> Calcutta did not abolish the Recorder's court but in 1829 put it high on the list of priorities on which future savings could if necessary be made.<sup>27</sup> During the 1830s various proposals were made by the executive for the abolition of the Recorder's court. George Bonham, as acting Governor in 1834, suggested that the Governor and Resident Councillors be left to administer justice, with occasional visits from one of the Calcutta judges.<sup>28</sup> Kenneth Murchison, Governor in 1836, proposed that instead of a full-time Recorder or visiting judge, Singapore needed a resident lawyer, subordinate to the Governor.<sup>29</sup> As a counter, Sir

<sup>25</sup> Kyshe, *Cases*, vol. i, p. lxviii.

<sup>26</sup> Fullerton's minute, 1 February 1829, SSR, A 64.

<sup>27</sup> India to Fullerton, 15 April 1829, SSR, C 6.

<sup>28</sup> SSR, R 3, no. 47.

<sup>29</sup> 'Report of Indian Law Commissioners on the Straits Settlements', p. 5, in India to Governor, 17 June 1842, SSR, S 9.

Benjamin Malkin,<sup>30</sup> who was appointed Recorder at the end of the two-year period of judicial chaos which followed the abolition of the presidency and was one of the most distinguished and erudite judges ever appointed to the Straits Settlements, suggested that it was the Governor who should be retrenched since he was a mere cipher and all decisions were made in Calcutta. Certainly no Governor could have seemed more superfluous than Murchison, who departed on leave on the day of his appointment as Governor a few months after Malkin's arrival and did not return until the Recorder was on the point of departing nearly two years later. Even Malkin did not think the settlements could support a full-time Recorder, and he suggested that the judge should be a fourth member of the Calcutta bench, visiting the Straits on circuit.<sup>31</sup>

By that time an Indian law commission was considering the reorganization of the administration of law throughout India, and in 1839 the question of the Straits Settlements was referred to it. In comparison with continental India, which had five different bodies of law introduced by the British, in addition to Hindu and Moslem law, the problem in the Straits Settlements was simple. Since the islands of Penang and Singapore were almost uninhabited at the time of their occupation, English law was applied wherever it did not conflict with the religious and marital customs of non-Christian settlers.<sup>32</sup> All that was needed was to find a satisfactory and economical way of administering it.

The Indian law commissioners issued their report in 1842. They rejected recommendations to leave the administration of justice to civil servants, but they agreed the existing machinery was too expensive and considered a competent judge could be recruited for less than half the salary then paid to the Recorder.<sup>33</sup> The report pleased neither the Governor nor the Recorder,<sup>34</sup> but

<sup>30</sup> Sir Benjamin Malkin, Recorder Straits Settlements, 1833-5; Chief Justice Calcutta, 1835.

<sup>31</sup> Kyshe, *Cases*, vol. i, p. lxxviii.

<sup>32</sup> P. B. Maxwell, 'The Law of England in Penang, Malacca and Singapore,' *JIA*, n.s. iii (1859), 26-55.

<sup>33</sup> 'Report of Indian Law Commissioners on the Straits Settlements', in India to Governor, 17 June 1842, SSR, S 9.

<sup>34</sup> Kyshe, *Cases*, vol. i, pp. lxxxii-lxxxiii, lxxviii; SSR, R 8, no. 123.



in any event discussion was unfruitful, for the government of India was so preoccupied with internal troubles that none of the commission's recommendations was implemented in the Straits Settlements.

Meanwhile a quiet revolution was taking place in the relationship of the government and the judiciary in the Straits Settlements. With the increase of population in the settlements in the 1840s and the growing pressure of business in the court, the executive officials and the community came to accept the need not merely to retain but to increase the Recorder's establishment. George Bonham, who in 1834 had wanted to abolish the Recorder's court, was won round by the time he retired as Governor in 1843 to the view that a professional judge was necessary.<sup>35</sup> This softening of his attitude was helped by the character of Malkin's successor, Sir William Norris, who was Recorder from 1836 to 1847. While Norris declared his opposition in principle to lay officials combining executive and judicial functions, in practice he was a lazy judge who disliked stirring from Penang, and he was content to sink his scruples and leave his lay colleagues to judge nearly all the civil and criminal cases in Singapore and Malacca, even on occasion capital offences.<sup>36</sup> During his eleven years in the Straits, Norris's relationship with the Governors was unexpectedly placid, largely because they rarely met.

Bonham took an energetic part in administering justice in Singapore, but his successor, Butterworth, a soldier and a stranger to the Straits Settlements, lacked the experience and taste for court work, which he left to the Resident Councillor. Thomas Church, Resident Councillor of Singapore from 1837 to 1855, shouldered an increasing burden until by the time he retired he was coping with nearly all the civil and all but the most important criminal cases in Singapore. With the Resident Councillor absorbed in the law court, his day-to-day administration of the settlement suffered. The press and the European merchants began to agitate not only to retain a professional Recorder, but to appoint a separate judge for Singapore.

Eventually in 1855 the British parliament granted a new charter of justice for the Straits, which provided for the

<sup>35</sup> SSR, R 8, no. 123.

<sup>36</sup> SFP, 5 March 1840.

appointment of a second Recorder and incorporated admiralty jurisdiction granted in 1837 and insolvency jurisdiction granted in 1848. Otherwise the new charter merely repeated the terms of the 1826 charter. The court was split into two: a Singapore and Malacca division, and a Penang division.

Before the charter could be implemented the administration of justice almost broke down with the sudden death of Sir William Jeffcott, the incumbent Recorder, in October 1855. Thomas Church, himself on the brink of retirement, had to close the Singapore court in October 1855 to catch up on arrears in his executive duties,<sup>37</sup> and it remained closed until the arrival of the two new Recorders in March 1856: Sir Richard McCausland for Singapore and Sir Benson Maxwell for Penang.<sup>38</sup>

McCausland, who remained Recorder of Singapore until his retirement in 1866, crossed swords occasionally with the Governors, but in general this genial and popular Irishman was on easy terms with them and he was too hard-worked to become involved in local politics. The situation was different in Penang, where Maxwell had abundant leisure and a taste for exposing and attacking abuses. He found plenty of scope in the judicial system, which had grown up haphazardly and fallen victim, like other branches of government, to the economy campaign after 1830. Some officials, such as the registrar, were overburdened with work, whereas others, such as the sealer and the sheriff, did almost nothing. There was no public prosecutor nor crown counsel, the standard of legal pleading was low and it was difficult to recruit interpreters. Perjury was scandalous, and no means could be found to devise suitable forms for taking oaths. Witnesses were reluctant to incur trouble and expense in coming to give evidence. There were many complaints about the unsatisfactory nature of the lower magistrates' courts administered by young Bengal civil servants or military officers with

<sup>37</sup> *SFP*, 9 October 1855. •

<sup>38</sup> SIR PETER BENSON MAXWELL (1816-93). Called to bar, 1841; member of commission to investigate hospitals in the Crimean War; Recorder of Penang, 1856-66; Recorder of Singapore, 1866-7; Chief Justice Straits Settlements, 1867-1871; retired, 1871; reorganized judicial tribunals of Egypt, 1883-5; author of several legal works, including *The Duties of Straits Magistrates*, 1866. His most famous work was *On the Interpretation of Statutes* (London, 1875). *DNB*, Supp. xxii, 1030; obituary notice, *The Times*, 18 January 1893.

no knowledge of the law or experience of the Straits Settlements. There were cases of witnesses put in jail while the accused were allowed bail, of witnesses imprisoned for perjury when they could not understand questions, and one magistrate threatening to jail people who coughed for contempt of court.<sup>39</sup>

Apart from creating a second Recorder, the 1855 charter provided for no additional staff, and the Directors ordered the former court officials to be shared between the two divisions of the court.<sup>40</sup> Wherever posts were duplicated, the existing salaries had to be divided. The most hard-hit official was the registrar, who after serving for thirty-seven years as registrar of the combined court, found his salary halved and resigned in protest.<sup>41</sup> In 1858, with the public backing of Maxwell, the Penang registrar and his staff insisted on taking fees instead of their official salaries, and the Singapore registrar quickly followed suit.<sup>42</sup> From that time litigation increased sharply, and by 1860 the registrars were earning more than the Recorders themselves,<sup>43</sup> but in March 1861 court officials were instructed to take fixed salaries instead of fees,<sup>44</sup> and in the twelve months which followed litigation dwindled rapidly.<sup>45</sup>

Maxwell embarked with great vigour on an attack upon the near sinecures of sealer and high sheriff. To the annoyance of the Governor, Edmund Blundell, who had begun negotiations with Calcutta for abolishing the offices in 1852,<sup>46</sup> Maxwell urged the immediate elimination of the two posts and payment of more generous salaries to the deputy sheriffs who did the actual work, without waiting to refer the matter to India.<sup>47</sup> Maxwell stirred up support from the press and the Penang grand jury,<sup>48</sup> and when the government of India agreed to abolish the office

<sup>39</sup> *SFP*, 26 December 1851.

<sup>40</sup> *SSR*, S 23, Item 78.

<sup>41</sup> *SSR*, S 23, Item 8.

<sup>42</sup> *SSR*, DD 28, Items 235, 239, 252; *SSR*, V 26, p. 115; *SSR*, R 35, pp. 77-84, 263-6; *SSR*, W 29, Item 153; *SSR*, W 30, Item 254.

<sup>43</sup> *SSR*, R 38 pp. 71-8.

<sup>44</sup> India to Cavenagh, 29 April 1861, *SSR*, X 21.\*

<sup>45</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*.

<sup>46</sup> Blundell to India, 20 December 1852, *SSR*, R 16; *SSR*, U 32, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> *SSR*, V 22, pp. 248-53; *SSR*, W 25, Items 407, 460; *SSR*, R 32, pp. 206-11.

<sup>48</sup> *SSR*, W 25, Items 418, 475; *SSR*, W 28, Items 230, 418; *SSR*, V 25, pp. 303-4; *SSR*, DD 28, Item 239; *SSR*, R 33, pp. 315-17; *SSR*, R 35, pp. 80-4; *PG*, 6, 13 February, 14 August 1858 in *SFP*, 25 February, 26 August 1858; *SFP*, 1 April 1858, 5 January, 10 March 1859.

of sealer in 1857 and that of high sheriff in 1859,<sup>49</sup> Blundell found to his chagrin that it was Maxwell who received all the public praise.<sup>50</sup>

In the final years of Indian rule, considerable improvements were made in the administration of justice. The lower courts were reformed and their jurisdiction enlarged. The standard of interpreting was improved. Hitherto interpreters were so badly paid that no competent men could be recruited, but Calcutta had persistently refused to raise salaries.<sup>51</sup> In Penang the Tamil interpreter, who joined government service in Penang in 1805 and became interpreter in 1827, had his salary halved when the court was divided in 1855, and he continued to totter into court, senile, deaf and blind until he died in 1859, after which no-one could be found to replace him.<sup>52</sup> In 1861 the *Singapore Free Press* argued that Singapore had 'not a single competent interpreter of the Chinese language',<sup>53</sup> and this created a dangerous situation when the judges and magistrates themselves knew no Chinese or Tamil and sometimes very little Malay. As a result of Governor Cavenagh's persistence, the number of interpreters' posts was reduced to enable more attractive salaries to be paid to the remainder, and in 1864 he persuaded the government of India to pay half the salary for a teacher to train Chinese interpreters at the Singapore Institution school.<sup>54</sup>

In such a cosmopolitan society it was difficult to devise a reliable method for taking oaths, and no legal deterrent could be found for perjury, which most of the population did not regard as a social crime. Influential Chinese were appalled when a prominent Chinese trader was sentenced to seven years' transportation for perjury in 1859 and sent a memorial on his behalf, urging that the sentence was unduly harsh, 'particularly towards an Asiatic whose moral education is unequal to the

<sup>49</sup> SSR, V 22, pp. 252-3; SSR, W 24, Item 242; SSR, W 25, Items 478, 486; SSR, V 24, pp. 9-10, 11-12; SSR, R 32, pp. 228-9; SSR, R 35, pp. 56-64.

<sup>50</sup> *SFP*, 1 April 1858, 5 January, 10 March 1859.

<sup>51</sup> SSR, V 22, pp. 309-10.

<sup>52</sup> SSR, W 32, Item 526; SSR, W 33, Item 72; SSR, W 36, Item 221; SSR, W 47, Item 69; *SFP*, 6 July 1863.

<sup>53</sup> *SFP*, 11 April 1861.

<sup>54</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 5-11; SSR, S 32, Item 212.

standard of European civilisation'.<sup>55</sup> In 1862 there was panic among the *chettians*, who were the main suitors in the Malacca court of requests, when one of them was transported for perjury.<sup>56</sup>

The Indian legislative council approved a penal code for India in 1860 but was reluctant to extend the code to the Straits Settlements, which would probably soon be transferred to the colonial office.<sup>57</sup> The delay caused such inconvenience that eventually, after persistent agitation by Cavenagh, legislation to apply the Indian penal code in the Straits was passed, but it was not brought into effect until 1871.<sup>58</sup>

The appointment of a crown counsel in Singapore in 1864 and a public prosecutor in Penang the following year marked a considerable reform,<sup>59</sup> but arrangements for legal pleading remained haphazard. All three charters of justice provided that suitors might be represented by agents licensed by the court, but no qualifications were stipulated for such agents. The standard of pleading was often very bad, particularly in medical matters. A Dr John Robertson was so appalled by medical evidence tendered at a murder trial which he attended in Singapore in 1860, that he published a pamphlet entitled *Medical jurisprudence in Singapore*, which attracted considerable interest among doctors and lawyers in Britain and prompted the *Edinburgh Evening Post* to declare that 'the system could not obtain even in the darkest corner of Europe'.<sup>60</sup> The first fully qualified lawyer was John Simons Atchison, who was admitted to the Singapore bar in 1859. In the 1860s Gray's Inn made arrangements for law agents to be called to the bar in a short time, provided they practised only in the Straits. In 1865 there

<sup>55</sup> SSR, W 31, Items 350, 429, 430, 435, 478; SSR, V 27, pp. 46-8, 69-70, 220-1.

<sup>56</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-3*.

<sup>57</sup> Directors to India, 19 August 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 107; SSR, R 38, p. 318; SSR, R 39, pp. 102-5; Secretary of State to India, 23 November 1861, IO, Judicial Despatches to India, vol. 4; IO to CO, November 1861, CO 144/20; SSR, S 30, Item 5.

<sup>58</sup> Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 2nd ser., vi (1867), 44-50.

<sup>59</sup> *Kyshe, Cases*, vol. i, p. lxxxv; SSR, W 49, Items 48, 54, 151; SSR, W 50, Item 234; SFP, 18 January 1866.

<sup>60</sup> *Edinburgh Evening Post*, 17 April 1861; *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, February 1861; SSR, W 39, Item 14.

were thirteen licensed law agents in the Straits, all of them Europeans,<sup>61</sup> but it was not until 1873 that law agents were required to obtain British qualifications as barristers or solicitors prior to admission to the Straits bar.<sup>62</sup>

The charters of 1807, 1826 and 1855 all provided for a grand jury of between thirteen and twenty-three members, and for a petit jury of twelve in minor cases. After 1849 service on the grand jury was confined to the partners in commercial houses, while their junior assistants were called to serve on the petit jury. Membership of the Singapore petit jury continued to be restricted to Europeans and Eurasians, even after Asians were admitted to the grand jury,<sup>63</sup> but in Penang the petit jury list from 1863 onwards contained the names of several Chinese and Indian residents.<sup>64</sup> Unlike the sober grand juries, petit jurymen tended to take their duties lightly. The twelve petit jurymen of Penang, who were kept locked up for two days and nights to deliberate on a case in 1858, consumed thirty-eight bundles of cheroots between them and three quarts of alcohol each a day in brandy, champagne, sherry, port and beer. The Governor and the secretary of state for India were horrified at the expense and cut down refreshment allowances for the future,<sup>65</sup> but the suitors may well have worried about the jury's verdict. One petit jury who could not make up their minds on a case tossed up for the result, and another, on being locked up for the night to deliberate on a difficult case, broke out in ribald songs and refused to stop until the Recorder dismissed them.<sup>66</sup> The *Straits Times* described the Singapore petit jury in 1867 as 'a gathering of mountebanks' rather than 'a body of sensible men deliberating on the lives or liberties of their fellow beings'.<sup>67</sup>

The last years of Indian rule were a period of fruitful co-operation between the executive and judiciary unknown at any earlier time, and coincided with a great period of judicial

<sup>61</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865), p. 71.

<sup>62</sup> R. Braddell in Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years*, i, 172-3, 195, 198.

<sup>63</sup> Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (London, 1923), p. 129.

<sup>64</sup> PG, 9 May 1863 in SFP, 11 June 1863; SFP, 10 March 1864.

<sup>65</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 247; SSR, U 36, pp. 176-7; Secretary of State to India, 29 June 1860, IO, Judicial Despatches to India, vol. 3; SSR, S 28, Item 167; SSR, R 38, pp. 124-5.

<sup>66</sup> ST, 13 July 1861.

<sup>67</sup> ST, 28 January 1867.

reform in India itself,<sup>68</sup> during which many of the defects in the administration of justice in the Straits were also removed: the sinecures of sheriff and sealer were abolished, the registrar's department was put on an efficient footing, the practice of paying court officials from fees instead of by fixed salaries was abandoned, the jurisdiction of the lower courts enlarged, sanction granted to introduce the Indian penal code, a crown counsel and public prosecutor appointed, a start was made in raising the status of interpreters and recruiting more able men, arrangements were made for the payment of witnesses, and the qualifications of law agents improved. Many deficiencies remained, notably the failure to appoint a third judge, which left the Recorder of Singapore and Malacca permanently overworked and prevented setting up a court of appeal. But the administration of justice in the Straits Settlements under Indian rule was slow, uncertain and often unfair. The rule of law would only be effective if it could be shown to be more certain in punishing the guilty and protecting the innocent than the traditional organization of the Asian communities and the courts of the secret societies.

Throughout the Indian regime the British law courts, even at the lowest level, remained remote from the bulk of the population. The Recorder's court at this period was perhaps more effective as a safeguard for the constitutional liberties of the politically conscious European mercantile minority. An influential contemporary journalist, John Cameron, editor of the *Straits Times*, paid tribute to the Straits judiciary in 1864 as a 'wholesome check' upon official maladministration in the absence of representative institutions.<sup>69</sup> This was true. The Recorders' insistence upon preserving the integrity of the British legal system made them impatient of executive defects and particularly of any trace of illegality in the proceedings of government officials.

<sup>68</sup> Cavenagh to Wood, 22 October 1865, Halifax papers, uncatalogued letters; A. West, *Sir Charles Wood's Administration of Indian Affairs from 1859 to 1866* (London, 1867), pp. 35-40.

<sup>69</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 208.

## THE CIVIL SERVICE

Throughout the East India Company's territories senior posts in the administration were reserved for covenanted civil and military officials, the élite of the Indian establishment. Until 1853 youths recruited in England on the nomination of a Director took out a bond or covenant as guarantee for their good behaviour, whereas uncovenanted officials, usually Europeans or Eurasians, were recruited locally to fill subordinate posts and did not enjoy the same status, security, salaries, pensions and promotion rights as the regular officials. Some of the covenanted civil recruits were sent to the Company's college at Haileybury, which provided a two-year course in general education, including studies in Indian languages and literature.<sup>70</sup> The brightest military cadets spent two years at the Company's military academy at Addiscombe, which included Hindustani in the curriculum.<sup>71</sup> While several of the military officers who served in the Straits were Addiscombe graduates, the only Straits official to be educated at Haileybury was Henry Somerset Mackenzie, Resident Councillor of Singapore from 1856 to 1859.<sup>72</sup> In 1853 the system of admission by Director's nomination was replaced by competitive examinations run by the Board of Control. The old Haileybury College was closed down in 1855 and it became customary to admit new recruits at an older age, many of them newly qualified university graduates. None of the Indian civil service's graduates served in the Straits Settlements.

When they reached India young officials could study Indian languages at a college founded in Calcutta in 1800,<sup>73</sup> but the Straits Settlements had no similar institution for further training. Fullerton introduced a scheme in 1826 for paying instruc-

<sup>70</sup> B. B. Misra, *The Central Administration of the East India Company, 1773-1834* (Manchester, 1959), pp. 398-400; J. Bowen, 'The East India Company's education of its own servants', *JRAS* (1955), pp. 114-19.

<sup>71</sup> A. Mills, *India in 1858* (London, 1858), pp. 67-8; O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), pp. 1-2; 'Addiscombe', *Calcutta Review*, ii, no. 3 (1844), 121-52.

<sup>72</sup> F. C. Danvers *et al.*, *Memorials of Old Haileybury College* (London, 1894), p. 439.

<sup>73</sup> Bowen, *JRAS* (1955), pp. 105-15, 119-20; Misra, *Central Administration*, p. 397; N. C. Roy, *The Civil Service in India* (Calcutta, 1958), p. 57.



tion fees and granting a bonus to officials who made themselves proficient in local languages, but this was abandoned when the presidency was abolished in 1830.<sup>74</sup> Study was left to individual initiative with no material inducement or reward. The result was that many of the officials were barely fluent in Malay, the study of Thai lapsed completely, and George Bonham was unique in learning Chinese.

The slashing retrenchment in the civil service in 1830 left the administration of the Straits Settlements very weak. Most of the subordinate staff was retrenched, and in some departments, such as the land office, the entire establishment was dismissed without compensation or pension.<sup>75</sup> Many senior officials fared little better. The number of covenanted posts was reduced from nineteen to eight, but the Directors were unwilling to transfer any of the Straits officials to India. Those who kept their posts suffered a substantial cut in salary. The majority were declared redundant and given the option of retiring on pension or remaining in the Straits as supernumeraries on small allowances until posts fell vacant.<sup>76</sup> Most chose to stay, waiting to step into dead men's shoes. The last of the queue was not reabsorbed until 1845, and for fifteen years no new blood was recruited to the senior ranks of the civil service. Morale suffered and the stimulus to ambition disappeared. New posts were created only after persistent agitation, and in the final years of Indian rule the salaries of all the senior officials in the Straits Settlements combined still totalled less than Rs. 8,000 a month.<sup>77</sup> Officials became increasingly disgruntled as the pressure of work grew heavier over the years while the establishment and the rewards did not.

As long as all the covenanted posts remained in the hands of the former presidency officials, there was harmony in the civil service and few complaints from the community,<sup>78</sup> but the new recruits brought in after 1845 were mainly young military officers from Madras, with little experience in administration

<sup>74</sup> SSR, U 4, no. 69.

<sup>75</sup> SSR, A 68, p. 87.

<sup>76</sup> Penang Council Proceedings, 10 October 1829, SSR, A 60; Singapore Resident Councillor's minute, 12 March 1830, SSR, A 68; SSR, U 1, no. 18; SSR, U 4, nos. 69, 294; SSR, Z 7, pp. 40, 67-8, 114; SSR, S 2, p. 44.

<sup>77</sup> SSR, R 35, pp. 195-202.

<sup>78</sup> G. F. Davidson, *Trade and Travel in the Far East* (London, 1846), p. 123.

and no knowledge of the Straits Settlements. Many of the passed-over uncovenanted officials were much more efficient but earned perhaps one-quarter of the salary of the new arrivals, and this bred discontent within the ranks of government service and criticism from the general public. The most violent attack upon the monopoly of the covenanted service was made in the books of John Turnbull Thomson, the uncovenanted government surveyor.<sup>79</sup> 'The monopoly by the sons of mediocrity of all honour, power and position',<sup>80</sup> 'an overgrown closely-cemented family oligarchy—blind to reason—insensible to circumstances',<sup>81</sup> wrote Thomson, who was equally scathing about the system of selection by competition which later replaced the Directors' patronage, 'a change from the privileged dolt to the privileged bookworm'.

In 1832 there were less than 1,200 covenanted servants in all three Indian presidencies, and this figure remained almost unaltered throughout the later years of territorial expansion in continental India.<sup>82</sup> All new posts had to be filled by uncovenanted officials, who by 1853 numbered between 2,000 and 3,000.<sup>83</sup> In the Straits Settlements the proportion of uncovenanted to covenanted officials was higher. Butterworth despised uncovenanted officials but was forced to appoint them, and his successors, Blundell and Cavenagh, who placed more value on their services, continued the practice. On the eve of the transfer to the colonial office there were 14 covenanted officials in the Straits Settlements, nine of them Indian army officers, and 306 uncovenanted servants.<sup>84</sup> Some of the uncovenanted officers proved to be men of considerable ability and later provided the foundation for the Straits civil service under colonial rule. Thomas Dunman<sup>85</sup> created the Singapore police force and 'made the forests more safe than town streets had

<sup>79</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1864); J. T. Thomson, *Sequel to Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1865).

<sup>80</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Sequel*, p. xxvii.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>82</sup> H. T. Prinsep, *The India Question in 1853* (London, 1853), pp. 31-3; Misra, *Central Administration*, pp. 405-7.

<sup>83</sup> A. Mills, *India in 1858*, p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], p. 704.

<sup>85</sup> THOMAS DUNMAN (1814-87). Came to Singapore 1834 as commercial assistant with Martin Dyce & Co.; deputy magistrate and superintendent of police, Singapore, 1843; commissioner of police, 1857-71; retired 1871; returned to England, 1875.

been before'.<sup>86</sup> When Thomas Braddell,<sup>87</sup> who was destined to be Singapore's first attorney general, resigned as assistant Resident of Penang in 1858, the *Penang Gazette* commended him, 'He has the rare merit of being as courteous and patient as he is intelligent and accomplished, and we have never known a magistrate at once so efficient and so popular.'<sup>88</sup> William Willans, first appointed a clerk in the land office in 1842, rose to be assistant Resident of Singapore and in 1867 became first colonial treasurer. He was commended by Blundell, Cavenagh, and the local press, and very popular with the Asian population.<sup>89</sup> When George Windsor Earl,<sup>90</sup> ship's captain, law agent and author,<sup>91</sup> joined government service as police magistrate of Singapore in 1857, it was a very popular choice,<sup>92</sup> and he acted as assistant Resident at Singapore, Province Wellesley and Penang until he died in 1865.

Since there was no reservoir of young covenanted officials in the Straits, every case of sickness, transfer or death among senior men caused major staffing difficulties, and by 1856 the assistant Resident Councillors at all three stations were uncovenanted officials.<sup>93</sup> In 1857 Governor Blundell appealed for permission to

<sup>86</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, p. 210.

<sup>87</sup> THOMAS BRADDELL (1823-91). Born in Ireland; sugar planter West Indies, 1839-44; sugar planter Penang and Province Wellesley, 1844-8; deputy superintendent police Penang, 1849; Malacca magistrate, 1851-4; assistant Resident Penang, 1856-8; called to bar in England, 1859; practised as lawyer in Singapore, 1862-4; crown counsel, 1864-7; attorney general, 1867-82; died in London. Author of several articles in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, and of *Singapore and the Straits Settlements Described* (Penang, 1858), and *Statistics of the British Possessions in the Straits of Malacca* (Penang, 1861).

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in *SFP*, 4 February 1858.

<sup>89</sup> SSR, U 33, p. 123; SSR, R 33, pp. 121-2; SSR, R 45, pp. 150-1; SSR, U 34, pp. 220-1.

<sup>90</sup> GEORGE WINDSOR EARL. Born in Britain about 1805; visited Straits Settlements as ship's captain, 1833-4; commissioner of crown lands for Port Essington, North Australia, 1838-49; law agent Singapore, 1849-52, 1856-7; police magistrate Singapore, 1857-9; assistant Resident Penang and Province Wellesley, 1859-65; died at sea, 1865. C. M. Turnbull, Introduction to reprint (Kuala Lumpur, 1971) of G. W. Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (London, 1837).

<sup>91</sup> G. W. Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (London, 1837, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), *Enterprise in Tropical Australia* (London, 1846), *The Native Races of the Indian Archipelago: Papuans* (London, 1853), and several articles in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* and the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

<sup>92</sup> *SFP*, 11 June 1857.

<sup>93</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 136-40.

employ uncovenanted officials as Resident Councillors.<sup>94</sup> Public opinion in Singapore favoured this,<sup>95</sup> but the Directors and Calcutta not only refused the plea but ruled that to avoid such an embarrassing situation arising again only covenanted officers could henceforth be appointed as assistant Resident.<sup>96</sup> This seemed a sensible decision in London and Calcutta, but in practice satisfactory covenanted officials were not available to fill senior posts. As the *Penang Gazette* complained in 1860, when Cavenagh's application to Calcutta to appoint Thomas Braddell as Resident Councillor of Penang was rejected, it was an 'absurd and pernicious rule' when a mature experienced administrator and lawyer like Braddell could be subordinated to a young subaltern.<sup>97</sup> The Directors' ruling put an end to the ambitions of able uncovenanted officials and left them disgruntled and frustrated.

The decision to ban uncovenanted officials from the posts of assistant Resident and Resident Councillor threatened to topple the whole administration. By 1859 of the three assistant Residents, one incumbent had died and a second was absent without leave.<sup>98</sup> Henry Mackenzie, the Resident Councillor of Singapore, was seriously ill and in 1859 went on sick leave from which he never returned. Lewis, the Resident Councillor of Penang, was old and so notoriously inefficient that in 1860 Cavenagh recommended his compulsory retirement on the ground that he 'was so enfeebled in mind and body as to be evidently incapable of efficiently performing the important duties of Resident Councillor'.<sup>99</sup> The position improved after 1861, when the secretary of state, in face of strong protests from the council of India, pushed through a bill to admit uncovenanted officials to senior offices in India, and in the last few years of Indian rule in the Straits Settlements most of the assistant Residents were uncovenanted men. But by that time Thomas Braddell, the most energetic and ambitious of the uncovenanted officials, had

<sup>94</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 292-4; SSR, R 33, pp. 40-5, 108-24.

<sup>95</sup> *ST*, 19 May 1857; *SFP*, 22 October 1857.

<sup>96</sup> Directors to India, 28 October 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 109; SSR, S 26, Items 57, 103.

<sup>97</sup> SSR, U 40, p. 11; SSR, R 36, pp. 130-2; *PG*, 4 February in *SFP*, 23 February 1860; *SFP*, 26 April 1860.

<sup>98</sup> SSR, R 35, pp. 195-202.

<sup>99</sup> SSR, R 37, pp. 238-9.

resigned to set up in private practice as a lawyer in Singapore.

By the mid-1850s the press complained that government service was almost monopolized by soldiers.<sup>100</sup> Public criticism was levelled at the inexperienced soldiers appointed direct to civil posts, often as police magistrates, not at older men, such as Henry Man,<sup>101</sup> or Ronald Macpherson,<sup>102</sup> who began their service in the Straits as military engineers and earned promotion later to the civil office of Resident Councillor. Many of these covenanted military engineer officers gave long, devoted service in the Straits, displaying a dedication to duty which inspired the envy of Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor of Hong Kong colony, when he came to report on the Straits Settlements in 1864.<sup>103</sup>

Ambitious covenanted civil servants shrank from service in the Straits. It was a dead end, meaning virtual exile for life, because officials could not be absorbed back into service in India. Lord Canning, the Governor General, commented in 1859, 'There is consequently so complete an absence of stimulus to exertion that it may well be doubted whether Indian civil officers sent to the Straits ever become thoroughly qualified for or heartily interested in, the duties they have to discharge.'<sup>104</sup> The only Bengal civilian who specifically asked to be retained in Singapore was Henry Mackenzie,<sup>105</sup> Resident Councillor from 1856 to 1859, who probably realized he could not stand the pace in India. He did nothing to enhance the reputation of the covenanted civil service, leaving behind when he retired a chaos which was remarkable even in Singapore. Boxes of coins

<sup>100</sup> *SFP*, 12 March 1857, 23 February 1860, 17 April 1862; *PG*, 8 April in *SFP*, 17 May 1860; *ST*, 26 April 1862.

<sup>101</sup> LT. COL. (LATER MAJOR GENERAL) HENRY MAN. Superintendent of convicts Malacca, 1845; Resident Councillor Malacca, 1855-7; organized convict system of Tenasserim, 1857-9; Resident Councillor Malacca, 1859; Resident Councillor Penang, 1860-7; superintendent Andaman Islands convict settlement, 1867.

<sup>102</sup> LT. COL. RONALD MACPHERSON. Artillery officer Penang, 1843; executive engineer Singapore, 1855; Resident Councillor Malacca, 1857; Resident Councillor Singapore, 1860-7; colonial secretary, 1867-9; died suddenly in Singapore, 1869. *ST*, 13 March 1867 gives the tribute paid to Macpherson by the Singapore mercantile community at Cavenagh's farewell dinner.

<sup>103</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 352.

<sup>104</sup> *PP*, 1862, xl (H. of C.) 259, p. 595.

<sup>105</sup> *SSR*, S 20, Items 92, 118.

lay about open in his treasury for the clerks to take handfuls as they were required, and the accounts were so confused that consequent investigations dragged on for years. The final report sent from Singapore in 1865 showed that Mackenzie's neglect had cost the government over Rs. 30,000.<sup>106</sup>

It was Mackenzie's ill-supervised subordinates who had defrauded the government, not the Resident Councillor himself. By that time the upper ranks of the service displayed an honesty very different from the standards of the 1830s, when Captain James Low,<sup>107</sup> superintendent of Province Wellesley, directed labour to open up large tracts of land for his own personal profit.<sup>108</sup> Low retired to Europe to enjoy his profits, a much respected figure among the official European community, author of many papers on the geology and history of Malaya and of a long book on agriculture in Penang and Province Wellesley.<sup>109</sup> His behaviour was not uncommon among the senior officials in the first half of the century,<sup>110</sup> but by the last years of Indian rule the covenanted servants in the Straits enjoyed a reputation for great integrity,<sup>111</sup> and the occasional lapse of even a senior uncovenanted official caused a sensation. The most celebrated scandal was that involving H. C. Caldwell, who joined the service of the court in 1828 and became senior assistant to the registrar in Singapore. He was much respected and the *Free Press* in 1853 urged that he be appointed sitting magistrate.<sup>112</sup> The registrar was stationed in Penang, but so trustworthy was Caldwell considered that the Governor and Resident Councillor did not presume to check his accounts. No investigations were made until a full-time Recorder arrived in Singapore in 1856, when Caldwell found it prudent to disappear, and it then transpired that over the years he had made away with more than \$100,000 of the court's money.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>106</sup> SSR, R 46, pp. 47-51; SSR, S 35, Item 195.

<sup>107</sup> CAPTAIN (LATER LT. COL.) JAMES LOW. Madras army; sent on political mission to Perak, 1826; superintendent Province Wellesley, 1830s; police magistrate Singapore, 1840-3; retired to Europe, 1850.

<sup>108</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, pp. 103-20.

<sup>109</sup> J. Low, *A Dissertation on the Soil and Agriculture of the British Settlement of Penang or Prince of Wales Island in the Straits of Malacca, etc.* (Singapore, 1836).

<sup>110</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, passim.

<sup>111</sup> SFP, 16 November 1865.

<sup>112</sup> SFP, 16 December 1853.

<sup>113</sup> SFP, 16 December 1856.

With a few exceptions, official salaries were not increased between 1830 and 1867, although the cost of living rose steeply. Indeed, whenever senior posts fell vacant Calcutta tried to cut the salary. When Thomas Church retired as Resident Councillor of Singapore in 1856 after holding the office for twenty years, a resolution which had been taken in 1837 to reduce the post from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 1,500 was put into effect.<sup>114</sup> From the early 1830s covenanted officials were not allowed to supplement their income from land, although this rule was not effectively extended to all classes of official. Dr Oxley, the senior surgeon, for instance, had large nutmeg plantations in Singapore and showed more interest in nutmegs than he did in medicine. When he retired in 1856 Calcutta insisted that the rules preventing Company doctors from indulging in commercial pursuits should be strictly enforced.<sup>115</sup> Uncovenanted officials were not restricted, and Thomas Dunman, the commissioner of police, for instance, had a large coconut and coffee plantation.

While the salaries of senior officials were lower than those of their counterparts in India, it was the subordinate officials who suffered most. During the reorganization of 1830 salaries attached to many posts had been reduced to one-third or one-quarter of the original.<sup>116</sup> There were exceptions to the general hardship. The marriage registrar of Singapore, who in 1857 appealed in vain to be paid the same rate as similar officials in the presidency towns, was discovered not to have registered a single marriage since the office was created in 1851.<sup>117</sup> Dr King, the Penang medical officer, applied unsuccessfully in 1857 for the acting appointment as police magistrate, on the grounds that the hours of work from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. would not interfere with his duties as surgeon.<sup>118</sup> Few officials were so fortunate, and junior civil servants in general were overworked and underpaid. In June 1858 Blundell applied to Calcutta for a general thirty per cent increase in all subordinates' salaries and special increases for some individual posts.<sup>119</sup> It was not a favourable time for such a revision, for in view of the demands for economy which followed the Indian Mutiny, Blundell had

<sup>114</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 214.

<sup>115</sup> SSR, U 4, no. 294.

<sup>116</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 497.

<sup>117</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 220.

<sup>118</sup> SSR, V 23, pp. 17-18.

<sup>119</sup> SSR, R 33, pp. 54-5, 114-24, 164-5.

already been warned that increases would only be sanctioned in emergencies.<sup>120</sup> Blundell considered he was facing an emergency, but his pleas met with an unsympathetic refusal,<sup>121</sup> and a further request in 1859 for a twelve per cent rise for those receiving salaries less than Rs. 100 a month fared no better.<sup>122</sup>

The executive functions of government were comparatively simple. The collection of revenue was farmed out, the government had no powers to exert control over trade and immigration, it had no physical means to put down piracy, and no legislative powers to deal with Chinese secret societies. Apart from the judges, the police, the magistrates and the engineers, most of the officials were engaged in paper work, the burden of which increased as a result of India's centralization policy in the 1850s. Calcutta's obsession with the collection of reports and statistics was recognized even by the most stalwart defenders of the Company.<sup>123</sup> As W. H. Russell, correspondent of the *London Times*, wrote in 1857, 'What wonderful piles of papers Indian officials get about them! . . . never did I behold out of Calcutta such heaps of despatch boxes, such mounds of record boxes, such vast fabrics of pigeon holes, such *abandon* of red tape!'<sup>124</sup> From 1856 annual reports of administration had to be presented by each subordinate government, and, with the need to correlate reports from three separate settlements, the Straits authorities found this requirement irksome. Not only did every matter have to be reported by the Resident Councillors to the Governor and by the Governor to Calcutta, but narrative summaries had also to be prepared for each quarter of the year of all activities, foreign, financial, judicial, legislative, military, medical, marine and public works, with copies of all correspondence and supporting papers. Everything had to be written and copied by hand, for the Straits government had no means of printing such documents.<sup>125</sup> In addition, from 1852 the Governor was required to keep a diary, which consisted of

<sup>120</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 222; SSR, S 26, Item 100.

<sup>121</sup> SSR, S 26, Item 115; SSR, V 25, p. 165.

<sup>122</sup> SSR, R 35, p. 294; India to Blundell, 26 July 1859, SSR, S 18.

<sup>123</sup> Prinsep, *India Question*, p. 37.

<sup>124</sup> W. H. Russell, *My Indian Mutiny Diary*, ed. M. Edwardes (London, 1957), p. 16.

<sup>125</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 201-3.



summaries of letters and action taken on each subject of correspondence. An army of clerks and writers was needed to do this task properly, but, unlike continental India, the Straits Settlements had no literate class of copying clerks willing to work for small wages.

The trade reports which each local government had to submit presented special difficulties in the Straits, since after 1854 returns had to be made in rupees and English weights and measures, although trade in the Straits was transacted in dollars and often recorded in local measures. Blundell pointed out repeatedly that the returns were valueless since Singapore was a free port with no compulsion to register imports and exports,<sup>126</sup> and only the entries covering the arrival and departure of square-rigged vessels approached accuracy. As the *Penang Gazette* said,

The rest are not statistics but lying figures . . . surely there is enough of real work in this world to save men from the painful necessity of being set to such a spinning of sand and weaving of moonbeams such as the attempt to manufacture facts by the multiplication of errors must prove.<sup>127</sup>

Calcutta refused to grant permission to print the tabular statements of commerce and shipping in local terms,<sup>128</sup> and arrears built up each year. The trade statements for 1856-7 were despatched from Singapore in February 1859.<sup>129</sup> The 1857-8 returns were sent in May 1860, when Cavenagh remarked that apart from showing a general tendency for trade to expand, they were 'of little use either to government or the community at large'.<sup>130</sup> Even when the figures reached Calcutta they were often not printed for a further twelve months.<sup>131</sup> The printed copy of the tabular statements for commerce and shipping for 1854-5 was not published till June 1857,<sup>132</sup> while the statement for 1857-8 did not appear till 1861.<sup>133</sup>

Delays in preparing the monthly treasury returns and

<sup>126</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 1-11; SSR, R 32, pp. 223-6; SSR, R 33, pp. 108-13; SSR, R 35, pp. 122-6.

<sup>127</sup> PG, 2 October in SFP, 29 October 1857.

<sup>128</sup> SSR, S 26, Item 91.

<sup>129</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 311-12.

<sup>130</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 265.

<sup>131</sup> SSR, R 35, pp. 122-6.

<sup>132</sup> ST, 16 January 1855.

<sup>133</sup> SSR, V 33, p. 35.

quarterly Straits narratives led to frequent reproofs from Calcutta.<sup>134</sup> By 1858, for instance, the narrative of the Straits Settlements was eighteen months overdue.<sup>135</sup> Blundell sometimes hired copyists at his own expense to transcribe documents,<sup>136</sup> but his attempts to persuade Calcutta to reduce demands for paper returns were thwarted by the Company's reluctance to abandon established procedure, even when the statistics were merely filed in Fort William.<sup>137</sup> 'Inadequacy of establishment cannot be admitted as an excuse for the neglect of duty', the Directors warned Calcutta in March 1858.<sup>138</sup> While the government officials were absorbed in preparing official returns for Calcutta in rupees and English measures, the *Singapore Free Press*, in return for the privilege of printing daily and monthly trade statements, paid the salaries of two extra clerks, who worked for the government compiling up-to-date statistics in dollars and local measures for the information of the commercial community.<sup>139</sup>

Most of the Straits officials, engaged in preparing voluminous and largely fruitless reports, narratives and accounts, and converting inaccurate statistics into meaningless terms, could well fit the description of J. F. Bignold, a Bengal civilian, who wrote in 1873:

The crack Collector, man of equal might,  
Reports all day and corresponds all night.<sup>140</sup>

This preoccupation with reporting to a far-away government in Calcutta bred frustration and a sense of futility, while long service in an enervating climate led to a weakening of general efficiency and sapping of energy which was not appreciated in

<sup>134</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 157; SSR, S 25, Items 70, 84, 103, 197, 257, 341; Directors to India, 28 January 1857, 28 July 1858, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vols. 102, 113; SSR, R 32, pp. 90-1; IO, India Political Consultations, 14 December 1857, Range 202, vol. 44, no. 45; SSR, R 35, pp. 34-5.

<sup>135</sup> SSR, S 26, Item 44.

<sup>136</sup> SSR, R 31, pp. 268-71; SSR, S 25, Item 230; SSR, S 26, Item 208.

<sup>137</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 276; SSR, S 25, Item 137; SSR, R 32, pp. 271, 223-6; SSR, S 26, Item 30; SSR, R 35, pp. 122-6.

<sup>138</sup> SSR, S 26, Item 69.

<sup>139</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 238-9.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in L. S. S. O'Malley, *The Indian Civil Service, 1601-1930* (London, 1931), p. 109.

Calcutta. The few officials from India who visited the settlements came invariably on holiday, and after the rigours of summer in Bengal, the Straits Settlements seemed to them a soft green paradise. Most travel books extolled the beauty of the scenery and the mildness of the climate. In his *Trade and travel in the Far East*, the merchant G. F. Davidson, for instance, made frequent reference to Singapore's 'delightful climate . . . remarkable for its salubrity'<sup>141</sup> and this 'land of perpetual summer'.<sup>142</sup> Earlier in the century a visitor, J. Wathen, referred to Penang 'from the salubrity of its air justly esteemed the Montpellier of India'.<sup>143</sup> The death of government servants in office in the Straits was exceptional, and they were not subject to the spectacular dangers which made life so precarious for their counterparts in India. But recurrent bouts of fever and dysentery, together with the insidious monotony of the climate, frayed tempers and weakened efficiency. There was no regular provision for overseas leave even for covenanted officials, who usually served many years without a break. Inadequate pension schemes often meant that uncovenanted officials could not afford to retire at all and struggled on long after they had become incapable of carrying out their work satisfactorily.

The petition to have the Straits Settlements detached from India in 1857 made no specific complaints about the Company's civil service, but many of the deficiencies of Indian administration stemmed from the shortcomings of the bureaucracy, which the Governor General, Lord Canning, himself acknowledged to be 'the greatest evil'. One of the main recommendations made by Sir Hercules Robinson in his report on the Straits Settlements in 1864 was for a separate Straits civil service, trained specially in Malayan languages and customs.<sup>144</sup> Understaffing, the combination of incongruous posts and absorption in paper work meant that officials had little time to become acquainted with the local languages and customs. Chinese translations of new laws had to be made in Hong Kong,<sup>145</sup> and as the *Singapore Free Press* commented in 1857, 'There is probably no other

<sup>141</sup> Davidson, *Trade and Travel*, p. 40.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>143</sup> J. Wathen, *Journal of a Voyage in 1811 and 1812 to Madras and China . . . in the H.C.S. 'The Hope'* (London, 1814), p. 131.

<sup>144</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], p. 704.

<sup>145</sup> SSR, V 30, p. 273.

government in the world so incapable of addressing the people as that of the Straits.<sup>146</sup>

In the very last years of Indian rule, Cavenagh improved this situation by insisting that young officials learn to read, write and speak Malay fluently. He also required all officials to make themselves acquainted with the legislative council acts, and attempted, within the limits of finance and available manpower, to organize the service efficiently. Cavenagh was an excellent leader of men, tactful but firm, and commanded the respect not only of the predominantly military senior officers but of subordinates too. Yet the difficulties he faced were immense, and in resisting demands to cut down on staff during the economy campaign which followed the Indian Mutiny, Cavenagh explained 'at present many departments can scarcely be called efficient'.<sup>147</sup> The number of officials allocated to the Straits Settlements was inadequate in 1830 and had hardly increased since, but Singapore's population doubled in the thirty years after 1830 and her trade more than trebled. While the port of Singapore by that time was second only to Calcutta in Indian administered territories, she had the same tiny marine establishment fixed in 1838, and the Singapore post office staff remained the same as before the days of steam. Minor improvements in administration could be achieved only by elaborate manipulation, while large-scale reorganization, such as the creation of an efficient master attendant's office, an accounts or a public works department, was almost impossible.

#### MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT: LAW AND ORDER

There was no elected representative municipal government in the Straits Settlements until 1857, but occasionally the authorities sought informal co-operation from private residents. In 1822, for instance, a prominent British merchant and two officials formed a committee to supervise the division of the town area of Singapore between the various communities, and consulted representatives of the other racial groups.<sup>148</sup> In 1827 Fullerton set up committees of assessors in Penang and Singapore, to be

<sup>146</sup> *SFP*, 12 March, 1 October 1857.

<sup>147</sup> *SSR*, R 40, p. 30.

<sup>148</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, viii (1854), 100.

appointed annually by the governor from the landholders and householders and to provide funds to clean, repair and patrol the streets. The executive government retained control of levying the assessment, and this control was confirmed in two acts of the Indian legislature: Act XII of 1839 and Act XII of 1840.

The first demand for representation on the local committees came from the Singapore merchants in 1845 but such representation was alien to the East India Company's policy at that time, and a new assessment act brought into force in 1848 provided for committees of five assessors in each of the three Settlements, two of them officials and three non-officials nominated by the Governor.

Four municipal acts, passed in 1856 and put into force in the Straits Settlements the following year, admitted the principle of representation for the first time but did not give the ratepayers in the Straits the practical control over municipal affairs which they sought. Three of the acts applied to the presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and to the three Straits Settlements. Act XIII of 1856, commonly known as the Police act, provided for a police force in each town, to be controlled by the executive government. The presidency towns were to have full-time commissioners of police, but in the Straits Settlements the Resident Councillors were to act as police commissioners. Act XIV of 1856 provided for conservancy, improvements and public health measures, while Act XXV concerned assessment and collection of municipal taxes. The fourth measure, Act XXVII of 1856, applied specifically to the Straits Settlements and provided for a municipal committee to be set up in each settlement. The committees were each to have five members consisting of the Resident Councillor as president, one other official, and three representatives chosen for one year by ratepayers paying annual rates of Rs. 25 or more. Any vacancy occurring during the year was to be filled by the Governor's nomination, not by a new election. The committees were to manage all money raised under Act XIV of 1856, but police expenditure demanded by the government was the first charge on this revenue.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser., i (1854), 49, 82, 251, 284, 720, 723, 731, 750, 752, 848-9; ii (1855), 201-32, 285-93, 369-97, 398, 400-13, 521, 625, 626, 672, 679, 715.

These changes brought a few years of lively municipal politics, particularly in Penang, but this soon gave way to apathy, and municipal service was left to a few enthusiasts, whose main problem was to make ends meet. After paying the compulsory levy demanded by the government for the police force, there was little left for major conservancy work. In Malacca over half the municipal fund was spent on the police force and there was barely enough left to keep the town roads in order.<sup>150</sup> In 1856 the Singapore municipal committee paid nearly fifty-six per cent of its income on police charges,<sup>151</sup> and in Penang the municipal committee in 1858 had to pay out two-thirds of its income for the police.<sup>152</sup>

In the early days the Straits towns had small police forces.<sup>153</sup> Malacca town was comparatively law-abiding, but Georgetown in Penang had a high crime rate, while Singapore, with its transitory, poverty-stricken alien immigrant population and its constant influx of turbulent sailors, was notorious as a dangerous and lawless place. In the mid-1820s gangs of two or three hundred men would roam the Chinese and Malay districts of the town nightly to pillage and steal.<sup>154</sup> Increased immigration during the 1830s encouraged greater lawlessness, particularly in Singapore. The government did not pretend to exert any authority in the country districts of Singapore, but life and property were insecure even in the town itself. The streets were full of beggars, many of them Chinese immigrants who arrived with nothing more than the clothes they stood up in. Many were refugees and criminals, for the Chinese authorities turned a blind eye to the emigration of undesirables.

Throughout the 1830s burglaries by gangs of fifty or a hundred men were so common that people feared to live on the outskirts of town. In February 1843 a public meeting was held and the members resolved to call on the government to increase

<sup>150</sup> SSR, R 30, p. 245; SSR, R 39, pp. 285-94.

<sup>151</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 73.

<sup>152</sup> SSR, V 24, pp. 94-5, 176-8; SSR, W 26, Item 70; SSR, W 27, Item 208; SSR, DD 28, Item 165.

<sup>153</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the police force and internal security see C. M. Turnbull, 'Internal Security in the Straits Settlements, 1826-67', *JSEAS*, i, no. 1 (1970), 37-53.

<sup>154</sup> 'Concerning the Tan Tae Hoey in Singapore', trans. T. Braddell from the Hikayat Abdullah bin Abdullah Kadir Munshi, *JIA*, vi (1852), 553-4.

the size of the police, to appoint more European constables and to create a harbour police. At the same time the meeting called for the suppression of the Chinese secret societies, which were assumed to be behind these outrages. Bonham argued strongly with Calcutta, but without avail, for the police force to be expanded and for regular recruitment of policemen from Madras. One improvement was sanctioned, the creation of a new post of deputy magistrate and superintendent of police, and Thomas Dunman, an energetic young man of twenty-nine, who was appointed to this office, proved to be well suited for the role. At first sight he seemed an unexpected choice. Dunman had lived in Singapore for nine years and was at that time a commercial assistant with Martin Dyce & Company. Gay and popular, a keen wit and mimic, he was an enthusiastic amateur actor, 'the greatest low comedian Singapore had ever seen'.<sup>155</sup> Up to that time he had been chiefly known for his attempts to enliven the town's social life and for his practical jokes. His most celebrated was a lavish dinner party, to which he invited the whole of Singapore society, an entertainment on a scale which had hitherto been attempted only by the wealthiest Chinese. In welcoming his guests he revealed the secret of his seeming opulence by telling them the waiters were their own servants and all the food and drink came from their own larders.<sup>156</sup> It was an unorthodox beginning to the public life of Singapore's future first commissioner of police, but Dunman was shrewd and blessed with common sense. Universally respected by the European merchants, lawyers and officials, he was reputed also to have the trust of the Chinese secret society leaders, and by the time he retired in 1871, he had laid the foundations of an efficient and humane police force in Singapore.

The task he faced was formidable. In 1845 robberies were reported almost every night.<sup>157</sup> In addition to the continual influx of destitute immigrants, many deportees came from other

<sup>155</sup> C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, 1902, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), ii, 743.

<sup>156</sup> W. H. Read, *Play and Politics: Reminiscences of Malaya by an Old Resident* (London, 1901), p. 165.

<sup>157</sup> *ST*, 2 September 1845, 13 January 1846; J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1864), pp. 203-5.

territories, and the Netherlands Indies authorities frequently banished troublemakers to Singapore.<sup>158</sup> Three thousand Chinese immigrants arriving from Riau early in 1846 included many deportees and brought a wave of troubles with them, culminating in a large gang of Chinese besieging the house of a European planter who lived only two miles from the centre of town. He kept them at bay for twenty minutes with gunfire but then fled with his family to the attic, while the gang spent two hours ransacking the house. The police did not arrive until long after the robbers had left with their loot.<sup>159</sup>

None of the offenders in any of the incidents was produced when the criminal sessions opened in Singapore two weeks later, and the Recorder described the police system as 'disgraceful'.<sup>160</sup> Dunman's energy and determination were unquestioned, but he had to spend most of his time in court as deputy magistrate. The justices of the peace absolved Dunman from his court duties in order for him to concentrate on police work. Butterworth rejected the right of the justices to do this, and Calcutta passed Act III of 1847 to abolish their powers over the police force. While the government in this way acquired full control over the police, Butterworth did not reverse the actual ruling made by the quarter sessions that Dunman should devote himself full time to supervision of the police force,<sup>161</sup> and he plunged himself into his task with such energy that by 1849 gang robberies in Singapore had ceased.<sup>162</sup>

The creation of an efficient Singapore police force was a slow process. The interior of the island was still unknown to the European population, and an attempt made in 1849 to create a rural police broke down over arguments between the government and the municipal committee about sharing the costs.<sup>163</sup> Even among seaports mid-nineteenth-century Singapore was notorious for its vice and crime. In the absence of a water police,

<sup>158</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 251.

<sup>159</sup> ST, 1, 4, 8 April 1846; SFP, 2 April 1846; L. Comber, *Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya: a Survey of the Triad Society from 1800 to 1900* (New York and Singapore, 1959), pp. 73-4.

<sup>160</sup> SFP, 16 April 1846.

<sup>161</sup> Butterworth to Bengal, 12, 16 October 1846, SSR, R 13.

<sup>162</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, p. 210.

<sup>163</sup> SFP, 7 December 1849.



petty piracy flourished among the small boats within the harbour limits,<sup>164</sup> and ashore the peace was often disturbed by the riotous behaviour of sailors. Large-scale Chinese immigration brought an upsurge of lawlessness in the 1850s and, as the *Free Press* commented in July 1854, 'We have in this small island the very dregs of the population of south eastern Asia.'<sup>165</sup> Widespread riots among the Chinese in Singapore in 1854 led to the European population attempting to organize their own defence. In July 1854 they formed a Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps, the first such body in Britain's possessions in the East. Governor Butterworth became the corps' first colonel, and sixty-one Europeans and Eurasians came forward immediately to join the force.<sup>166</sup>

While Singapore was the most lawless of the Straits Settlements ports, life in Penang was precarious, and in Province Wellesley the position was worse. The frontier, almost forty miles long, was unprotected by police or troops, and in the middle of the century the province was terrorized by gangs of marauders from Perak or Kedah, who were rarely caught since they could easily slip over the border. Blundell, as acting Governor in 1854, encouraged the local population to organize their own defence and divided Province Wellesley into districts under *penghulus*, who were responsible for reporting and helping to suppress crime. Within a few years this system, under the supervision of Penang's first full-time deputy commissioner of police, who was appointed in 1856, managed to put some check on gang robberies.<sup>167</sup>

In Malacca the force was weak in numbers and the quality of recruits very poor, since they were paid even less than at the other stations. A force of 131 men under one European inspector had to keep order over a population of about 70,000, scattered over an area of 1,000 square miles and with poor communications. In practice the police were concentrated in Malacca town, with outposts at Linggi, Alor Gajah, and at Kassang

<sup>164</sup> *SFP*, 26 September 1851.

<sup>165</sup> *SFP*, 21 July 1854.

<sup>166</sup> W. Makepeace, G. S. Brooke, R. Braddell (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore* (London, 1921), i, 384-6; T. M. Winsley, *A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, 1854-1937* (Singapore, 1938), pp. 2-4.

<sup>167</sup> *SFP*, 6 January 1854, 11 January 1855; SSR, W 24, Item 197.

where there were frequent outbreaks among the miners. The official report for the Straits for 1859-60 recorded that 'the police force at Malacca is morally and numerically perfectly inefficient',<sup>168</sup> and two years later 42 resigned and 44 were dismissed.<sup>169</sup>

In 1857 the government of India agreed to remove the Singapore police from the direct control of the Resident Councillor and appointed a separate commissioner of police for Singapore, as in the Indian presidency towns. Dunman was appointed to this office at a substantial salary of Rs. 1,000 a month.<sup>170</sup> It was a wise and popular appointment,<sup>171</sup> but despite Dunman's exertions in the fourteen years before his promotion to commissioner, conditions and morale in the force remained low. In 1857 police peons were still paid only \$5 a month, which was less than most carriage *syces*, or drivers. Policemen were expected to work sixteen hours a day, with long spells of night duty, and were not given contracts nor were they eligible for retirement pensions. The work itself was hard and dangerous, and neither they nor their dependants received compensation if they were injured or killed on duty. The result was that the only recruits were desperate men who could find no other employment. Many of them were unemployed sailors waiting for another ship. Most policemen tended to steer clear of dangerous situations while they served in the force, and deserted it for other work at the first opportunity. In July 1857 Dunman appealed for supplementary legislation to improve the force, advocating that policemen should be recruited on contracts for five or seven years, fined if they resigned, but given bonuses after completing ten years' and twenty-six years' service.<sup>172</sup> The Indian legislative council deliberated on these suggestions but did nothing to implement them.<sup>173</sup>

The main problem was financial. The India office was anxious to see improvements in the police force when municipal

<sup>168</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1859-60.*

<sup>169</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2.*

<sup>170</sup> SSR, R 31, pp. 155-61; SSR, U 33, pp. 117-18; SSR, V 23, pp. 13, 255; SSR, S 25, Item 231.

<sup>171</sup> PG, 23 May in SFP, 11 June 1857; SFP, 7 January 1858.

<sup>172</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 16-26.

<sup>173</sup> Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser., iii (1857), 387.

revenues could be expanded to meet the charge,<sup>174</sup> but it was impossible to extract more from the municipal committees.<sup>175</sup> Even before the police and conservancy acts were passed in 1856, municipal committees were hampered by lack of finance in carrying out conservancy projects, such as draining swamps and providing adequate water supplies.<sup>176</sup> After they acquired greater powers under the new acts, the reluctance of the municipal authorities to restrict their conservancy work through excessive expenditure on police, proved the stumbling-block in producing an effective force.<sup>177</sup>

The low salaries paid to policemen encouraged bribery and corruption. Dunman was above reproach, and investigation of charges against Bruce Robertson, the deputy commissioner for Penang, in 1857 and 1859 indicated that he was honest. Few of their subordinates were beyond suspicion. In 1860 it was discovered that the then deputy commissioner of police in Malacca, a former London police sergeant, had been guilty of accepting bribes to turn a blind eye to gambling while he was an inspector in Singapore. From the subsequent investigation it became obvious that this was common practice among police inspectors, and in 1861 Cavenagh decided to review the gaming laws.<sup>178</sup>

The gaming farm was abolished in 1829 but this had not suppressed gambling itself, which flourished and proved a constant strain upon the honesty of the police. Some policemen earned commendation for waging war on gambling dens, notably a constable Simonides, who in 1847 received a gold medal for having suppressed 111 gambling houses in Singapore in ten months.<sup>179</sup> It was more common for policemen to take bribes to leave gambling dens alone. In 1852 the government of India passed an act to suppress gambling,<sup>180</sup> but without the

<sup>174</sup> Secretary of State to India, 21 July 1859, IO, Judicial Despatches to India, vol. 2.

<sup>175</sup> SSR, R 33, pp. 141-4, 231-7; SSR, R 35, pp. 292-3; India to Blundell, 21 January 1859, NAI, Public Consultations, 48-55.

<sup>176</sup> SSR, S 22, Item 51; SSR, S 23, Item 64.

<sup>177</sup> SSR, S 29, Item 6.

<sup>178</sup> SSR, U 42, p. 131.

<sup>179</sup> R. Braddell in Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years*, i, 257.

<sup>180</sup> Act XXXIV of 1852; SSR, S 19, Item 49; SSR, S 20, Items 44, 98.

co-operation of the police the law was a dead letter. The temptation to supplement meagre wages with easily obtained subsidies from gaming-house keepers was too strong.

The police act of 1856 gave a new impetus to gambling, for it transferred gambling cases from the Recorder's court, which had often imposed sentences of hard labour, to the police magistrates' courts, where the maximum penalty was a fine of Rs. 100. Under the police act gambling could not be prosecuted at all if it took place off-shore, so that many boats on the rivers and in the harbours became notorious gambling dens,<sup>181</sup> while on land the gaming houses were often 'like little fortresses, with three, four and sometimes even seven strong thick doors to break through and concealed holes in the walls for the gamblers to escape'.<sup>182</sup> Gaming-house keepers made such huge profits that if they could remain undisturbed for eight or ten days at a time 'they laugh at the highest penalty when fined by the magistrate'. The same offenders appeared over and over again in court,<sup>183</sup> and the fine became in practice a 'premium on the play', often being paid by a subscription round the gaming table the following night.<sup>184</sup>

While Cavenagh disliked the legalization of gambling on principle and considered it 'a disgrace to a Christian government to attempt to raise a revenue by pandering to the vices of any portion of the people entrusted to its charge',<sup>185</sup> he admitted the existing laws were ineffective and corruption among the police was rife. He proposed to license a few gambling houses under strict police control, but his schemes roused no enthusiasm in Calcutta.<sup>186</sup> No legislation on gambling was passed during the remaining years of Indian rule, and the Straits authorities had to cope with the problem as best they could with their existing powers. Penalties for gaming were stepped up in Singapore in 1861 but rewards paid to informers were meagre. Spies were often murdered and found it safer and more profitable to keep watch on the police on behalf of

<sup>181</sup> SSR, W 30, Item 245.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 136.

<sup>184</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), pp. 219-24.

<sup>185</sup> SSR, R 38, pp. 262-9.

<sup>186</sup> India to Governor, 20 April 1861, SSR, X 21.

gaming-house keepers.<sup>187</sup> Gambling was even more prevalent in Penang than in Singapore, but its corrupting influence on the police was less marked. Many of the Georgetown gaming houses were well-known and old-established concerns,<sup>188</sup> and gambling was usually carried on so openly that there was little inducement to bribe the police to ignore it. In 1864 the *Penang Argus* claimed there were forty-three gaming houses in the harbour area alone, with a turnover of some \$390,000.<sup>189</sup> Gambling continued to be a serious problem in the Straits Settlements until it was checked by gambling ordinances passed in the 1870s and 1880s.

One of the causes of the recurrence of crime in the Straits was the defective prison system. Sir Christopher Rawlinson, who was Recorder from 1847 to 1849, recommended creating an inspector of prisons, but this was not done until 1872, some years after the transfer to colonial rule.<sup>190</sup> Grave offences were punishable by death or transportation to Bombay, but most convicted prisoners remained in the Straits, and no programme of rehabilitation or training was evolved comparable to the system among convicts transported from India.

The jails were small and inadequate. Owing to the long delays before cases came to court, it was customary to put accused men in irons and sometimes to set them to hard labour, although at their subsequent trial months later they might be found innocent and acquitted.<sup>191</sup> The prisons were so full of men awaiting trial that condemned criminals were often released before their time to make room for new inmates. The prisons were understaffed and the jailers ill-paid. When the Recorder's court was split into two divisions in 1855, the jailers' salaries were cut in common with those of other court officials. The Singapore jailer, with nine years' service behind him, suddenly found his salary slashed from Rs. 100 to Rs. 50. He

<sup>187</sup> SSR, W 42, Item 203; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*.

<sup>188</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 136; PG, 11 April in SFP, 30 April 1857.

<sup>189</sup> *Penang Argus*, 4 February in SFP, 18 February 1864.

<sup>190</sup> J. W. N. Kyshe, *Cases Heard and Determined in H.M. Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements, 1808-84* (Singapore, 1885), vol. i, pp. lxxxix-xc.

<sup>191</sup> ST, 15 April 1846.

was left with one jemadar and five peons to guard a prison which at one point in 1857 had two hundred inmates.<sup>192</sup> Accommodation for prisoners was crowded and living conditions appalling.<sup>193</sup> On the other hand, with the absence of supervisors, discipline was lax and 'hard labour' in the houses of correction was not arduous. Sir Benson Maxwell, the Recorder of Penang, did not consider it a deterrent for serious crime. He thought it 'disgusting that able-bodied criminals should be picking and pulling at bits of basket work as if they were women or children, and probably in pleasant gossip also', and he condemned Penang's house of correction as 'a perfect paradise for the natives of the east, in whose philosophy the greatest of human enjoyments was the happiness of doing nothing'.<sup>194</sup>

The worst fault in the prison system was the lack of any attempt to train prisoners. Many first offenders were new immigrants, forced to steal because they did not find immediate employment. At the end of their sentence they were released with their old clothes, no money and no training, except perhaps the fruit of the experience of mixing with more hardened offenders in preparing them for more sophisticated crime.<sup>195</sup>

Wise legislation and good leadership could not produce an efficient police force in face of bad conditions of service. As commissioner of police, Dunman battled hard, fighting for higher wages for his men, with gratuities and contracts of service, rearranging schedules to try to cut down hours of work, trying to improve the calibre of the force by organizing classes in reading and writing. Despite his hard work, he was far from satisfied at the end of his first year in office. 'The police as a detective body is utterly defective', he acknowledged in 1858, and as a protective force they were little better. Of his 317 peons less than one in three could read and write a single word. Police work was so unpopular that men still only took it up as a stopgap. In May 1858 he had fifty vacancies he could not fill, and this was not surprising. Police peons still worked sixteen hours a day, much of this at night and at considerable risk. Police peons' pay had not been increased since 1843 although the cost of living had risen some fifty per cent.

<sup>192</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 241.

<sup>194</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 239.

<sup>193</sup> SFP, 26 September 1851.

<sup>195</sup> SSR, W 30, Item 273.

Meanwhile in the northern settlement Robertson, the deputy commissioner, produced considerable improvement and the crime rate dropped both on Penang island and in Province Wellesley, where he was 'indefatigable in hunting the gangs of robbers and murderers who infested the country'.<sup>196</sup> But he was being called upon to achieve the impossible, for it was impracticable for one man to supervise both Penang and Province Wellesley. His force had to patrol the island with an area of 160 square miles, the mainland with an area of 235 square miles and an undefended frontier, and to protect a population of over 127,000.<sup>197</sup>

The last few years of Indian administration witnessed some improvement in the maintenance of order and suppression of crime in the Straits Settlements. Colonel Cavenagh took a personal interest in prison administration and in the discipline and performance of the police force, and in his first months as Governor he travelled extensively in Province Wellesley, in the interior of Malacca and along the coasts of Singapore island advising on sites for new police stations.<sup>198</sup> Cavenagh would have liked to put the police forces at the three stations under one commissioner based in Singapore, and in May 1860 he submitted his recommendations for improving the police forces in the Straits, but he could awaken no interest in Calcutta.

Despite this, he achieved considerable success in his aim 'to grant to the meanest peasant ready access to our courts' by opening courts in rural areas. Hitherto many people in outlying country districts could not afford to bring charges or act as witnesses. In 1849 there were cases of labourers coming five or six miles to the Singapore court for days on end before their evidence was taken, which not only deprived them of their livelihood but left their property unprotected. Consequently inhabitants outside the town areas were exposed to extortion and theft, with no recourse except possibly to secret society

<sup>196</sup> SSR, DD 25, Item 115.

<sup>197</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 136.

<sup>198</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 121-5, 183-94; SSR, R 44, pp. 245-7; O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), p. 285.

tribunals. Cavenagh ordered a court to be held once a week alternately at Kassang and Alor Gajah in Malacca. He established a court at Bukit Tambun in south Province Wellesley, with provision for occasional courts at Penaga in the north. In Singapore he appointed an additional assistant Resident to hold court in country areas.<sup>199</sup> In addition to giving better access to courts in rural areas, Cavenagh extended more police protection to outlying districts. In 1861 he obtained the co-operation of the rajah of Kedah in putting a stop to raids and gang robberies in the borderlands of Province Wellesley.<sup>200</sup> Cavenagh built roads to the Malacca frontier and brought peace to its border districts, and he set police boats to patrol the islands round Singapore and the Johore Strait.

As a result of the work of Cavenagh, Dunman and Robertson, the efficiency of the Straits police forces improved. The morale of the force was higher, and men began to join the police voluntarily, instead of being driven into the service by desperate poverty. Drill improved, peons were given instruction in reading, writing and police duties. By the time Indian rule came to an end in the Straits Settlements in 1867, the protection offered by the police was much better than in 1857 when the petitioners for transfer to colonial rule complained of the danger to life and property. But the system had merely been tidied up and the major defects remained. Police peons were still overworked and often sick. The meagre pension scheme did not compensate for the poor pay.<sup>201</sup> In 1863 out of a force of more than 300 in Singapore, only sixty-four had served for four years or more, and only twenty-nine for more than six years.<sup>202</sup>

The police were hampered by poor communications in the rural districts in all the stations, because road construction was one of the improvements which fell casualty to the economy programme after the Indian Mutiny. Probably only a small proportion of murders ever came to light. It was easy to dump corpses in the jungle or the sea, and even in the middle of

<sup>199</sup> SSR, R 37, pp. 19-27.

<sup>200</sup> SSR, V 33, pp. 189-92; SSR, R 41, pp. 268-71; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*; PG, 21 June in SFP, 18 July 1861.

<sup>201</sup> SSR, W 45, Item 43; SSR, W 49, Item 87.

<sup>202</sup> SSR, W 48, Item 404.



Singapore town murderers could bury victims in public cemeteries in broad daylight because no funeral records were kept.<sup>203</sup> Of the murders which were discovered, few were solved. In 1864 Dunman reported that of twenty murder cases notified in Singapore the previous year, only those committed by the insane or in moments of passion were solved. Murders for gain hardly ever came to trial, and it was hopeless to attempt to solve any that involved the secret societies.<sup>204</sup> Life on the plantations in the interior of Singapore was still precarious.<sup>205</sup> Gas lighting, which was introduced in central Singapore in 1864, provided some check to crime in the town, after Cavenagh resisted the demand of the municipal committee who wished to use this as an excuse to cut down the police force.<sup>206</sup> Even so the merchants employed watchmen to guard their houses, and the Recorder needed a strong personal bodyguard.<sup>207</sup>

During his seven years as Governor, Cavenagh succeeded in appointing deputy commissioners of police in Malacca and Province Wellesley; setting up police stations along the Singapore side of the Johore Strait to suppress petty piracy; establishing frontier posts and other stations in the interior of Malacca under a separate force; setting up a marine police to protect shipping in the Singapore roads; organizing a moderately successful detective police; drawing up a code of regulations for the guidance of police officers and for the running of prisons; appointing headmen as special constables to help check the influence of secret societies; framing rules for the control of pawnbrokers' shops; and seeing that periodical mortuary returns were made by the commissioners of police.<sup>208</sup> By 1867 much had been done by the Governor and officials to improve the working of the police and the discipline in prisons and to achieve the maximum efficiency within the existing framework. Unfortunately Calcutta's refusal to devote funds from the

<sup>203</sup> *SFP*, 25 April 1851; SSR, W 46, Item 292; SSR, W 50, Item 338.

<sup>204</sup> SSR, W 50, Item 338.

<sup>205</sup> Blundell to India, 12 August 1859, SSR, X 18; SSR, W 43, Item 6.

<sup>206</sup> *SFP*, 12 January 1865, 18 January 1866; SSR, W 50, Item 437; SSR, W 42, Item 172; SSR, V 35, pp. 218-19.

<sup>207</sup> SSR, W 38, Item 244; SSR, R 39, pp. 181-2.

<sup>208</sup> O. Cavenagh, *Report on the Progress of the Straits Settlements from 1859-60 to 1866-7* (Singapore, 1867), pp. 5-6.

general revenues and the municipal authorities' reluctance to increase their assessment or curtail their works of improvement to provide more money for the police led, as in other spheres of administration, to a deadlock in major police and prison reform under the Indian regime.

### CHAPTER III

## Government and Society

DESPITE the Indian administration's weakness in the Straits, its small civil service, tiny police force and lack of financial resources, throughout this period it faced no serious challenge to its authority. The European population experienced some unease at being a small, almost defenceless, minority among thousands of Asians, and well-to-do merchants of all races looked with misgiving at the mass of poor, illiterate, half-starving, rootless youths who came to seek their fortune in the Straits. There were times of rumour and panic, but there were no risings or racial clashes and on the whole the Straits Settlements remained little oases of orderly calm in the turbulent world of southeast Asia. Accounts in the Straits newspapers of piracy in the nearby waters, of murder in the Malay states, or of the massacre of European communities in neighbouring countries merely added spice and excitement to the otherwise monotonous lives of the ruling class.

This general peacefulness derived mainly from the heterogeneous character of the population. The Straits authorities realized that the divisions between the various communities gave the government strength. In times of emergency it was prepared to play off one community against another, as in 1857 when thousands of Malays were called in from Province Wellesley to counteract possible trouble from the Penang Chinese.<sup>1</sup> This precaution was unnecessary and underlined the fact that the authorities rarely needed to adopt any conscious policy of 'divide and rule', since the natural divisions were sufficiently deep. In language, religion, custom, social organization and economic activity, Malays and Chinese stood aloof from each other.

In both political administration and economic activities the

<sup>1</sup> SSR, V 22, pp. 256-7; SSR, DD 25, Item 144.

government had less contact with the Malays than with any of the other major communities in the Straits Settlements. For administrative, judicial and social purposes they remained largely under the control of their chiefs, headmen and priests. In Singapore the Sultan and the Temenggong held sway over their own communities to almost the same extent as the rulers in independent Malay states. In Malacca the British took over the Dutch practice of administering the country districts through *penghulus*, who were responsible for checking crime and collecting revenue, keeping roads in repair, maintaining records of population, and submitting annual returns of births, marriages and deaths to the Malacca authorities.<sup>2</sup> After 1830 the two senior British officials who remained in Malacca rarely left town, so that in practice the *penghulus* retained complete charge of the rural districts.<sup>3</sup> They were usually as illiterate as their fellow villagers. Some were ineffective, and others exploited the opportunity to oppress the peasants and abuse their power.<sup>4</sup>

There were some well-educated Malays, usually of Arab extraction, and Haji Macawi, an Arab priest and the most influential religious leader of the Penang Muslim community, was much respected by European officials, merchants and planters.<sup>5</sup> However, apart from the Koran schools, there were few schools for Malays in any of the Straits Settlements, and in the 1850s the majority, including many of their *imams*, were illiterate.<sup>6</sup> The Straits government stood aloof from religious matters and refused to become involved in the appointment of religious officers or in their administration.<sup>7</sup> In 1860 Cavenagh refused to intervene in a dispute over the selection of a chief *kathi* in Penang. 'Every man is of course at liberty to act according to his own judgment in the choice of a religious instructor', he insisted, and offered to give a certificate of appointment only if the Muslim community's choice was

<sup>2</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notes on Malacca', *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 53-5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> SSR, R 40, pp. 62-7.

<sup>5</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1864), pp. 41-2.

<sup>6</sup> J. D. Vaughan, 'Notes on the Malays at Penang and Province Wellesley', *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857), 121-2.

<sup>7</sup> SSR, R 40, p. 67; SSR, U 38, pp. 163-7; SSR, U 40, pp. 85-6; SSR, V 36, p. 251.

unanimous.<sup>8</sup> He gave no support to Malacca *penghulus* who complained to him in 1863 that their villagers were not attending the mosque, and insisted that worship should be voluntary.<sup>9</sup> The refusal of the British authorities to recognize and support chief priests, combined with the prohibition of former Islamic punishments for criminal offences, weakened the religious authority of the priesthood among the Malays. Until the middle of the century the supremacy of the *kathi* of Telok Ayer Tawar was acknowledged by the Malay community in Province Wellesley, and that of Haji Macawi in Penang. But during the 1850s many *hajis* set up independent jurisdiction in Province Wellesley, and the attempts of a devout and strictly orthodox Arab, Abdul Ghani, to take over authority in Penang when Haji Macawi died, met with resistance, particularly from well-to-do Muslims, many of whom were drifting away from orthodoxy. Some feared that under the pressures of western commercial influence and *laissez-faire* colonial rule Islamic worship might wither away in the Straits.<sup>10</sup>

There were a few British officials who admired the Malays, such as Raffles, who regarded them as a fine race dragged down by European political and commercial encroachment, or J. D. Vaughan,<sup>11</sup> police magistrate and later puisne judge in Singapore, who studied Malay and acquired increasing respect and affection for the Malay community. Vaughan admitted himself to be an exception among his contemporaries,<sup>12</sup> and the general tendency among the British officials was to hold the Malay population in indulgent contempt. Cavenagh compared them to his fellow Irishmen, good-natured, intelligent but priest-ridden, energetic in sport but lazy in work.<sup>13</sup> There was a

<sup>8</sup> SSR, U 40, pp. 85-6.

<sup>9</sup> O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), p. 343.

<sup>10</sup> Vaughan, *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857), 153.

<sup>11</sup> JONAS DANIEL VAUGHAN. Served with East India Company's navy in south-east Asia and China waters; first officer of the *Hooghly* in Straits, 1851-6; master attendant Singapore, 1856-61; police magistrate Singapore, 1861-9; resigned from government service and called to the bar, 1869; practised as lawyer and for short time acted as puisne judge in Singapore; disappeared at sea, 1891. Author of 'Notes on the Chinese of Penang', *JIA*, 1854, viii, pp. 1-27; 'Notes on the Malays of Penang and Province Wellesley', *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857), 115-75; *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (Singapore, 1879, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> Vaughan, *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857), 116.

<sup>13</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 263-5.

general feeling among the ruling class that while the Malays were law-abiding and easy to administer, economically they were unproductive.

The Indian population, though predominantly south Indian, was divided by social class, dialect and religion; many were Muslims but the majority Hindus. The garrison and convicts were under direct government control, the petty trading class were generally peaceable, and the estate labourers lived a separate existence under their employers' control, rarely coming into contact with the authorities. The only section of the Indian community which caused concern to the government were the Jawi-pekans, the offspring of intermarriage between Malays and Indians.

Indian soldiers and civilian immigrants brought their Hindu and Muslim religious practices with them, and usually the garrison and upper-grade convicts were given leave to celebrate their religious festivals, the Hindu Dusserah and the Shiah Muslim Muharram.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the Malays, who were Sunni Muslims, most Indian Muslims were Shiahs and set up their separate mosques.<sup>15</sup> In India Muharram was a serious, solemn ceremony, but in the Straits it degenerated into a noisy festival, from which most of the Malay population stood aloof.<sup>16</sup>

Between 1830 and 1850 more than 1,500 Thugs were transported to Penang and Singapore,<sup>17</sup> and they played a prominent part in the Dusserah and Muharram festivals, helping to turn them into a rowdy display of hooliganism. Thugs and other dangerous Indian criminals may also have been responsible for the growth of Indian-type secret societies, whose origin in the Straits Settlements is obscure, and in 1846 there were said to be Indian secret society leaders in the convict jail.<sup>18</sup> The Indian societies were certainly not offshoots of the Chinese secret societies, although later they became associated with them. The first Muslim society, the Red Flag Society, may have originated as a Malay organization during the Kedah wars in

<sup>14</sup> SSR, S 28, Item 112.

<sup>15</sup> M. L. Wynne, *Triad and Tabut* (Singapore, 1941), p. 231.

<sup>16</sup> Vaughan, *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857), 115-75.

<sup>17</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 244.

<sup>18</sup> F. S. Marryat, *Borneo and the Indian Archipelago* (London, 1848), p. 217.

the 1830s.<sup>19</sup> A rival White Flag Society emerged in Penang in the late 1850s, and by 1860 both societies were in league with rival Chinese secret societies in Penang and Singapore.<sup>20</sup>

The growing influence of convicts and the emergence of Muslim secret societies coincided with a period of tension and rift in the Malay Sunni church in Penang and Province Wellesley. Whole villages of Malay peasants were being drawn into the Chinese secret societies in the early 1850s.<sup>21</sup> Abdul Ghani set out with some success to break the connection of Malays with the Chinese societies, and by 1860 both the Red and White Flag societies were left predominantly Indian in character, although they were to become closely linked with the Malay population in Penang and Perak during the Larut wars.<sup>22</sup>

The Muharram and Dusserah festivals, when convicts were usually given permission to carry *tabuts* in procession through the Straits towns, caused increasing trouble. The 1855 celebrations resulted in such hooliganism that the following year Governor Blundell banned the processions. His orders were enforced in Malacca, but in Penang, the Resident Councillor lifted the prohibition for fear of the convicts' reaction, while in Singapore defiant convicts overpowered the sepoy guards and marched through the town, planting their *tabut* in front of the Resident Councillor's house.<sup>23</sup> By the 1860s the Muharram celebrations had shed all sense of solemn religious observance and become a trial of strength between the Flag societies.<sup>24</sup>

During the hearing of a civil case in the Recorder's court in Singapore in 1865 a Red Flag headman turned queen's evidence against his society and surrendered documents and information which exposed its activities in extortion and oppression and led to the arrest and imprisonment of six Red Flag leaders.<sup>25</sup> Cavenagh put a permanent ban on both the Muharram and

<sup>19</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, pp. 232, 234.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> J. D. Vaughan, 'Notes on the Chinese of Penang', *JIA*, viii (1854), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 219.

<sup>23</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 220; SSR, DD 26, Item 148.

<sup>24</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, pp. 105, 190-1, 236; *Penang Argus* in *SFP*, 27 August 1863; SSR, W 43, Items 8, 17, 18, 19; SSR, W 50, Item 440.

<sup>25</sup> *SFP*, 3 August, 19, 26 October, 23 November 1865.

Dusserah processions,<sup>26</sup> after which the Indian societies ceased to menace Singapore's peace,<sup>27</sup> but the Penang authorities remained complacent about the Muslim societies. The strength of their connection with the Chinese organizations was not realized, but was soon to play a crucial role in Perak.

The two communities who proved most troublesome to the Straits authorities were the Chinese, who throughout this period succeeded in resisting integration and maintaining their own discrete organization, and the European non-officials, who sought to share in the work and power of government.

When he founded Penang Francis Light introduced the system used by the Dutch in Malacca and elsewhere in the East, in administering different communities through headmen or kapitans, who held their own courts to settle minor disputes and were responsible for keeping the peace among their people. Raffles adopted the same system in Singapore, but the kapitans' judicial functions were in theory abolished in Penang in 1807 when the court of judicature was set up, and no kapitans were appointed by the Straits authorities in Singapore or Malacca after the settlements were united and the court's jurisdiction extended to all three in 1826. Despite this, in practice the Chinese continued to take their disputes to their elders rather than to the Recorder's court in Penang,<sup>28</sup> and in Malacca the Hokkiens of Malacca town continued to look upon the *Teng-chu* or president of the Cheng Hoon Teng temple as their leader, calling him kapitan and referring their disputes to him. By custom the most successful merchants were elected to the office of *Teng-chu*. Tan Kim Seng held this honour for many years, and in 1866 when his son, Tan Beng Swee, became *Teng-chu*, the Straits government was asked to confirm the title.<sup>29</sup> In this way the Baba communities of Malacca, Penang and Singapore continued to organize themselves informally under the kapitan system.

This voluntary kapitan arrangement suited Chinese immi-

<sup>26</sup> *SFP*, 1 June, 12, 19, 26 October 1865.

<sup>27</sup> *SFP*, 16 November 1865, 18 January 1866.

<sup>28</sup> Wong Choon San, *A Gallery of Chinese Kapitans* (Singapore, 1964), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



grants because it encouraged a local autonomy to which they were accustomed in mainland China, where the mandarinat was thinly spread and local communities were expected to organize their own affairs and settle their own disputes. Litigation in the Chinese imperial courts was unpleasant, expensive and often dangerous even for the plaintiff. As the Emperor K'ang-hsi expressed it, good citizens should refer disputes to their elders, but 'those who are troublesome, obstinate and quarrelsome, let them be ruined in the law courts'.<sup>30</sup> The authority for settling disputes within clans lay with the elders, while disputes between clans were settled by force of arms.

The Chinese in the Straits consisted of five major groups: Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese, speaking different dialects and often traditionally hostile to each other. The provinces of southeastern China, and particularly Fukien and Kwangtung, from which most of the immigrants to the Straits Settlements came, were notorious for their turbulence and the bitterness of their clan feuds. The Hokkiens, from Fukien province, were the most peaceable of the Chinese immigrant communities in the Straits, and the majority of the most influential and wealthy merchants were Hokkien. The immigrants from Kwangtung were divided into four groups, or *pangs*,<sup>31</sup> the Cantonese, who were usually at that time termed Macao men; the Teochews from Swatow; the Hakkas who came mostly from the mountains of northeast Kwangtung and southwest Fukien, and the Hainanese from Hainan island. The Teochews, who were nearer to the Hokkiens in customs and dialect than the Cantonese, shared also their leaning towards trading pursuits, although they were considered much more troublesome people. The Cantonese were attracted in large numbers with the opening of agriculture and tin mining in the Straits Settlements and the Malay states and provided many of the artisans in the Straits towns, the carpenters, tailors, goldsmiths and masons. The Hakkas, 'the Jews of China',<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> T. J. Jernigan, *China in Law and Commerce* (New York, 1905), quoted in M. Freedman, *Lineage Organisation in South Eastern China* (London, 1958), pp. 114-16.

<sup>31</sup> Yong Chin Fatt, 'Chinese Leadership in Nineteenth-Century Singapore', *Journal of the Island Society, Singapore*, i (1967), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 89.

originated centuries before in northern China, but were driven to the southern provinces, where their quest for land often caused friction with the existing inhabitants. The Cantonese were the first to come to seek their fortune in Malaya, but the Hakkas, driven by pressure of population and lack of land, soon followed. Some of them settled in the Straits towns, but the majority went through to the hinterland. The different dialect groups battled incessantly in China, Hokkien against Teochew, Cantonese against Hokkien, and the most bitter conflict of all was the Cantonese-Hakka quarrel which led to open warfare between these communities in China from 1845 to 1862.

Unlike other countries, such as North America where the bulk of the Chinese immigrants came from the Cantonese community, in the Straits the different dialect groups tended to form regional associations.<sup>33</sup> But the southern Chinese shared a common hostility to Manchu rule in China, and anti-imperial political movements cut across these clan organizations in the Straits. The anti-Manchu illegal secret society, the Triad, variously known as the Hung Brotherhood, the Thian Ti Hui, or the Heaven and Earth Society, drew its major strength from the provinces of Fukien and Kwangtung. From the late eighteenth century the Triad was responsible for numerous outbreaks against the imperial government, many of them in Kwangtung and Fukien. These provinces too were hotbeds of unorthodox religion, which challenged the state religion and was considered to be politically subversive. Attempts to suppress the Triad went hand in hand with religious persecution in nineteenth-century China.<sup>34</sup>

The Chinese immigrants brought their secret society organization and ritual with them to the Straits Settlements, but their political subversion remained directed against the imperial Chinese government and was not transformed into hostility towards the British authorities, nor were the Chinese in the Straits roused to any nationalist fervour whenever the British came into conflict with the Chinese imperial government. In their new home the societies, or *hoey*s, were not illegal organizations and did not become secret underground movements until

<sup>33</sup> Naosaku Uchida, *The Overseas Chinese* (Stanford, 1960), p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Freedman, *Lineage Organisation*, pp. 116-17.

criminal societies were outlawed in 1890. In the early years only their oaths, ceremonies, signals and membership were secret.

Nearly all the Chinese immigrants were young men, hoping to make money quickly and return to settle in their homeland. For the young immigrant peasant, divorced from the family life upon which society was based in his homeland, the secret societies softened the impact of bewildering loneliness and isolation at being plunged into a totally foreign environment. They gave the new arrival, or *sinkheh*, protection, they helped to arrange employment, and above all they admitted him to a brotherhood as strong in its links as the blood relationship of a family, with a code of conduct to which he could conform. They provided a background for ritual and religion, and in Singapore this tended to be an adaptation of Chinese rural folk religion or *shénism*, worshipping the *shén*, the spirits concerned with material well-being,<sup>25</sup> which was particularly appropriate where the main concern was the speedy attainment of economic prosperity.

In the early years the *hoeys* did not clash with the Straits government. The hand of the civil service was lighter even than in China, there was no interference with religious practice, customs or dress. The system of auctioning the tax farms meant that there was no argument over the collection of revenue. The Chinese community was not opposed to the government but indifferent to it. The authorities tolerated this situation in the pioneering days, but later became more concerned, partly because of their determination to make settlers conform to British law, which conflicted with the rooted Chinese objection to being brought under any state law, and partly because they feared the secret societies were behind the wave of violence and crime which troubled all three Straits Settlements, and particularly Singapore, in the 1830s.

The secret societies provided the machinery for exploitation of Chinese immigrants and violence against the community at large. This combination of protection and oppression, common

<sup>25</sup> M. Topley, 'The Emergence and Social Function of Chinese Religious Associations in Singapore', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, iii (1960), 300.

in mainland China among all classes of society, became more marked in the Straits Settlements, where there was no existing organization of society, where most of the Chinese population was transitory, and where the proportion of destitute and criminal was always high. The coolie trade and prostitution offered endless scope for exploitation among a floating population of young, unattached men. The tendency to brutality may have been encouraged by the fact that the Triad Society, unlike some of the other secret societies in China, traditionally put mutual help for its members second to opposition to the Manchus.<sup>36</sup> While shedding any resistance to the local government in the Straits, it retained the tradition of subordinating welfare to violence.

This characteristic of the Chinese to insulate themselves from the community in which they settled with an organization mingling protection with oppression and exploitation, accounts for what Mervyn Wynne of the Malayan Police Force described in 1941 as 'that Chinese exclusiveness, self-reliance and inscrutability which is at once the wonderment and the despair of the European official'.<sup>37</sup> This blend of admiration and dread on the part of the European minority, both officials and merchants, was as strong a century earlier.<sup>38</sup>

The first secret societies in Penang were offshoots of larger organizations well established among the Chinese miners of Junk Ceylon, the modern Puket island. The Triad (Ghee Hin or Patriotic Rise Society as it was known in the Straits) was set up in Penang during the last decade of the eighteenth century. About 1820 another society, the Hai San, was formed, also an offshoot of a parent society in Puket. Both societies consisted then predominantly of Cantonese members. In the early years there was no permanent hostility between the societies, both of which were involved in 1825 in plotting with the Siamese and the *hoeys* in Puket to seize Penang town. The exposure of this plot led to the first investigation by the Penang government into the *hoeys*, as a result of which Fullerton wanted to suppress them. In 1826 he instructed the master attendant of Penang to refuse entry to undesirable immigrants, and in 1828

<sup>36</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> SSR, W 34, Item 233.

declared that societies not licensed by magistrates were deemed illegal.<sup>39</sup> Neither measure was effective.

In Malacca, where the Dutch had tried to suppress secret societies, the *hoeys* sprang up again under lax British rule. The *Malacca Observer* estimated that in 1826 there were at least 4,000 secret society members.<sup>40</sup> At that time the well-to-do Hokkien merchants of Malacca town professed to have nothing to do with secret societies.<sup>41</sup>

New branches of the Triad were set up in the early days in Singapore, either from Malacca, Penang or Riau, and in November 1824 several people were killed in secret society clashes.<sup>42</sup> Munshi Abdullah recorded that about that time he was taken to see an initiation ceremony at Tanglin in the country, and he claimed the Triad had about 8,000 members in Singapore,<sup>43</sup> which was a wild exaggeration since the entire Chinese population of the island at that time numbered little more than half that figure.

By the 1830s officials were worried. In 1830 Bonham, then assistant Resident of Singapore, warned Resident Murchison, 'the real object of the *hoeys* I firmly believe as far as Singapore is concerned is in general rapine and robbery among the lower classes and the assumption of an improper degree of power and importance among the higher'.<sup>44</sup> Bonham would have liked to see the societies abolished.

Nothing was done to check the *hoeys*, which expanded with the dramatic rise of Chinese immigration in the mid-1830s and were considered responsible for most of the lawlessness and violence in Singapore. At a meeting held in Singapore in 1843 to discuss crime and the police force, there was a call for secret societies to be prohibited, and the Chinese merchants

<sup>39</sup> Fullerton's minute, 31 December 1826, SSR, A 30; Penang Council minute, 4 August 1828, SSR, Q 3.

<sup>40</sup> T. J. Newbold and E. W. Wilson, 'The Chinese Secret Triad Society of the Tien Ti Hueh', *JRAS*, vi (1840).

<sup>41</sup> SSR, W 34, Item 233.

<sup>42</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, ix (1855), 471.

<sup>43</sup> T. Braddell (trans.), 'Concerning the Tan Tae Hoey in Singapore', *JIA*, vi (1852), 545-55.

<sup>44</sup> Bonham to Governor, 17 September 1830 in SSR, R 9, quoted in W. L. Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur, 1969), pp. 58-60; *SFP*, 9 March 1865.

present suggested that payment of protection money to the *hoey*s be made a penal offence.<sup>45</sup> Samuel Garling, the acting Governor, sent a long report to India, together with a draft bill 'for the suppression of clubs and associations of a secret and dangerous character in the Straits Settlements',<sup>46</sup> but the Calcutta authorities refused to consider such an act.<sup>47</sup>

In the absence of control, new societies came to life. In Singapore a predominantly Hokkien society, the Ghee Hok, was formed in the late 1830s. In 1844 a new society, the Toh Peh Kong, was formed in Penang, also predominantly Hokkien, perhaps an offshoot of the Ghee Hok in Singapore, and constantly at variance with the Cantonese societies. In 1840 it was estimated there were about seven thousand members of the Triad among the Chinese in the Straits.<sup>48</sup> Early in 1846 about three thousand Chinese immigrants came from the Dutch Indies, including several secret society leaders banished by the Dutch from Riau.<sup>49</sup> Their arrival coincided with a series of alarms and outrages in Singapore, including a near panic among the European community on the occasion of the funeral of a Ghee Hin leader in March 1846. The authorities gave permission for a procession a hundred strong to pass along a prescribed route, but thousands turned out to join the procession and surged through the town, while the Governor, Resident Councillor and deputy police commissioner looked on as helpless spectators.<sup>50</sup> A week later a Chinese gang attacked a police party in broad daylight to rescue some Ghee Hin prisoners and kill the informer who had caused their arrest.<sup>51</sup>

Secret society lawlessness and violence were as rife in the other settlements. The Malacca Hai San was probably the most powerful single *hoey* in the Straits, because it had no rival in the settlement and monopolized the Kassang mines.<sup>52</sup> In 1849 thousands of Chinese tin miners from Kassang poured

<sup>45</sup> *SFP*, 16 February 1843.

<sup>46</sup> Acting Governor to Bengal, 1 April 1843, SSR, R 9.

<sup>47</sup> SSR, S 10, pp. 52-3.

<sup>48</sup> Newbold and Wilson, *JRAS*, 1840, vi, 130.

<sup>49</sup> *SFP*, 19 March 1846.

<sup>50</sup> *ST*, 14 March 1846; *SFP*, 19 March 1846; Marryat, *Borneo*, p. 217; W. H. Read, *Play and Politics: Reminiscences of Malaya by an Old Resident* (London, 1901), p. 93.

<sup>51</sup> *SFP*, 19 March 1846.

<sup>52</sup> SSR, W 34, Item 233.

into Malacca town, ostensibly to rescue one of their society leaders, who was on trial in the Recorder's court, but their intentions were not put to the test, since he was acquitted.<sup>53</sup> The next year there was fighting between the Chinese in the streets of Malacca, with which the police could not cope,<sup>54</sup> and in 1852 troops had to rescue police who were attacked at the Kassang mines.<sup>55</sup>

Violence continued to grow among the Chinese community in Singapore, and the grand jury repeatedly called for suppression of the *hoëys*. Butterworth refused to support this plea and assured Calcutta in 1848, 'I am of the opinion that the Chinese are the best and most peaceable colonists in the world.'<sup>56</sup> In 1849 the Singapore grand jury alleged that order was kept among the Chinese only by secret co-operation between the police and the society headmen,<sup>57</sup> and that same year Chinese witnesses summoned to give evidence in the law courts were kidnapped on the public road in broad daylight and never seen again.<sup>58</sup> For the first time reports came in of the murder of Chinese Christian converts, who had abandoned the secret societies, and the grand jury appealed again for laws to suppress the *hoëys* and for a rural police to patrol the interior of the island,<sup>59</sup> where no European would venture and where thousands of Chinese lived on isolated gambier and pepper farms outside the government's pale altogether and ruled only by secret society law. Rumours that more than five hundred Chinese Christians had been killed in widespread attacks in the country districts of Singapore early in 1851 led to further demands from the grand jury for effective police control of the interior and a call to ban Chinese from service on the grand jury for fear they might be members of secret societies themselves.<sup>60</sup> Grand juries repeated their pleas regularly in the years that followed.<sup>61</sup>

By that time it was obvious that the secret societies extended

<sup>53</sup> *SFP*, 21 September 1849.

<sup>54</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1851.

<sup>55</sup> *SFP*, 14 January 1853; *SSR*, S 19, Item 58; *SSR*, S 20, Item 62; *SSR*, S 21, Item 7.

<sup>56</sup> *SSR*, R 17, pp. 65-6.

<sup>57</sup> *SFP*, 19 April 1849.

<sup>58</sup> *SFP*, 3 August 1849.

<sup>59</sup> *SSR*, R 19, p. 187; *SFP*, 21 September, 5 October 1849.

<sup>60</sup> *ST*, 4 March 1851; *SFP*, 12 September 1851.

<sup>61</sup> *ST*, 13 April 1852; *SFP*, 19 August, 21 October 1853; *SSR*, U 24, pp. 126-30.

their power throughout the Chinese community and could flout the authority of the law. In 1850 when a society leader, Tan Ah Tow, was fined \$200, it was said that his *hoeys*, rumoured to be 20,000 strong, could raise the fine money by a levy of one cent apiece. In 1852 a police constable who infiltrated into a Ghee Hin initiation ceremony found most of the novices were employees of European merchants.<sup>62</sup> At the beginning of 1854 the government published a document giving the thirty-six oaths of the Triad, which had been confiscated from a Chinese house by the Singapore police. This paper in the main laid down an innocuous and indeed laudable code of behaviour for helping fellow members in time of need or distress and acting honourably towards their brethren. What concerned the authorities were the regulations which required members to shield their fellows in escaping from the police, forbade them giving evidence against their brethren in the law courts and required members to help each other against outsiders.<sup>63</sup> It amounted to a deliberate boycott of the civil administration. A similar document was found in Hong Kong about the same time, and the publication roused concern even in the Calcutta press, which up to that time had been sceptical about the supposed dangers from Chinese combinations.<sup>64</sup> While Gustav Schlegel's celebrated *Thian Ti Hwui: the Hung League*, published in Batavia in 1866, threw light for the first time on the origin and history of the Triad, too much emphasis has been laid by modern writers on the impact this book made in the Straits Settlements. The aims of the *hoeys* in the Straits and the code laid down for members were common knowledge more than a decade before this.

By the middle 1850s Chinese immigration into Singapore reached a new peak. In the official year 1853-4 more than thirteen thousand Chinese immigrants arrived, many of them dangerous men, rebels and refugees from civil war that raged in southern China. Singapore Chinese supplied much of the money and leadership for the Short Dagger Rebellion, during which the rebels seized control of the city of Amoy for a few

<sup>62</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 92.

<sup>63</sup> Full translation in *SFP*, 13 January 1854.

<sup>64</sup> *SFP*, 7 April 1854, commenting on articles in *Friend of India*.



months in 1853. Three of the six leaders were Singapore Hokkiens and after abandoning Amoy the rebels fled to Singapore,<sup>65</sup> where their arrival upset the balance of the societies. Up to that time the Ghee Hin was indisputably the major society in Singapore, but most of the defeated Hokkien rebels from Amoy presumably joined the rival Ghee Hok society. During the early months of 1854 Singapore town was alive with rumours that an uprising was imminent,<sup>66</sup> and in May 1854 an apparently trivial argument over a weight of rice sparked off fighting among the Chinese which led to greater bloodshed than had ever been seen in Singapore before. The trouble might have broken out because the Ghee Hin refused to pay a subscription to help the rebels, or it might have been a struggle between the Ghee Hin and the Ghee Hok for control of sources of wealth. J. D. Vaughan, a contemporary with considerable knowledge of the Chinese community, insisted that the divisions on this occasion were tribal rather than according to secret society loyalties, and that it was a struggle between the Hokkiens on one side and the Teochews, backed by the Cantonese, Hakkas and Hainanese.<sup>67</sup> But this would in fact be compatible with a struggle between the Hokkien-dominated Ghee Hok and the Ghee Hin, which included branches of various communities.

The scale of the violence came as a surprise. By early afternoon it was reported that four or five thousand men were fighting in the streets and Chinese were coming ashore from junks in the harbour to join the fray. It was a purely domestic dispute among the Chinese themselves and not directed against the government or non-Chinese communities. Rioters withdrew as the troops and officials appeared but immediately resumed their fighting once they had passed. The Governor gave orders that no force was to be used, a policy which was condemned by the press as weakness. Next morning the magistrates called together the Hokkien and Teochew leaders and appealed to them to use their influence to stop the fighting. By that time the town itself was calm, but fighting spread to the country

<sup>65</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, pp. 61-3.

<sup>66</sup> *ST*, 9 May 1854.

<sup>67</sup> J. D. Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (Singapore, 1879, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), p. 93.

districts. There were reports of terrible atrocities, of whole villages being wiped out, and rumours that hundreds of Chinese were massing to attack the town. Troops and police were posted to guard the main roads into the town, and after eight days of sporadic fighting life returned to normal.

It is possible that about 400 Chinese died during the week's rioting, but owing to Butterworth's restraint none was killed by the troops and only one by the police. Only two Europeans received injuries, in each case slight ones. Many Chinese shops were looted but no European godowns were touched. A week after the riots the *Straits Times* still condemned Butterworth's 'mistaken humanity' and lack of 'nerve and decision', and called for an end to be put to the Chinese *imperium in imperio* and the immediate suppression of the *hoeys*.<sup>68</sup>

Hundreds of Chinese were arrested and tried at a special session, which opened in a crowded and noisy court house in June 1854. After a trial lasting seventeen days, two men were condemned to death, fifteen were transported and sixty-four imprisoned.<sup>69</sup> Butterworth was by then convinced that legislation to control the *hoeys* was needed. In November 1854 he produced a bill which recommended the registration of all Asian inhabitants and of Chinese societies, appointment of Chinese headmen to keep the peace in their districts, and giving the Governor powers of banishment.<sup>70</sup> Calcutta took no steps to convert the bill into law, and the Chinese *hoeys* continued to enjoy complete freedom. After 1856 Triad activity died down in China, and it is possible that the Triad centre may have moved to Singapore.<sup>71</sup> The developments of the 1850s increased the wealth and influence of the *hoeys* and intensified the struggle between them. The attraction of agricultural and tin-mining enterprises in the Malay states, combined with the disintegration of the Taiping rebellion, led to an influx of immigrants, and growing profits could be made from the coolie traffic, from the opium and spirit farms and from the control of prostitution, which flourished with the growing

<sup>68</sup> *ST*, 4, 30 May 1854; *SFP*, 19 May 1854.

<sup>69</sup> *SSR*, R 26, pp. 158-61; *ST*, 13, 27 June 1854.

<sup>70</sup> *SSR*, R 26, pp. 78-86, 87-119, 158-61; *SSR*, R 27, pp. 18-38.

<sup>71</sup> Freedman, *Lineage Organisation*, p. 120.

imbalance between the numbers of Chinese men and women.

Meanwhile in Penang the character of the secret societies was changing. Up to 1845 both the leading *hoeyes* were predominantly Cantonese, but from that time Hakkas began to take over the Hai San. The bitter feud between Hakkas and Cantonese in China extended to Malaya. By 1854 the Hai San was almost exclusively a Hakka society and anti-Cantonese. The Ghee Hin, still mainly Cantonese in membership, remained the largest and most powerful society in Penang, and in 1854 was said to number fifteen thousand members in Penang and Province Wellesley. The Toh Peh Kong consisted mainly of Straits-born Baba Hokkiens and Teochews, and from the beginning its relations with the Ghee Hin were strained.

Divisions between tribes, embittered by hostilities in their homeland, were intensified by economic conflicts when they reached Malaya. The Cantonese were generally the pioneers in clearing the forests and making plantations, while the Hokkien and Teochew shopkeepers tended to control and profit from their labour. As a contemporary observer put it, the Cantonese 'are excellent squatters and may be called pioneers to the Chinchews' (Hokkiens).<sup>72</sup> Much of the wealth in Penang in the middle of the century was in the hands of Hokkiens and Teochews, which caused resentment among Cantonese labourers.

During the 1840s the Penang Chinese were quiet, partly because immigration was steady but limited, partly perhaps through the influence of Koh Kok Chye, who died in 1849. About that time Chinese immigrants began arriving in large numbers, bringing with them pent-up hostilities from mainland China. By the early 1850s between 2,000 and 3,000 Chinese were landing during the junk season in the early months of each year in Penang, which was a transit point for immigration into Province Wellesley, southern Siam and the Malay states. There was a great deal of fighting among the Chinese both on Penang island and Province Wellesley, and after the murder of a European planter by a Chinese gang in 1850, the government took the much-criticized step of appointing a prominent secret society leader as a headman in Province

<sup>72</sup> Vaughan, *JIA*, viii (1854), 3.

Wellesley.<sup>73</sup> In 1852 there was fighting in the streets of Georgetown, and for the first time the Penang grand jury began to appeal for the *hoeys* to be registered.<sup>74</sup>

Despite this, Penang was more peaceful than Singapore. The main moderating influence was the Bengal-born Cantonese Ghee Hin leader, Boon Appoo, a generous, charitable, benevolent old man, who kept a private hospital for lepers. President of the Penang Ghee Hin for more than thirty years, he commanded great respect and as long as he remained in control of the massive Ghee Hin society, and as long as the chiefs were known and the societies met openly, as they did in Penang in the middle years of the century,<sup>75</sup> trouble between them remained localized street fighting.

The enforcement of the new police and municipal laws caused riots and disturbances among the Chinese in Singapore in January 1857,<sup>76</sup> which led to protests from the European population and to a demand by the Singapore grand jury either that the *hoeys* be suppressed or registered and kept under close supervision.<sup>77</sup> Governor Blundell considered legislation would be useless but appealed for arbitrary powers to deport troublemakers, which the government of India refused to grant.<sup>78</sup> It is unlikely that either these disturbances or clashes which took place between the Penang police and the Chinese two months later over interpretation of the new municipal legislation had anything to do with the *hoeys*, but in September 1857 fighting broke out in Penang between the Cantonese Ghee Hin society and the Hokkien Toh Peh Kong which went on for a week.<sup>79</sup>

Fear of the Chinese secret societies figured prominently in the petition for transfer drawn up by the Singapore Europeans in 1857, and the petitioners complained the *hoeys'* power was

<sup>73</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1851.

<sup>74</sup> *SFP*, 14 January 1853; Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, pp. 91-2, quoting *PG*, 23 October 1852; *SFP*, 11 January 1855, 10 January 1856.

<sup>75</sup> Vaughan, *JIA*, vii (1854), 22; Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, p. 105.

<sup>76</sup> C. M. Turnbull, 'Communal Disturbances in the Straits Settlements in 1857', *JMBRAS*, xxxi, no. 1 (1958), 96-146; Blythe, *Impact*, pp. 88-100.

<sup>77</sup> *SFP*, 8, 22 January 1857.

<sup>78</sup> *SSR*, R 30, pp. 303-8; India to Blundell, 27 March 1857, *SSR*, S 25.

<sup>79</sup> *SSR*, DD 26, Item 239.

encouraged by the vacillations of official policy, at times irritating and harsh and at others weak and appeasing. The petition claimed the government had persistently ignored the suggestions put forward by the European population to curb the influence of the *hoeys*, although neither Calcutta, Governor Blundell nor the Recorder of Singapore considered legislation practicable.<sup>80</sup> Dunman found it impossible to recruit trustworthy Chinese into the Singapore detective service because of the power of the secret societies. The *hoey* rules forbade members, on pain of death, from helping officials to arrest other members. In 1858 Dunman considered his existing police force 'utterly incapable to cope with such a monster evil as the Chinese secret societies', and estimated three-quarters of the Singapore Chinese and all the Chinese in Johore belonged to *hoeys*. The combined force of police, army and European Volunteer Corps could not hope to stem a concerted Chinese uprising in Singapore, but Dunman did not consider this a real danger, since the Chinese were divided among themselves and it was in the interests of their wealthy leaders to keep peace with the government.<sup>81</sup>

Impatient with the constant demands of the Singapore grand jury for suppression of the *hoeys*, Governor Blundell suggested in 1859 that the European merchants should lead the way by voluntarily breaking up their own secret society, the Freemasons.<sup>82</sup> But by that time senior officials were beginning to worry about the political activities of the secret societies, who were starting to recruit non-Chinese to their ranks. The leadership was passing into more irresponsible hands. The death of Boon Appoo in 1858 signalled a disintegration of the Penang Ghee Hin into rival factions.<sup>83</sup> In March 1859 the custom was introduced of enrolling *hoey* leaders in Penang as special constables to keep the peace, and the merchants renewed their demands for legislation and firm government action.<sup>84</sup> When

<sup>80</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, p. 587; SSR, W 26, Item 40; SSR, V 24, p. 134.

<sup>81</sup> SSR, W 26, Item 137; SSR, W 27, Item 288; SSR, R 33, pp. 231-8.

<sup>82</sup> SSR, R 35, pp. 288-94.

<sup>83</sup> SSR, U 36, p. 319; Straits Narrative 1st quarter 1859, Collection 9, CO 273/3; PG, 26 February in SFP, 10 March 1859; SFP, 17 March 1859.

<sup>84</sup> PG, 26 February in SFP, 10 March 1859; SFP, 17 March 1859; SSR, U 36, p. 319.

fresh fighting broke out in Penang in September 1859 the authorities were worried because Penang seemed to be caught up in a chain of disturbances among Chinese settlers along the whole coast south from Rangoon.<sup>85</sup>

The new Governor, Cavenagh, was alarmed at reports that the Penang Chinese were enrolling Malays, Indians and even Eurasians into their societies.<sup>86</sup> Up to that time the government had relied on the support of other communities to counter any disaffection among the Chinese. Cavenagh's concern deepened when he learned in November 1859 that three Malacca *penghulus* and many Malay peasants had joined the Hai San society. He immediately issued a proclamation to the non-Chinese in Malacca, forbidding them to join the *hoeys*, and he arrested some of the Malays involved. Soon afterwards he visited Malacca and set up courts at Kassang and Alor Gajah to compete with the *hoeys'* tribunals.<sup>87</sup>

Calcutta brushed aside Cavenagh's fears. They were confident that by admitting non-Chinese the *hoeys* would find it more difficult to preserve their secrecy, and in this the government of India was right. Non-Chinese members revealed many of the societies' secrets.<sup>88</sup> Despite this, Cavenagh objected to Calcutta's complacency towards the problem of the *hoeys* and in 1860 he sounded out the opinions of senior officials with a view to drafting a bill.<sup>89</sup> None of them advocated suppression and all admitted the societies served many useful purposes. The views of those officials who administered the law were much more moderate than those of the European merchants.<sup>90</sup>

In 1860 Cavenagh submitted to Calcutta his draft bill 'for the better regulation of societies and prevention of illegal assemblies in the several stations of the Straits Settlements', which provided for registration of societies and office bearers and gave the right to justices of the peace and senior police

<sup>85</sup> Resident Councillor Penang to Governor, 2 October 1859, SSR, X 18; SFP, 6 October 1859; PG, 24 September in SFP, 6 October 1859; SSR, W 32, Item 542.

<sup>86</sup> SSR, U 39, p. 141; SFP, 6 October 1859.

<sup>87</sup> Proclamation 24 November 1859, SSR, V 29; SSR, V 28, pp. 19-20; SSR, U 39, pp. 227-31; SSR, R 36, pp. 1-3; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 261-2.

<sup>88</sup> SSR, S 28, Item 3; PG, 28 January in SFP, 9 February 1860.

<sup>89</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 99-110; SSR, S 28, Item 63.

<sup>90</sup> SSR, V 31, pp. 69-71; SSR, W 33, Item 185; SSR, W 34, Items 191, 202, 233, 242; SFP, 17 May 1860, 17 January 1861; PG, 26 May in SFP, 7 June 1860.

officers to attend meetings. Calcutta, postponing the question of legislating for the Chinese societies while the transfer negotiations were going on, ignored Cavenagh's draft.<sup>91</sup>

In the early 1860s the *hoeys* were quiet in all three settlements, but the year 1863 was a time of trouble among the Chinese in Penang and in Singapore, where a group of wealthy Chinese merchants petitioned the governor for protection against the *hoeys*, alleging that the Ghee Hin leaders in particular were idle, good-for-nothing extortionists.<sup>92</sup> Friction grew between the societies, possibly over a large number of prostitutes shipped in from China. Fighting lasted four days but petered out when Cavenagh enrolled the headmen as special constables, the first time this very effective system was used in Singapore.<sup>93</sup> The magistrates, and Read in particular, were harsh on the offenders who were arrested. Two hundred and thirty were convicted and imprisoned, the ringleaders for two years,<sup>94</sup> but this did not put an end to unrest in Singapore and skirmishing went on all the year. Dunman suspected many of his policemen belonged to the *hoeys* and dismissed some of them in 1864,<sup>95</sup> but secret society battles received a new impetus in Singapore in 1865 with the release of thirty-five Ghee Hin leaders who had been imprisoned after the riots two years before.<sup>96</sup>

Despite Calcutta's refusal to consider legislation and insistence that the courts and police force should be able to cope with the problem, Cavenagh sent two draft bills to Calcutta in October 1865. One was 'for the better regulation of societies and the prevention of illegal assemblies' and the other 'for the better prevention of riots and unlawful confederacies'.<sup>97</sup> Together with the draft law of 1860, these remained among the

<sup>91</sup> SSR, R 37, pp. 71-83; Wood to India, 12 January, 14 April, 16 July 1860, IO, Judicial Despatches to India, vol. 3; Wood to India, 16 March 1861, IO, Judicial Despatches to India, vol. 4; SSR, S 28, Items 36, 182; India to Wood, 15 January 1861, CO 273/5.

<sup>92</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*; PG, 7, 24 March, 11 April in SFP, 19 March, 2, 23 April 1863.

<sup>93</sup> SSR, W 46, Item 292; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-3*; SSR, R 44, pp. 68-9; SFP, 21 January 1864.

<sup>94</sup> SSR, W 46, Item 292; Read, *Play and Politics*, pp. 105-6.

<sup>95</sup> SSR, W 50, Item 437.

<sup>96</sup> SFP, 20, 27 April, 20 July, 3 August, 14 September, 19 October, 2 November 1865.

<sup>97</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 254-5, 335-6; SSR, R 44, pp. 202-5; SSR, S 33, Item 162.

'subjects for legislation notified', which Cavenagh listed in his final report before giving up the administration in 1867.<sup>98</sup> No legislation was passed and in the last months of Indian rule the Chinese *hoeys* in Singapore and Penang were as active and unruly as ever.<sup>99</sup> Only Malacca enjoyed peace, probably because most of the miners at Kassang who had been responsible for earlier outbreaks had moved over the borders.

The problem of the Chinese *hoeys* became more acute in the 1860s because of large-scale migration into the Straits Settlements of Hakkas driven out of China. The Hakkas were the mainstay of the Taiping rebellion, which was suppressed in 1864, and were still engaged in bitter fighting with the Cantonese in south China, until by the end of 1862 the Cantonese had the upper hand. Perhaps as many as 150,000 Hakkas were slaughtered and the remnants dispersed in China and overseas, many of them sold as coolie emigrants. Large numbers of Hakkas came to Penang and the Perak tin mines, and in its bitter opposition to the Cantonese Ghee Hin, the now almost exclusively Hakka Hai San society became associated with the Toh Peh Kong.

The Straits authorities and the Calcutta government were generally reluctant to interfere with societies which were of no political danger. The Chinese *hoeys* tyrannized only their own people and constituted no threat to the government. They had some admirable social virtues and often they cut across regional links. In 1840 the Singapore Triad had a council which represented the four major groups, the Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew and Cantonese. In 1879 of the nine Triad branches in Singapore, five represented the main dialect groups, but the other four contained members from all the communities. Very often the *hoeys* seem to have helped avoid intense friction between the various dialect groups as long as the balance of power was preserved. 'To this day', the magistrate, J. D. Vaughan wrote in 1879, 'much of the peace that exists in the colony is due to the influence of the secret societies.'<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> *Report on the Progress of the Straits Settlements from 1859-60 to 1866-7* by Governor Cavenagh (Singapore, 1867), p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> *SFP*, 15 November 1866; *ST*, 8, 9 March 1867.

<sup>100</sup> Vaughan, *Manners and Customs*, p. 94.



On the other hand the *hoeys* were regarded as a serious impediment to the British judicial system. According to the societies' rules members were forbidden to give evidence against a brother or supply the authorities with information. It was general practice to smuggle criminal members out of the country, as in the case of a wanted murderer who was disguised as a woman and shipped back to China by *hoey* leaders in 1859 despite the reward offered for his capture.<sup>101</sup> It was not uncommon for Chinese to volunteer to serve others' prison sentences for payment, and to give aliases which confused the police.<sup>102</sup> The *hoey* oaths made it impossible to check perjury in the law courts. The only remedy was to undermine the authority of the *hoey* tribunals and attract Chinese into the British courts by opening up more magistrates' courts to deal speedily and effectively with petty crimes, by punishing firmly any obvious perjury,<sup>103</sup> and by applying the law impartially to rich and poor.<sup>104</sup> This was a slow process which was only beginning to achieve momentum by the time Indian rule came to an end.

One of the main causes of friction between the Chinese community and the government concerned celebrations and entertainment. The East India Company's policy of non-interference in religious practices led its officials to tolerate Chinese processions and festivities which became increasingly disturbing to the rest of the population and often had nothing to do with religious observance. Originally the Chinese were allowed to gamble freely for a fortnight at Chinese new year, and when this was stopped in 1848 it led to protests of discrimination against the Chinese community.<sup>105</sup> But the main trouble arose over processions and *wayangs*, or theatrical performances. Lewis, as

<sup>101</sup> SSR, W 30, Item 273.

<sup>102</sup> SSR, W 45, Item 70; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 277.

<sup>103</sup> For example the public flogging of a false 'eyewitness' put up by a secret society in Singapore, J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), pp. 144-5.

<sup>104</sup> For example the imprisonment in 1863 of Lim Chin Nyo, daughter of a prominent Penang merchant, for injuring a servant. *Penang Argus*, 27 August in *SFP*, 10 September 1863.

<sup>105</sup> C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, 1902, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), ii, 471.

Resident Councillor of Penang, considered *wayangs* 'a nuisance and grossly immoral' and 'the *wayang* house itself when the play is over a receptacle for vagabonds and thieves'.<sup>106</sup> But the Singapore and Penang Chinese represented these entertainments to be essential religious customs.

In Penang the Chinese enjoyed greater freedom than in Singapore to indulge in noisy entertainments, which came to be regarded as sacred and almost immune from official interference. The result was that Penang was a town where an 'incessant clang of gongs and drums' went on all day and most of the night. Even the main roads were converted into bazaars filled with food stalls and were often made impassable by processions and *wayang* stages. Europeans complained constantly of the disturbance and of the ineffectiveness of the police, but as Blundell commented, 'No police can be efficient in the face of such licence.'<sup>107</sup>

The municipal legislation of 1856 provided an opportunity to curtail such nuisances, but the enforcement of the acts led to the Chinese merchants of Penang appointing J. R. Logan as their agent to plead for restoration of their privileges. Following a commission of enquiry held in Penang in July 1857, Blundell drew up orders for granting licences for festivals and processions, which sought gradually to curb the privileges enjoyed by the Chinese community of Penang.<sup>108</sup> In Singapore there was always more restraint, although every year the press urged the curtailing of celebrations at Chinese new year, when all business stopped for fifteen days of noisy merry-making, and the grand jury sometimes called for the suppression or restriction of rowdy processions. Cavenagh refused to abolish long-established rights, and on the whole the press supported his firm policy of leniency.<sup>109</sup>

After the official kapitan system was abandoned there was no formal organization for administering the Chinese community until the founding of the Chinese protectorate in 1877, and the British authorities came to rely on the informal co-operation of

<sup>106</sup> SSR, DD 26, Item 228.

<sup>107</sup> SSR, U 34, p. 63.

<sup>108</sup> SSR, DD 25, Item 65; SSR, S 25, Item 193; SSR, U 34, pp. 59-69; SSR, S 26, Item 56; SSR, DD 34, Items 82, 134; SSR, U 43, p. 80.

<sup>109</sup> SSR, W 33, Item 57; *SFP*, 3 April 1862, 26 January 1865; *ST*, 11 October 1865.

individual wealthy Chinese merchants, who became essential go-betweens. How far these men had influence over their countrymen is difficult to gauge, but it was very much in their interests to keep the peace between the Chinese community and the government.

No European official or merchant knew what connection existed between these prosperous merchants and the secret societies. No respectable Chinese merchant at that time would admit to membership of the Singapore *hoeyes*. A contemporary, writing in 1853, referred to the upper ranks of Chinese merchants in Singapore as 'gentlemen as honourable, polished and worthy of friendship as can be found in any society'.<sup>110</sup> John Cameron considered the wealthy upper-class Chinese who settled permanently in the Straits Settlements, 'left behind them nearly all their vices and lead a life distinguished by outward probity'.<sup>111</sup> But their private life remained a mystery to the European community, who could not gauge their real influence over the masses or their links with the murky underworld of the Straits Settlements. Thomson regarded Whampoa as 'a friend and a gentleman',<sup>112</sup> and the *Straits Times* described him in later life 'as much an Englishman as he is a Chinaman'.<sup>113</sup> Whampoa himself denied any connection with the Ghee Hin,<sup>114</sup> but Europeans suspected that he and other wealthy Chinese were secret society leaders.<sup>115</sup> A well-to-do Malacca Chinese escorted Munshi Abdullah to witness a Triad initiation ceremony in Singapore about 1824,<sup>116</sup> and in the 1830s the distinguished Koh Kok Chye was reputed to be a Penang Ghee Hin leader.<sup>117</sup> The powerful Khoo family established and dominated the Toh Peh Kong.<sup>118</sup> In Malacca, George Windsor Earl, who went there as a law agent in 1848, maintained that the Baba Chinese controlled the Kassang mines and that his first retainer was from an influential Hai San chief.<sup>119</sup> It is possible that Tan Kim Ching was the head of the Triad in

<sup>110</sup> H. St John, *The Indian Archipelago* (London, 1853), ii, 353.

<sup>111</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 146.

<sup>112</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, p. 307.

<sup>113</sup> *SFP*, 19 March 1846.

<sup>114</sup> T. Braddell (trans.), 'Concerning the Tan Tae Hoey in Singapore', *JIA*, vi (1852), 545-55.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>116</sup> *ST*, 21 December 1869.

<sup>117</sup> Marryat, *Borneo*, p. 217.

<sup>118</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 205.

<sup>119</sup> *SSR*, W 34, Item 253.

Malaya in the later years of Indian rule,<sup>120</sup> while the scholarly Seah Eu Chin's brother-in-law, Tan Seng Poh,<sup>121</sup> Singapore's first Chinese municipal commissioner, may have been a Ghee Hok leader.<sup>122</sup>

In a community where wealth was synonymous with power, a divorce between merchants and *hoes* seems unlikely. Philanthropy and good works alone were not sufficient to establish leadership in the growingly turbulent and shifting Chinese communities of Penang and Singapore in the 1850s. With the influx of immigrants from the middle of the century, power and influence lay increasingly with the secret societies. The traditional pattern of leadership in mainland China, based on respect for scholarship and the dominance of the mandarin class, was broken by emigration to the Straits Settlements. The vast majority of Chinese immigrants were illiterate peasants. There were no Chinese schools in the Straits in the first half of the nineteenth century and little opportunity or incentive for immigrants to acquire any education. Wealth and material success rather than learning commanded respect. In China itself the Triad in the 1830s and 1840s admitted men of all ranks, including minor mandarins and well-to-do merchants, and in the Straits Settlements, where the Triad took the place of the lineage or clan organization of mainland China in its relationships with the government, the successful merchant having the ear of the authorities must have wielded great influence. Such go-betweens were particularly powerful in a settlement where the ruling class had almost no direct contact with the mass of the population.

The earl of Elgin, who visited Singapore in 1857, thought it extraordinary that in a settlement with a Chinese population of more than 60,000, no westerner took the trouble to learn Chinese.<sup>123</sup> The position was no better ten years later when the

<sup>120</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 64.

<sup>121</sup> TAN SENG POH (1830-79). Teochew, born in Perak; opium and spirit farmer Singapore; proprietor of gunpowder magazine; municipal commissioner Singapore, 1870-6; justice of the peace, 1872. Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (London, 1923, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1966), pp. 132-4, 170.

<sup>122</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 418.

<sup>123</sup> T. Walrond (ed.), *Letters and Journals of James Eighth Earl of Elgin* (London, 1872), p. 190.

colonial office took over the administration, and up to 1867 the training of officials in the Chinese language continued to fall victim to what the *Free Press* condemned as 'a sordid and irrational economy'.<sup>124</sup> Blundell saw the danger and in 1858 he urged the Calcutta authorities to offer a 'handsome reward' to officials who qualified in Chinese. In response Calcutta drew up rules prescribing tests in Malay but did not demand a compulsory study of Chinese.<sup>125</sup> Cavenagh wanted to recruit some of the young men trained in England for the Chinese consular service, but could only offer vacancies in the uncovenanted service at too low a rate to attract them.<sup>126</sup> All further discussions about providing Chinese-speaking officials were shelved during the transfer negotiations, and it was not until colonial times that cadets were appointed to learn Chinese and to specialize in Chinese affairs.

Throughout the whole period of Indian rule in the Straits Settlements the Chinese community stood apart from British administration, and the Calcutta authorities showed a consistent reluctance to introduce restrictive legislation to curb a community whom they considered to be ideal settlers, energetic, hard-working and self-reliant. Lord Canning, Governor General of India in 1859, commended the Chinese as 'democratic, in spite of the outward form of their own government, enterprising and persevering' with a strong tendency to self-government.<sup>127</sup> It was the Chinese who opened up gambier and pepper plantations in Singapore and later in the valleys of Johore, and who braved the dangers and hardships of pioneering tin mining at Kassang and in the independent Malay states. It was the taxes on the vices and pleasures of the Chinese community which raised the bulk of the revenue and kept the taxes on the European merchants attractively low. It was largely Chinese merchants who provided the social welfare services.

Most Straits officials and many private European residents agreed with Calcutta's view. John Crawford, Resident of

<sup>124</sup> *SFP*, 17 April 1856.

<sup>125</sup> *SSR*, R 33, pp. 122-3; *Straits Settlements Government Gazette*, 3 November 1859.

<sup>126</sup> *SSR*, R 38, pp. 90-3, 201-4, 279-81; *SSR*, S 28, Item 264; *SSR*, S 29, 16 February 1861.

<sup>127</sup> *PP* (H. of C.), 259 of 1862, p. 13.

Singapore from 1823 to 1826, declared, 'One Chinaman is equal in value to the state to two natives of the Coromandel coast and to four Malays at least.'<sup>128</sup> Sir Richard McCausland, on retiring as Recorder of Singapore in 1866, told a Chinese deputation that of all the Asian communities, their industry, mutual support and liberality had 'stamped the Chinese as the best colonists which the world has produced'. Blundell considered them 'hard-working, industrious men',<sup>129</sup> and Cavenagh regarded them as useful citizens who needed only to be treated firmly by 'the iron hand with the velvet glove'.<sup>130</sup> John Cameron described the Chinese as 'by far the most industrious and consequently the most valuable people we have in these possessions, the development of the internal resources of which is almost entirely due to them'.<sup>131</sup> J. R. Logan extolled their virtues. 'In intelligence, docility and industry they are far above their Malay kindred', he claimed.<sup>132</sup> Consequently no restrictions were put on Chinese immigration throughout the Indian regime, and before the 1870s the Straits authorities exercised no supervision over the coolie trade, the organization of labour and the import of prostitutes.

There were no signs of anti-British hostility even when Britain was at war with China. When the second Anglo-Chinese war broke out in 1856 and the British factories in Canton were destroyed, the Straits government feared that their Chinese communities might rise in sympathy with their countrymen. Consequently they read a political significance which did not exist into the restiveness among the Straits and Sarawak Chinese in 1857. In June 1857 the leading Chinese merchants of Singapore waited on Lord Elgin, who as British High Commissioner and Plenipotentiary was passing through Singapore with troops to fight the Chinese imperial government. Elgin was puzzled when they presented him with an address expressing their loyalty to the British government and appreciation of the advantages the Straits Chinese enjoyed under British rule,<sup>133</sup> but there was no anomaly in this declaration of

<sup>128</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, viii (1854), 40.

<sup>129</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 21-2.

<sup>130</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 255.

<sup>131</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 138.

<sup>132</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 193.

<sup>133</sup> Walrond, *Elgin*, p. 190.

support for the British leader of an anti-Manchu expedition. As the *Free Press* concluded during the second Anglo-Chinese war, the Chinese were a potential danger 'not from their sympathy with the country from which they sprang, but from their want of sympathy with the country in which they have taken up their abode'.<sup>124</sup>

Whereas the Chinese posed a problem since they did not wish to be involved with the process of government, the European minority created difficulties for the authorities by agitating for greater participation and control. It was the small body of British merchants, law agents and newspaper editors, constituting the majority of the adult male European population of Singapore, who provided the impetus for constitutional change. In Malacca there were very few British residents and no interest either in constitutional questions or municipal politics. After thirty years of British rule, Thomas Braddell, then police magistrate of Malacca, considered that if the Company gave up the settlement, 'The British name and recollection will be obliterated in a day.'<sup>125</sup> Penang by the middle of the century was a political and economic backwater. Her agriculture was failing, her trade a pale reflection of Singapore's, her European population small and, apart from a few individuals, lacking the drive, the ambition and the growing discontent which caused their fellow countrymen in Singapore to agitate for constitutional change and a greater share in government.<sup>126</sup>

As the commercial importance of Singapore increased and her problems became more complex, the western settlers became restive under the autocratic government of the East India Company. The denial of any share in government, even at the lowest level, bred frustration. At the same time the Company's tolerance of free expression provided the European community with the means of criticism without imposing the responsibilities of an official opposition. Throughout the period of Indian rule

<sup>124</sup> *SFP*, 29 December 1859.

<sup>125</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notes on Naning', *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 216.

<sup>126</sup> For fuller treatment of this subject see C. M. Turnbull, 'The European Mercantile Community in Singapore, 1819-67', *JSEAH*, x, no. 1 (1969), 12-35.

the residents of the settlements enjoyed freedom of speech and assembly, and there was no censorship of the press after 1835. A 'Gagging Act' introduced after the Indian Mutiny in 1857 was formally extended to the Straits but never enforced.

This atmosphere of free expression encouraged the emergence of an independent English-language press in the Straits Settlements. Penang had weekly newspapers from 1805 onwards, almost without interruption, the most long-lived being the *Prince of Wales Island Gazette*, started in 1833, which changed its name in 1838 to the *Penang Gazette*. In Malacca newspapers appeared only for brief periods, from 1826 to 1829 and from 1839 to 1840. Singapore's first newspaper was the *Singapore Chronicle*, which was founded in 1824 and closed down in 1837. The *Singapore Free Press* appeared in 1835 and survived as a weekly until 1869 when it ceased publication. A rival weekly, the *Straits Times*, started in 1845, was published twice a week from 1847 and daily from 1858.

The relationship between press and government in continental India in the early nineteenth century was stormy. Censorship regulations were withdrawn in 1818, but the authorities were so embarrassed by the immediate flowering of several critical and outspoken English-language newspapers that a new 'Gagging Act' was imposed in 1823. The birth of Singapore's first newspaper, the *Singapore Chronicle*, a few months later in January 1824 appeared inauspicious. But for the first two years John Crawfurd, the Resident, controlled the *Chronicle* effectively through subordinate uncovenanted servants and promised that 'the paper is to be exclusively commercial... its aim will be rather to convey useful intelligence to foreign merchants than to the settlers of the colony itself'.<sup>127</sup> After Crawfurd's departure in 1826, the character of the newspaper changed under a new editor who was a critic of the government. Fullerton silenced his opposition by threatening to expel him, and also forced the *Malacca Observer* to close down in 1829, when the editor criticized the handling of the Naning War. Fullerton's successors were more tolerant. Unlike their counterparts in Calcutta, Straits officials had no fears that newspapers

<sup>127</sup> C. A. Gibson-Hill, 'The Singapore Chronicle, 1824-37', *JMBRAS*, xxiv, no. 1 (1953), 181, 183-4, 193.



might incite discontent among the local population against the Company, and in 1833 the government of India agreed to exempt editors in the Straits Settlements from submitting proof sheets to the Governor before publication.<sup>138</sup> Censorship disappeared in practice in the Straits two years before the 'Gagging Act' was formally repealed in India in 1835.

The first issue of a second newspaper, the *Singapore Free Press*, appeared in 1835. This competition quickly killed the *Chronicle* which wound up two years later. The *Singapore Free Press* was founded by William Napier,<sup>139</sup> Singapore's senior law agent, Edward Boustead,<sup>140</sup> a prominent merchant, and George Coleman, the leading architect. It quickly established a reputation as a reliable, sober and moderate journal, the champion of Singapore's mercantile interests. In 1846 Abraham Logan became the editor and in his hands the scope of the *Free Press* widened to embrace constitutional questions and overseas affairs. The newspaper was described in 1853 as 'among the ablest and most influential journals in the East, conducted with remarkable vigour and animated always by the spirit of genuine liberality'.<sup>141</sup>

A rival newspaper was founded in 1845, the *Straits Times and Journal of Commerce*. At that time the *Free Press* was a rather stiff sombre journal, a respected but dull ornament for Singapore's breakfast tables, and it regarded its competitor with some contempt.<sup>142</sup> Robin Woods, the *Straits Times's* editor, set out initially to provide the town with some lighter reading in the form of short stories, anecdotes and jokes, but soon abandoned this policy and devoted the new journal to political and commercial issues. The third influential newspaper in the middle of the century was the *Penang Gazette*, which James Richardson Logan bought in 1855.

To contemporaries the local newspapers must generally have

<sup>138</sup> SSR, R 2, p. 21; Gibson-Hill, *JMBRAS*, xxiv, no. 1 (1953), 181-2.

<sup>139</sup> WILLIAM NAPIER. Nicknamed 'Royal Billy'; law agent, Singapore; Lieutenant Governor Labuan, 1848; legal adviser to Temenggong of Johore, 1855-7; returned to England 1857; first Chairman of Straits Settlements Association in London, 1868.

<sup>140</sup> EDWARD BOUSTEAD. Came from China and founded Boustead & Co. of Singapore about 1827; part-time editor *Singapore Chronicle*; retired to England 1850 and died there 1888.

<sup>141</sup> H. St John, *Indian Archipelago*, ii, 107.

<sup>142</sup> *SFP*, 9 October 1845.

made tame reading, because the East India Company's rules forbade them from discussing or criticizing personalities. They lacked spicy scandals, and apart from occasional issues, such as the controversy over Rajah James Brooke's campaign against pirates, it was not until the late 1850s that dissensions over the Governor's policy provided material for heated press debate. The newspapers were tolerably well-informed. The Governors often released official information to them, and in 1855 the Calcutta government ordered all its local authorities to allow newspaper editors to examine selected official papers.

In the middle of the century the Straits newspapers were sometimes pompous about their position as guardians of the liberties of the community. 'In a settlement where the vast majority is ignorant and thus encouraging despotism, it is the duty of the press to induce in government officials deference to their position as servants of government', insisted the *Penang Gazette* in September 1855. But they had a definite and important part to play in the development of the community in the last years of Indian rule. In the absence of a legislative council they were invaluable as a gauge—and often as a creator—of public opinion, and they kept interest in political issues alive. The Indian council's bills were published in full on the front pages of the newspapers, and discussion was invited from readers. Publicity was given to the calling of public meetings, which were reported in detail. Often the information was taken up by the press in England and sometimes used to influence members of the British parliament.

Most civil servants in the Straits attached considerable importance to press opinion. Sometimes officials in India consulted Straits newspapers as an indication of public opinion, although they were not read regularly by the Calcutta authorities in the way that the colonial office studied local newspapers. Blundell had the greatest contempt for newspapers and was constantly at war with the local press, but Cavenagh's dealings with the press were more cordial and he paid attention to their comments.

The *Singapore Free Press*, the *Straits Times* and the *Penang Gazette* remained to the end of Indian rule the only newspapers of any account in the Straits Settlements. A few other English-

language newspapers put in a fleeting appearance, but there were no vernacular journals. Few merchants could emulate the activity and interest in public service shown by the newspaper editors, but all of them were part-time journalists, for it was impossible to wrest a living out of publishing a newspaper in the Straits Settlements. In 1858 the subscription rate for the *Straits Times* was only \$16 a year, and the circulation amounted to a few hundred. The difficulties of the weekly *Penang Gazette* were even more acute, for in 1855 its circulation was less than one hundred.<sup>143</sup> Advertising must have provided the bulk of the finance, but there can have been little scope for it in a small English-reading community. This meant that editors had to combine journalism with other more lucrative activities. The Logan brothers and Woods were law agents, while Abraham Logan for a time was also a nutmeg planter. In 1861 Woods sold the *Straits Times* to John Cameron, a former master mariner, who continued other branches of business which he advertised in his newspaper, as a coal merchant, a dealer in cigars, wines and brandy, as a merchant in the Borneo trade, and managing director of the Singapore Ice Company. Cameron proved to be a good writer and a very fair and level-headed journalist, who improved the tone and style of the *Straits Times*. In 1865, in order to publicize the Straits Settlements in England in view of the coming transfer, he produced *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India*, the best contemporary account of the settlements at that time.

Cameron gave up the *Straits Times* in 1867 and was succeeded by a series of mediocre editors. Abraham Logan sold the *Free Press* in 1865, after which it rapidly deteriorated in the hands of inferior editors until the newspaper expired four years later. James Richardson Logan died in 1869. The great days of the press in the Straits Settlements were over, but the political conditions which had encouraged newspapers to flourish were also changing. By the mid-1860s the battle for transfer to colonial rule was almost won, and the legislative council, which was set up under the new regime in 1867, provided a more effective means for the expression of public opinion.

<sup>143</sup> PG, 22 September 1855.

One regular outlet for public opinion among the European mercantile community lay with the grand jury, which in addition to attending in court was required to inspect and report on jails and public buildings. At the close of each court sessions the foreman of the jury could make a presentment of comments and grievances, which the Recorder submitted to the Governor, and in practice these presentments came to include matters which would normally have been the responsibility of a legislative council and representative municipal authority, had these bodies existed.

Some of the early Recorders thought the grand jury served no useful purpose. Sir Benjamin Malkin suggested abolishing it, and the Indian law commissioners agreed in principle in 1842.<sup>144</sup> But the press came out in full support of the grand jury system in 1846, when the *Singapore Free Press* quoted the words of H. T. Prinsep, a Director of the East India Company: 'I would preserve the institution of the Grand Jury, if for no other reason than as being the only constitutional germ of political institutions that for a long time to come will be available for any purposes of advancement.'<sup>145</sup> After this Governors made no further move to censor grand jury presentments. Sir Christopher Rawlinson, Recorder from 1847 to 1849, who was a constant advocate of self-government and critical of the lack of popular representation in the East India Company's territories, told the Singapore grand jury just before he left the Straits that they were a better protection for the welfare of the settlement than the government, the police, the troops or any other body.<sup>146</sup>

The grand jury agitated for social improvements and the *Free Press* praised its long detailed Presentment at the end of 1854 as fit to constitute 'The Resident Councillor's and Municipal Committee's Manual for 1855'.<sup>147</sup> But the jury was more important as an outlet for public opinion than an effective means of getting grievances removed. Their recommendations were usually ignored, since they generally called for expenditure which the Straits government was powerless to incur. The

<sup>144</sup> Indian Law Commissioners' Report, in India to Bonham, 17 June 1842, SSR, S 9.

<sup>145</sup> *ST*, 29 April 1846; *SFP*, 30 April 1846.

<sup>146</sup> *SFP*, 29 March 1849.

<sup>147</sup> *SFP*, 24 November, 1 December 1854; *ST*, 28 November 1854.

Directors in London studied the presentments with some care, but invariably they were eighteen months old before they reached England, and on no occasion did a grand jury presentment induce the government of India or the Directors to reverse a decision made by the local government.

Jurymen wavered between regarding service as a tiresome duty or as a vital safeguard in preserving the liberties of the community. An attempt made by Butterworth to browbeat the Singapore grand jury in 1846 rallied public opinion to support the institution, but once Butterworth adopted a more conciliatory policy, the excitements of jury service disappeared and the merchants began to grudge the time they had to spend sitting in court. From the reopening of the Recorder's court in 1834 it became the practice to call thirty candidates each time and ballot for the maximum of twenty-three jurymen. The merchants of Penang, where there were few men eligible for grand jury service, began to complain as early as 1837 that jury service was a hardship.<sup>148</sup> It was no burden in Singapore in the first half of the century. While sailing ships stayed in harbour for days and sometimes weeks at a time, the pace of commerce was leisurely, and sitting on a jury provided a pleasant break from routine. Growing pressure of court business in the early 1850s coincided with the increase in the number of steamships calling at the Straits ports and making faster turn-rounds. In 1849 the Singapore grand jury complained that a man could be imprisoned for five months before trial for stealing a fowl, and 'nearly the whole of the British merchants and three fourths of their assistants taken from business for a fortnight to investigate this and forty or fifty similar cases'.<sup>149</sup>

The rule made in 1849 confining service on the grand jury to the partners in commercial houses and to heads of departments put a great strain on the senior merchants, only about fifty of whom were eligible to be called upon for service in Singapore in the 1850s. Most European mercantile houses had only one resident partner, who went as a grand juror, while one or two of his senior assistants would invariably be

<sup>148</sup> J. W. N. Kyshe, *Cases Heard and Determined in H.M. Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements, 1808-84* (Singapore, 1885), vol. i, p. lxxxii.

<sup>149</sup> *SFP*, 21 September 1849.

summoned as petit jurors. When a steamship arrived on a day that the court was in session, the disruption to commerce was serious, and in 1854 the merchants, the press and the grand jury themselves demanded a reduction in the size of the jury.<sup>150</sup> Two years later the Directors agreed that only fifteen jurymen need be called to serve at a time.<sup>151</sup>

By the early 1850s the press and the senior merchants were demanding the abolition of the grand jury,<sup>152</sup> and it was now the Recorder who objected. In 1854 the Recorder, Sir William Jeffcott, paid tribute to the grand jury as 'guardians of public utility' and 'the only independent body who represented the independent public'.<sup>153</sup> With the appointment of the prickly natured Blundell as Governor in 1855 and the arrival of McCausland and Maxwell as Recorders the following year, the grand jury rediscovered its vigorous opposition to government policy, and for a while there was no further talk of abolition. In Penang the grand jury acquired unaccustomed energy, and in Singapore objections from Blundell that the grand jury was exceeding the scope of its authority brought an outcry from the press.<sup>154</sup> Blundell passed presentments on to Calcutta but without his support, 'to avoid the suspicion of withholding from the cognizance of the Government of India a document supposed to represent the views and wishes of the European community of Singapore'.<sup>155</sup>

After Cavenagh became Governor, the grand jury once more lost its impetus as a critic of the government. Cavenagh was careful to explain at length what action was being taken on presentments and why some recommendations could not be adopted. In 1860 the Singapore grand jury disclaimed any right to be regarded as representative of the public,<sup>156</sup> and between January 1861 and October 1865 it made no presentment at all. The grand jury was so quiet that John Cameron

<sup>150</sup> *SFP*, 11, 18, 25 August 1854; *ST*, 15, 29 August 1854; Petition in full in *SFP*, 24 November 1854.

<sup>151</sup> *SSR*, S 23, Item 269.

<sup>152</sup> *SFP*, 18 February, 21 October 1853, 3 March, 25 August, 24 November 1854; Kyshe, *Cases*, vol. i, p. xc.

<sup>153</sup> *ST*, 28 November 1854.

<sup>154</sup> *SFP*, 3 December 1857.

<sup>155</sup> *SSR*, W 26, Item 40; *SSR*, V 24, pp. 127-34; *SSR*, R 33, pp. 3-5.

<sup>156</sup> *SSR*, W 33, Item 89.

in 1865 considered it an obsolete institution,<sup>157</sup> while the following year the *Singapore Free Press* contemplated the appointment of a crown counsel and a public prosecutor as a beneficial and constructive step towards abolishing the grand jury.<sup>158</sup> The advocate general of India also recommended abolishing grand juries,<sup>159</sup> but the institution survived in the Straits Settlements until the early years of crown colony rule.

In its early days the Singapore chamber of commerce, founded in 1837, appeared to be a most promising institution to provide a basis for participation in government. Established in response to a plea by Edward Boustead to fight an attempt by the Indian government to impose port dues in Singapore, the chamber was open to all merchants, agents and shipowners, and its first committee included Europeans, Americans, Eurasians, Arabs and Chinese. The Penang merchants founded a chamber of commerce shortly afterwards, but no similar body was established in Malacca.

At first the chambers of commerce concentrated on purely commercial matters, but gradually their influence extended to more general political affairs. Butterworth was prepared to pay at least lip-service to the importance of the chambers. He negotiated such questions as increased assessment rates for Penang with the Penang chamber of commerce,<sup>160</sup> and in 1845 he urged Calcutta that the chambers represented 'nearly the whole of the mercantile community'.<sup>161</sup> In 1846 he submitted a police bill for comments to the chambers of commerce, not to the Recorder or the magistrates,<sup>162</sup> and two years later he was prepared to surrender to the chambers his own right to nominate municipal councillors.

For some years the mercantile community regarded the chambers of commerce as their mouthpiece in dealing with government on a variety of subjects ranging from secret society

<sup>157</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 209.

<sup>158</sup> *SFP*, 18 January 1866.

<sup>159</sup> NAI, Home Department Consultations (Judicial), 4 March 1859, 7-8, 16 February 1861, 27-28A.

<sup>160</sup> *PG*, 7 March in *SFP*, 19 March 1846.

<sup>161</sup> Butterworth to Bengal, 21 October 1845, SSR, R 13.

<sup>162</sup> *SFP*, 22 October 1846.

control to agricultural assessment. Abraham Logan, who held the office of secretary of the Singapore chamber of commerce from 1850 to 1869, gave much space in the *Free Press* to its affairs, and in his hands the chamber became deeply involved in local politics. But it failed to play an effective role or to become the nucleus for political power. As early as 1846 it was riddled with faction, and from the middle of the century it was monopolized by cliques.<sup>163</sup> In 1850 the failure of an official mission led by Rajah James Brooke to Bangkok, which the Singapore chamber of commerce had backed enthusiastically, dealt a severe blow to its prestige. This led to dissensions among the European merchants of Singapore which became more bitter with growing commercial rivalry and intrigue in the Malay states in the twenty years which followed. Bousteads, the founders of the chamber of commerce, and many other firms withdraw their membership. The chamber's activities were frequently criticized as ineffective and secretive, and its proceedings as 'stealthy'.<sup>164</sup> It received rebuffs on some major issues, notably in its appeals for legislation to combat piracy. Occasionally it influenced decisions of the government of India, and its powers depended largely on the degree of importance which the Governors placed on the body. Under Cavenagh's conciliatory rule, a unanimous decision by the chamber of commerce supported by the Governor could influence the government of India to abandon a line of commercial policy. But in political agitation its record was one of failure, and there was much resentment at its aspirations to meddle in politics.<sup>165</sup>

Despite the absence of formal representative institutions, the citizens of the Straits Settlements had the opportunity to make their views known to the government by calling public meetings. This right was challenged only once, in 1827, when the sheriff refused to convene a meeting called in Penang to protest against the raising of court fees. The sheriff maintained no meeting could be called without an order from the Governor or the court, but the grand jury repudiated this interpretation,<sup>166</sup>

<sup>163</sup> *ST*, 18 February 1846; Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 298.

<sup>164</sup> *SFP*, 17 September 1852.

<sup>165</sup> *ST*, 11 September 1865.

<sup>166</sup> Kyshe, *Cases*, vol. i, pp. lxxiv-lxxv.



and the public's right to demand such meetings was never questioned again. Early gatherings rarely showed hostility to government. Most of the meetings in Singapore in the 1830s were called to organize facilities such as setting up a hospital or a library. Government officials often attended such meetings, and it was not until 1868, a year after the colonial office took over the settlements, that civil servants were forbidden to promote or take part in public political meetings.<sup>167</sup>

Very few public meetings were called in Penang until the middle years of the century, and the Penang chamber of commerce took up general matters relating to the community. Even in later years political agitation in Penang was the preserve of a small clique. In Singapore there was no semblance of an opposition party in the 1830s, but by the middle of the century Singapore public meetings were developing into a regular means of agitating against official policy. It became customary to sound out the general feeling of meetings, adopt resolutions and appoint a small committee to incorporate these into petitions, which were then published in the press and made available for signature. The heyday of the public meetings came in the 1850s, when in the hands of a small minority, these gatherings and the petitions they produced became a troublesome and effective opposition to the government. Influential Asian merchants were to be found at many public meetings. A wealthy Chinese, See Boon Tiong, was appointed to a committee chosen at a public meeting held in Singapore in 1846 to question the powers of the justices of the peace,<sup>168</sup> and a gathering called in 1849 to discuss the excise laws met at the requisition of a leading Chinese merchant and philanthropist, Tan Tock Seng.<sup>169</sup> But the Singapore Chinese seem to have acted under the pressure of their European acquaintances on political questions not specifically relating to their own community.

<sup>167</sup> Memorandum XXXV, 19 June 1868, *Straits Settlements General Orders, 1867-1872*.

<sup>168</sup> *ST*, 11 November 1849.

<sup>169</sup> *SFP*, 20 July 1849.

## CHAPTER IV

# The Economy

### LAND AND AGRICULTURE

WHILE the East India Company in 1826 was interested in the Straits Settlements primarily to protect and stimulate her China trade, she also hoped that the stations would develop into prosperous agricultural communities, yielding a healthy revenue from the land and its produce. On both counts the company was doomed to disappointment. Trade prospered in all three settlements, spectacularly in Singapore, but this brought profit to private merchants, not to the government, which was precluded from taxing commerce. The story of agriculture was one of almost unrelieved failure, enriching neither individual farmers nor the Company's coffers.

Agricultural development was eventually impeded by deficiencies of the soil, plant disease and the absence of seasonal change, but in the first half of the nineteenth century would-be planters were deceived by the lushness of the natural vegetation and the abundance of flat or gently undulating land into thinking that it was only the Company's unenlightened land policies which prevented the Straits Settlements from becoming an agricultural paradise.

In order to build up the population and develop the settlement quickly, Penang's early administrators granted individuals perpetual title to large areas of land. The Company was prepared to sacrifice immediate returns in the form of purchase money or land rent in favour of the prospect of taxing the product of the land. But spice plantations, which offered the best prospect for private profit and ultimately for state taxes, were slow to come to maturity. In 1826 Penang's land revenue was still infinitesimal, and when the Straits Settlements were amalgamated in that year and Penang became a free port, the government had to seek new sources of revenue to

replace customs duties. Its interest switched from a future tax on agricultural produce to an immediate direct revenue from land.<sup>1</sup> Governor Fullerton wanted to stop granting land on a permanent basis and instead to issue leases of five, ten or fifteen years,<sup>2</sup> but legislation which he submitted to the Directors to regularize the land position in Penang was not approved until 1831, by which time the presidency had been abolished and Fullerton's elaborate land establishment swept away. The new Penang land regulations were a dead letter.

In Singapore attempts to avoid the mistakes of Penang led only to new problems in land policy. Various allotments of land had been made in Singapore town before the settlement was acknowledged as a permanent British possession, and in 1826 these were converted into 999-year leases.<sup>3</sup> There were many applicants for land on these terms, but Fullerton, determined to abandon long leases and permanent grants in Singapore as 'a complete sacrifice of government interests', decided to grant agricultural land only on short leases.<sup>4</sup> New land regulations were introduced into Singapore at the beginning of 1830, whereby agricultural land could be leased for fifteen years and the lease could be renewed for a further three terms of fifteen years at progressively higher rents. No-one took up agricultural land on these terms.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1830s the whole land question was one of 'wild confusion'.<sup>6</sup> In 1837 Calcutta passed an act<sup>7</sup> repealing the Penang and Singapore land regulations and appointed a commissioner to investigate land problems and recommend a suitable land tenure system for the Straits. This commissioner, W. R. Young, who arrived in the Straits in August 1837 and stayed for two years, faced a formidable task. He recognized the defects of the short-lease policy, which was under general

<sup>1</sup> SSR, A 31, pp. 143-4.

<sup>2</sup> Lee Chye Hooi, 'The Penang Land Problem, 1786-1841', B.A. academic exercise, University of Malaya (Singapore), 1957, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> J. T. Thomson, 'General Report on the Residency of Singapore, drawn up principally with a view of illustrating its Agricultural Statistics, *JIA*, iv (1850), 212-13.

<sup>4</sup> Fullerton's minutes, 22 February 1827, SSR, A 32; 31 March 1828, SSR, A 51.

<sup>5</sup> J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 215.

<sup>6</sup> R. Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements*, 2nd ed. (Singapore, 1931), i, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Act X of 1837.

attack in the Straits,<sup>8</sup> but he was bound by the Directors' resistance to permanent grants. In 1838, on Young's instructions, leases for building lots in town were auctioned on terms of ninety-nine years for substantial buildings and sixty years for free option of development. These were not as attractive as the earlier 999-year leases and the prices offered for building land slumped to one-third of the previous value.

In Penang Young came to the conclusion that the land question could not be settled without a thorough survey of the entire island, the cost of which would outweigh any land revenue.<sup>9</sup> Short-term leases discouraged spice planters. It took seven years to produce the first fruit from the nutmeg tree and fifteen years for nutmeg and clove plantations to come into full bearing, so that planters would have to pay rent for many years with little return on their considerable capital outlay. Once brought to their prime, however, spice trees continued to bear fruit indefinitely, and under a twenty-year lease plantations would revert to the government in full production. No capital could be attracted into spice planting on these terms.

For pepper planting leases were unprofitable for the government. Pepper planting exhausted the ground after fourteen to sixteen years, so that the pepper planter would enjoy his maximum returns during the rent-free initial period and return the ground in a useless condition to the state before the rates of lease became expensive. Leases encouraged abuses in peasant farming. Farmers would grow rice for a few years while the soil was fertile and then abandon it. Charcoal burners, who, in a bid to prevent the wholesale deforestation and erosion on the hills in Penang, were prohibited from cutting and burning timber except under licence, could take a lease and burn the timber free without hindrance. Altogether the short-lease system discouraged the legitimate planter whose enterprise would benefit the state and favoured those whose farming methods exhausted its resources.

As a result of Young's report, a Straits land act was passed

<sup>8</sup> *SFP*, 7 September 1837; *PG*, 28 July 1838; J. Crawford in *SFP*, 11 October 1838; P. J. Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula* (Madras, 1834, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), pp. 384-6.

<sup>9</sup> *SSR*, P 1, p. 245.

in 1839.<sup>10</sup> Special arrangements were made for Malacca, but as far as Singapore and Penang were concerned the act was a compromise which sought to encourage spice planters by offering them twenty-year leases, renewable up to a total of fifty years at a moderate fixed rate, with shorter leases for cotton, sugar, coffee or indigo, which came to maturity more quickly. Even a fifty-year lease was unattractive since it would mean a spice plantation reverting to the government in full fruit, and in 1841 the Directors ordered Bengal to discontinue the lease system and sell land in perpetuity.

This put an end to complaints about land tenure in Singapore and Penang, but by that time the opportunity for building up a flourishing large-scale agriculture in Penang was gone, and the land reform did not lead to prosperity. In part this was because the long years of muddled policy had encouraged planters to settle elsewhere, in Australia, Canada or Ceylon, where land could be bought cheaply in perpetuity. But Ceylon had other natural advantages: richer soil, plenty of cheap indigenous labour, and a climate which was kinder to crops, planters and labourers. Furthermore Penang's produce met with stiff competition and tariff barriers in Britain, because the Penang planters, unlike, say, the West Indian sugar planters, were at that time a small isolated group without political power in London. Young described spice cultivation as 'at best a lottery and more frequently a ruinous infatuation'.<sup>11</sup> Of this Robert Ibbetson, superintendent of landed tenures in Penang from 1824 to 1830 and a staunch advocate of spice planting, was living proof. He spent Rs. 150,000 on developing a plantation, which he had to sell a few years later for Rs. 3,000.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless in 1840 Penang still presented an air of prosperity, the hills covered with orderly plantations of nutmegs and cloves, with rich plantations of coconuts and betel-nuts, rice and sugar cane on the Georgetown plain.

The 1840s saw a rapid opening up of Province Wellesley to plantation agriculture. In 1840 probably less than 30,000

<sup>10</sup> Act XVI of 1839.

<sup>11</sup> Young's Report, quoted in Lee Chye Hooi, 'Penang Land Problem', p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Chye Hooi, 'Penang Land Problem', p. 45.

acres had been brought under cultivation,<sup>13</sup> and this was mainly in the northern region where successive waves of refugees from Kedah in the 1820s and 1830s began planting rice and coconuts. Teochew immigrants had introduced the cultivation of sugar to Province Wellesley shortly before the British occupied the territory,<sup>14</sup> and European sugar estates were established in Penang in 1838 and in Province Wellesley two years later. In 1845, after several years of agitation,<sup>15</sup> the Penang sugar planters won their battle in the British parliament for tariffs on equal terms with the West Indies. There was an immediate rush to buy land. Large tracts of hitherto unexplored territory in the southern part of Province Wellesley were opened up, and by November 1845 land was selling for three times the price it had fetched at the beginning of the year.<sup>16</sup> By 1846 almost all land suitable for sugar cane production was taken up, and there were eleven estates in the fertile southern part of Province Wellesley, where the climate was particularly favourable for sugar.<sup>17</sup> Province Wellesley attracted European capital and planters, many of them experienced sugar planters from other countries. Thomas Braddell came to Penang from Demerara in 1844, while several Frenchmen came from plantations in Mauritius. By 1846 one of these, Joseph Donnadieu, had 4,000 acres under cane and two sugar-processing steam mills.<sup>18</sup> The biggest plantation owner was Edward Horsman, a member of the British parliament and a privy councillor, who started opening estates in Province Wellesley in 1852 and by 1864 owned six of the eleven European sugar estates in the territory.<sup>19</sup> Sugar growing was dominated

<sup>13</sup> J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iv (1850), 378.

<sup>14</sup> J. C. Jackson, *Planters and Speculators: Chinese and European Agricultural Enterprise in Malaya, 1786-1921* (Kuala Lumpur, 1968), p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Bonham to Bengal, 16 August 1841, SSR, R 7; Bengal to Bonham, 17 October, 28 December 1842, SSR, S 9; *SFP*, 16 November 1843; *PG*, 3 January in *SFP*, 15 January 1846; G. F. Davidson, *Trade and Travel in the Far East* (London, 1846), pp. 41-2.

<sup>16</sup> *PG*, 3 January 1846 in *SFP*, 15 January 1846.

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, p. 142.

<sup>18</sup> *SFP*, 29 October 1846.

<sup>19</sup> *PG*, February 1856, quoted in J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, p. 143; J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), p. 342; SSR, W 34, Item 274.

by Europeans, who produced four-fifths of the crop in Province Wellesley in 1861, and monopolized the processing of cane, since considerable capital was needed to buy modern machinery for sugar mills.<sup>20</sup>

Penang island was not so fortunate in her agricultural development. Her main crops were spices, chiefly nutmegs, and the rise in price of nutmegs on the European market in the 1830s and 1840s led to enthusiastic expansion of planting in Penang. Since it required long-term capital, production remained for many years in European hands, but by the 1840s the returns were sufficiently attractive to interest Chinese farmers who eked out a living growing vegetables and bananas and rearing pigs while they cleared the jungle and tended their young nutmeg plants. In this way they needed little capital, for borrowing money for farming was expensive in Penang. An act passed in 1855 limited interest rates to twelve per cent, but the law was generally disregarded by the Indian and Chinese merchants and by the Indian *chettis*, who charged interest rates of thirty-six per cent to Penang farmers in the 1850s.<sup>21</sup>

By the middle of the century there were hundreds of small estates on Penang island, and it was predicted that within five or six years the whole island would be cleared and planted with nutmeg.<sup>22</sup> These hopes were doomed. By 1854 blight had ruined half the trees on the island.<sup>23</sup> The disease spread over the next few years and the decline of estates was hastened by severe drought in 1860. In May 1861 the surveyor general reported more than 6,000 acres of the best land in Penang had been put out of cultivation by nutmeg disease.<sup>24</sup> Some enterprising Americans experimented with growing cotton.<sup>25</sup> Two hundred and thirty acres were planted and the first crop won prizes at an exhibition in Calcutta, but the plants died off

<sup>20</sup> G. W. Earl, *Topography and Itinerary of Province Wellesley* (Penang, 1861), p. 30; J. Balestier, 'View of the State of Agriculture in the British Possessions in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, ii (1848), 142-3; L. Wray, *The Practical Sugar Planter* (London, 1848), pp. 126-9; Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 331; J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, pp. 145-8.

<sup>21</sup> SSR, W 45, Item 409.

<sup>22</sup> SFP, 25 July 1851.

<sup>23</sup> SFP, 11 January 1855.

<sup>24</sup> SSR, DD 34, Items 78, 82.

<sup>25</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*; SFP, 23 January 1862.

during a drought in 1864.<sup>26</sup> This put an end to any ambitions of making Penang a thriving agricultural settlement.

In Singapore, once the dissension over land tenures was resolved, there was a steady demand for agricultural land, largely from Europeans. The luxuriance of Singapore's primary jungle encouraged false hopes for a prosperous agricultural future. A group of enthusiasts who were beginning to experiment with various tropical crops formed the Singapore Agricultural and Horticultural Society in 1836. Dr William Montgomerie, the Company's resident surgeon, a nutmeg expert, also began growing sugar in 1836. Joseph Balestier, the American consul, was a second pioneer in sugar cultivation. José d'Almeida began cotton planting in 1836 and experimented with cloves, coffee and cinnamon.<sup>27</sup> His brother-in-law, T. O. Crane, followed d'Almeida's lead in growing cotton and also experimented with coconuts.<sup>28</sup> The press hailed the birth of the society as the start of a bright new era in Singapore's agricultural development, and the optimists were further encouraged when John Turnbull Thomson was appointed in 1841 to begin the first systematic survey of Singapore island.

At the census taken in Singapore in 1849 ten Europeans described themselves as farmers, most of them nutmeg planters. The biggest estate belonged to a retired official, C. R. Prinsep, and the second to Dr Thomas Oxley,<sup>29</sup> who was acknowledged the keenest expert and took great pride in nursing his estates. His success induced other officials and merchants to emulate his enterprise. One merchant, G. G. Nicol, had 8,000 young nutmeg trees, Alexander Guthrie more than 2,000, Thomas Dunman had 1,000, and several Chinese planters between them had 7,000 young trees. Altogether in 1848 there were

<sup>26</sup> SSR, R 45, pp. 260-5.

<sup>27</sup> T. O. Crane, 'Remarks on the Cultivation of Cotton in Singapore', *JIA*, v (1851), 120-2; J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 102, 141, 143.

<sup>28</sup> Crane, *JIA*, 1851, v, pp. 120-2; J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 103, 142. THOMAS CRANE. Came to Singapore about 1824 and set up Crane Bros., auctioneers and land agents; freemason, justice of the peace; married daughter of Sir José d'Almeida; retired 1864; left Singapore 1866; died 1867.

<sup>29</sup> DR THOMAS OXLEY. Succeeded William Montgomerie as senior surgeon, Straits Settlements, 1846-57; retired from Singapore 1857; died in England 1886.



56,000 nutmeg trees in Singapore, nearly 15,000 already in bearing.<sup>30</sup>

By the middle of the century nutmeg planting had become what John Cameron described as a 'sort of mania in Singapore',<sup>31</sup> and the only threat appeared to be British tariff policy. Since the nutmeg had been imported into the Straits Settlements from its native Moluccas, it was classed as a cultivated nutmeg in the British market and had to pay duty of half a crown a pound, whereas the identical Dutch Indies product was classed as wild and carried a tax of only fivepence. In 1849 the Singapore chamber of commerce petitioned parliament to impose equal duties on nutmegs, but the British government was unswayed by seven years of agitation from the merchants and nutmeg planters of Singapore and the tariff remained unchanged.<sup>32</sup> In fact, nutmeg planting was fated to die a natural death in the Straits. The blight which first devastated the nutmeg plantations in Penang spread to Singapore. By 1864 there was only one blight-stricken plantation left under cultivation, and dismal acres of dying nutmeg trees surrounded Singapore town, 'skeleton trees . . . with their bark bleached white and their branches overgrown by tangled creepers'.<sup>33</sup> Many European and Chinese planters were ruined, and there was no attempt to revive nutmeg growing in Singapore.

Coconuts, which grew well on the southeast coast of Singapore, were the second most important crop in 1848.<sup>34</sup> Coconut trees did not produce marketable fruit for the first ten years and only a modest profit thereafter. Thomas Crane, the leading coconut producer, spent over \$18,000 on his estate and after eleven years had realized only \$200 net profit.<sup>35</sup>

Montgomerie and Balestier invested heavily in sugar planting but both estates finished in financial disaster. Balestier went bankrupt in 1848 and Montgomerie's estate was sold up in 1852.

<sup>30</sup> Balestier, *JIA*, ii (1848), 139-50; T. Oxley, 'Some Account of the Nutmeg and its Cultivation', *JIA*, ii (1848), 659.

<sup>31</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 168.

<sup>32</sup> *SFP*, 6 January, 3 March 1854, 27 March, 22 May, 25 September, 18 December 1856.

<sup>33</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, pp. 82, 164-70.

<sup>34</sup> Balestier, *JIA*, ii (1848), 141.

<sup>35</sup> J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 103-4.

At its peak sugar cultivation covered no more than 400 acres.<sup>36</sup>

Early experiments in growing coffee ended in failure. A thousand trees planted in 1825 and 1826 died before coming into bearing. D'Almeida, Dunman and a Chinese named Cong Tuan revived coffee growing in the 1830s but without success. Cong Tuan planted fifty acres at Jurong, but the bushes died. Dunman managed to produce a little coffee but found it was cheaper to buy imported coffee.<sup>37</sup> In 1839 a Singapore Joint Stock Coffee Company published a long and glowing prospectus, promising a full return on capital invested within four years, by which time it was predicted half the island would be covered with coffee. The venture was a miserable failure, and a year later the plantation had to be sold up.<sup>38</sup>

Attempts to grow cotton were no more successful, despite the apparent suitability of the crop for Singapore. Cotton did not demand a fertile soil, it needed only a small capital and no expensive machinery, and it provided a return on investment from the first year. Experiments made by Thomas Crane and Sir Jozé d'Almeida with various types of seeds in the 1830s disillusioned would-be cotton planters. Crane's first plants were killed by caterpillars. Another species which he imported in 1837 flowered all the year round because there was no seasonal change and eventually produced a tiny uneconomic crop.<sup>39</sup>

Other attempts to find a staple crop failed. Cinnamon bushes brought in by José d'Almeida failed to produce a marketable crop, and clove trees all died before they reached the fruiting stage.<sup>40</sup> Sir Jozé d'Almeida and Thomas Dunman tried growing indigo but the plants withered after a few years, and by 1850 there was only one acre of indigo left, farmed by a Chinese planter.<sup>41</sup> James Low tried to bring in silkworms to encourage a local silk industry but met with no response.<sup>42</sup> The climate

<sup>36</sup> Balestier, *JIA*, ii (1848), 147-8; J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 138.

<sup>37</sup> Balestier, *JIA*, ii (1848), 149; J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 140-1.

<sup>38</sup> C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, 1902, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), i, 339.

<sup>39</sup> G. W. Earl, 'On the Culture of Cotton in the Straits Settlements', *JIA*, iv (1850), 720-7, *JIA*, v (1851), 69-73.

<sup>40</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Cinnamon Cultivation in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, v (1851) 650-8.

<sup>41</sup> Balestier, *JIA*, ii (1848), 148; J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 143.

<sup>42</sup> *SFP*, 10 December 1846.

proved unsuitable even for rice and the crops produced were small and unprofitable.<sup>43</sup> Only pineapples flourished, but no-one tried to grow them commercially. Some Chinese cleaned pineapple leaf fibres for export to China, and J. R. Logan tried to stimulate interest in a pineapple fibre industry but nothing came of this venture.<sup>44</sup>

Singapore's first Agricultural and Horticultural Society was wound up in 1846,<sup>45</sup> but a new Agri-Horticultural Society was formed in 1860, with an influential committee, chaired by Governor Cavenagh. It was allotted sixty acres at Tanglin to open a botanic garden, with the twin object of promoting agriculture by experimenting in new crops and developing a pleasure garden. In this latter capacity the botanic garden was an immediate success,<sup>46</sup> and ultimately it was to provide Malaya with its most successful staple crop, rubber. But in the 1860s enthusiasm for agriculture had given way in Singapore to disillusionment, and by 1862 the demand for agricultural land in Singapore had dried up.<sup>47</sup>

From the beginning there had been sceptics. The gloomiest was John Crawford, who as Resident in 1825 condemned Singapore's soil as sterile and almost useless.<sup>48</sup> J. R. Logan, writing in 1849, agreed that on the whole the experience of the intervening quarter of a century had proved Crawford right.<sup>49</sup> The only possibility which Crawford saw for agricultural development was in gambier and pepper,<sup>50</sup> and events were to justify his prediction. These crops were ideal for Chinese immigrants, who were not interested in settling permanently and importing the intensive subsistence farming practised in

<sup>43</sup> J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 140.

<sup>44</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Preparation of Pineapple Fibres in Singapore for the Manufacture of Pina Cloth', *JIA*, ii (1848), 528.

<sup>45</sup> W. Makepeace, G. E. Brooke, R. Braddell (eds.), *One Hundred Years of Singapore* (London, 1921), ii, 70.

<sup>46</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*; *SFP*, 3 January 1861.

<sup>47</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-3*.

<sup>48</sup> J. Crawford, paper in *Singapore Chronicle* 1825, reprinted in *JIA*, iii (1849), 508-11; J. Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (London, 1828, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), ii, 352-3.

<sup>49</sup> J. R. Logan on Crawford, *JIA*, iii (1849), 511.

<sup>50</sup> Crawford, *JIA*, iii (1849), 508-11.

their homeland. They wanted crops which produced a quick return and called for no special skill or experience. Gambier and pepper blended well together: gambier waste provided an excellent fertilizer to counteract pepper which exhausted the soil, and usually one acre of pepper was planted to ten acres of gambier. Gambier leaves had to be boiled soon after picking, so that it was necessary to have large areas of forest to supply wood for the burners. The unoccupied jungles of Singapore were ideal for this purpose.

Gambier planters were unaffected in the early days by the government's land policy. Their plantations lay outside the government's reach and no tax collector or surveyor dared visit them. The planters had no interest in freehold ownership or long leases when their plantations exhausted the soil and supplies of wood within twenty years. The margin of profit was so small that they could not have afforded to buy land or pay the rent on a lease. The basis of their agriculture depended upon having an abundance of free land, and efficient land laws would have been a deterrent.

When the British arrived in 1819, there were about twenty gambier plantations on Singapore island, some worked by Chinese and others by Malays,<sup>51</sup> and many Chinese moved in soon afterwards to plant gambier and pepper. Most of their produce went to China, until British import duties on gambier were reduced in 1830, after which Britain's dyeing and tanning industries became the chief market for Singapore's gambier. At the beginning of 1831 gambier fetched between \$1.30 and \$1.75 a picul, but within three years the price rose to between \$3 and \$4 a picul,<sup>52</sup> which encouraged the rapid opening up of new plantations. In 1836 Singapore produced about 22,000 piculs of gambier and 10,000 piculs of pepper.<sup>53</sup> Three years later production of gambier had more than doubled and pepper production was up by fifty per cent. By that time there were some 350 plantations scattered across the interior of the island, employing about 3,000 labourers.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> W. Bartley, 'Population of Singapore in 1819', *JMBRAS*, xi, no. 2 (1933), 177.

<sup>52</sup> J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, p. 13.

<sup>53</sup> Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, i, 307.

<sup>54</sup> P. Wheatley, 'Notes on Land Use in the Vicinity of Singapore in the 1830s', *Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, ii (1954), 63-6; *SFP*, 28 March 1839.

These figures are mere indications. No accurate statistics can be given since European officials and merchants were divorced from this activity and had to rely for their information on the Chinese merchants who financed it. Most planters were penniless young men who borrowed money from town shopkeepers in return for which they paid interest on the capital and were obliged to buy their food and supplies from their creditors and to sell them their gambier and pepper.

In 1839 the price of gambier fell to \$2 a picul, and by 1844 it was down to \$1.50.<sup>55</sup> Even when prices were good there was little margin for profit unless the plantation was efficiently run and favourably situated. The largest plantations, of which there were about thirty, produced about 210 piculs of gambier a year and up to 150 piculs of pepper. At the prices ruling in 1839 this would have produced a gross income of about \$970 a year. Such a plantation would employ about ten labourers, each receiving wages of \$3.50 to \$4 a month, so that the annual wage bill would come to about \$450. Allowing for transport costs, interest payments on loans, purchase of tools and materials, the most hardworking and fortunate plantation owner could be left with a net profit of \$400.

Successful planters were rare. Small plantations, employing half a dozen men and producing less than 100 piculs of gambier a year and perhaps 50 piculs of pepper, could barely pay their way. By 1840 many of the plantations were twenty years old. They had exhausted their soil, and—even more vital—had used up their supplies of wood, for the plantations passed their peak of production by their fifteenth year. To find vacant land new plantations had to be cleared far from town, which meant that transport costs were high. Stiff interest rates kept farmers tied to their creditors for years and they often sank further into debt by borrowing more in lean years. In 1841 nearly all the gambier planters were in debt to the Chinese merchants in the town.<sup>56</sup> Wages fluctuated according to the price of gambier, which remained low throughout the 1840s and early 1850s.

Chinese gambier production reached its peak in Singapore in the 1840s, when the plantations started during the mid-thirties

<sup>55</sup> J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> SFP, 18 November 1841.

boom reached maturity. In 1848 there were 600 gambier and pepper plantations under cultivation on the island, but the fall in pepper and gambier prices made the old estates uneconomic. By the beginning of 1848 the price of gambier slumped to 80 cents a picul, and pepper, which in Singapore's early days had fetched \$14 to \$15 a picul, was now down to \$3 or \$4.<sup>57</sup>

Planters began to abandon their worn-out plantations, and as early as 1843 the long-settled Tanglin district of Singapore was reduced to 'barren looking hills covered with short brushwood and lalang'.<sup>58</sup> Gambier planters began to move to the mainland in search of virgin soil, and in 1844 the first permit was given by the Temenggong of Johore for a plantation to be opened up on the Scudai river. During the first six months of 1845 some 500 Chinese moved over to Johore and opened up over fifty gambier plantations along rivers running into the Johore Strait.<sup>59</sup> The immigrants obtained concessions or *surat sungei* from the Temenggong, permits to clear and farm land within specified boundaries. The Chinese headman, who was known as the *kangchu* or master of the river, was responsible for keeping law and order and received monopoly rights over trading, gambling, pawnshops and the supply of opium, spirits and pork. By 1848 about 9,000 acres had been brought under gambier cultivation in Johore, producing 30,000 piculs of gambier a year,<sup>60</sup> and by the middle of the century there were about 200 plantations.

This emigration caused no concern in Singapore, since the enterprise was controlled by the old-established gambier dealers and merchants in the same way as planting on the island itself.<sup>61</sup> The *kangchus* borrowed money to open up their plantations, in return for which they engaged to sell their produce to their Singapore creditors and to take their provisions from them. As on Singapore island, most planters were Teochews and the remainder Cantonese. A few dealers were Teochew, notably Seah Eu Chin, who controlled many gambier planta-

<sup>57</sup> J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, iv (1850), 136-7.

<sup>58</sup> Makepeace *et al.*, *One Hundred Years*, quoted in J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> *SFP*, 5 June 1845.

<sup>60</sup> Balestier, *JIA*, ii (1848), 146.

<sup>61</sup> *SFP*, 1 January 1846.

tions in Singapore and Johore, but probably four-fifths of the gambier and pepper dealers were Hokkien.<sup>62</sup>

It was not only declining productivity on Singapore island which drove farmers away, but also the increasing danger from tigers. Early settlers were not troubled, and Crawford listed freedom from tigers as one of Singapore's virtues.<sup>63</sup> The first scare appears to have come in September 1831 when two Chinese were killed by tigers in two separate incidents not far from town.<sup>64</sup> As more gambier and pepper plantations were opened up in the interior, the tiger menace grew. In 1840 the *Singapore Free Press* carried accounts of men being killed by tigers every month. In July 1840 five men were killed in eight days by tigers less than two miles from town, and in March 1841 a tiger carried off a Chinese from a public road near the town in full view of passers-by. In 1840 a band of Europeans and twenty-five convicts set off on the first organized tiger hunt,<sup>65</sup> and tiger hunting soon became a popular sport among young Europeans. It was profitable too, for apart from a \$100 reward which the government paid for the head, the flesh was a prized ingredient in Chinese medicine and would fetch another \$100, while the skin could be sold for about \$70.<sup>66</sup>

By the middle of the century Singapore was famous for its tigers, and no book about the Straits was complete without some description of these beasts to chill the spine of armchair travellers. It was rumoured that tigers were carrying off a victim a day and committing dreadful slaughter among the defenceless planters in the jungle.<sup>67</sup> By the mid-1840s Chinese merchants were afraid to visit their debtors in the country and plantations were being abandoned.<sup>68</sup> Nearly every issue of the newspapers carried stories about tiger tragedies in the late 1840s.<sup>69</sup> In 1851 the Singapore grand jury deplored the ravages

<sup>62</sup> Seah Eu Chin, 'The Chinese in Singapore: general sketch of the numbers, tribes and avocations of the Chinese in Singapore', *JIA*, ii (1848), 283-9.

<sup>63</sup> Crawford, *Embassy*, ii, 355.

<sup>64</sup> Buckley, *Anecdotal History*, i, 219.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 342.

<sup>66</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1864), pp. 229-30.

<sup>67</sup> W. H. Read, *Play and Politics: Reminiscences of Malaya by an Old Resident* (London, 1901), p. 156.

<sup>68</sup> Davidson, *Trade and Travel*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>69</sup> *ST*, 13, 26 June, 30 October, 6 November 1849; H. Keppel, *A Sailor's Life under Four Sovereigns* (London, 1899), ii, 78.

of tigers,<sup>70</sup> and Horace St John, writing in 1853, considered tigers to be a greater danger in Singapore than criminals.<sup>71</sup> In 1859 the *Free Press* reported that a village near Bukit Timah had been abandoned because so many inhabitants had been killed by tigers,<sup>72</sup> and the following year the Governor sanctioned sending out parties of first-class convicts to hunt tigers.<sup>73</sup> Very few were caught, and between 1860 and 1864 the government reward was only claimed on ten occasions.<sup>74</sup> In London the danger seemed picturesque and remote. At first the Directors found the Singapore grand jury's statistics difficult to believe, but they ordered the government to continue 'all practicable measures' to exterminate tigers.<sup>75</sup>

By 1855 the number of gambier plantations on Singapore island had fallen to 543, most of them in decline.<sup>76</sup> By that time the price of gambier was rising again. In that year it reached \$3.20 and for the next few years fluctuated between \$2.67 and \$2.85.<sup>77</sup> The renewed demand for gambier led to the opening of fresh plantations in the remote northern and western parts of the island, and gambier was still an important product in the 1860s.<sup>78</sup> But many of the estates in the central areas of the island were worn out by the time the price revived, and more stringent land laws and stricter assessment drove squatters to Johore.<sup>79</sup> Pepper continued to be Singapore's major agricultural product in the 1860s, although it was subjected to an exceptionally heavy duty of 150 per cent in the British market, and appeals from the Singapore chamber of commerce to the chancellor of the exchequer failed to secure any relief.<sup>80</sup>

Gambier and pepper planting was a disastrous form of agriculture for Singapore. It provided a few with comparative wealth and for some years gave several thousands a livelihood. But it exhausted the soil, destroyed the forest, and left the ground open to the encroachment of coarse lalang grass,

<sup>70</sup> *SFP*, 26 September 1851.

<sup>71</sup> H. St John, *Indian Archipelago*, ii, 353.

<sup>72</sup> *SFP*, 24 November 1859.

<sup>73</sup> *SSR*, V 29, p. 113.

<sup>74</sup> *SSR*, W 49, Item 102; Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, pp. 90-106.

<sup>75</sup> *SSR*, S 20, Item 40; *SSR*, S 21, Item 58.

<sup>76</sup> *SFP*, 17 May 1855.

<sup>77</sup> J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 160.

<sup>79</sup> *SSR*, W 30, Item 292.

<sup>80</sup> *ST*, 26 March 1862; *SFP*, 12 January 1865; *SSR*, V 40, p. 220; Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 161.



which was more difficult and more expensive to clear than virgin jungle. The gambier and pepper planter moved on 'as the locust leaving a tract of desolation behind him'.<sup>81</sup> By the end of Indian rule much of the interior of Singapore island was laid waste and abandoned.

The land problem in Malacca was different in character from that in Penang and Singapore, since Malacca was a station with a long-settled population who had lived for three centuries under European rule. When the East India Company took permanent possession of Malacca in 1825, it knew very little about its new acquisition, because the previous British occupation from 1795 to 1818 was a temporary wartime measure and administration had continued much on the Dutch pattern. When the Company began investigations with a view to providing Malacca with an efficient administration and extending its authority throughout the whole settlement, it was shocked to discover that the Dutch had granted rights over nearly the entire territory, with the exception of the inland province of Naning, to a small number of private individuals, mainly Dutch settlers, who lived in town and hired the rights to collect their profits to Chinese middlemen. The terms of the grants were not clear. The proprietors, as they were known, usually had bills of sale but no deeds, and the Dutch administrators removed most of their records when they left, while climate and insects played havoc with what remained.

For two years the Penang council debated the problem. Although the proprietors at first claimed an absolute title to the land, Fullerton suspected that they had in fact only been granted the right to take one-tenth of the value of the produce of the lands, in accordance with Malay custom, and in 1828 the council decided to buy out the proprietors' rights to the tenth. W. T. Lewis, a former Bencoolen official, was ordered to negotiate with the grantees and he drew up deeds by which the government agreed to pay to each of them in perpetuity an annuity equal to the value of the tenth they had been receiving. A regulation was passed by the council in June 1828 whereby the government had the sole right over waste and

<sup>81</sup> Balestier, *JIA*, ii (1848), 146.

forest lands and was entitled to one-tenth of the gross produce from cultivated lands.

In order to settle the matter quickly, to encourage agricultural development and to free the peasantry from exactions, Fullerton was prepared to be generous to the proprietors. He accepted the compensation figures suggested by his subordinates, Lewis and Ibbetson, although the amounts later proved to be too generous. While Fullerton did not expect any great immediate expansion of revenue, he did not anticipate any financial loss and estimated that eventually the revenue raised by the government from the tenth would be ten times the amount spent on annuities.<sup>82</sup>

The Directors approved of the land arrangements and of the principle of taking collection out of the hands of Chinese middlemen. Fullerton's land laws were confirmed by Regulation IX of 1830. The tenth was to be collected by the village chiefs or *penghulus*, under the land department's supervision, and all lands were to be surveyed and new title-deeds issued. Within a few months the newly appointed surveyor and the land office establishment were swept away in the drastic retrenchment which accompanied the abolition of the presidency, and the machinery for supervising the collection of the tenth collapsed. This collection was left entirely to the *penghulus*, who were inadequate for the task, and the inability to levy land tax effectively was one of the major reasons for the failure of Fullerton's scheme. During the first year a revenue of Rs. 15,400 was collected, against expenses in annuities and establishment of Rs. 32,080.<sup>83</sup> This deficit grew each year, since expenses remained constant while collections declined.

Under the Straits land act of 1839 Malacca was treated as a special case, and an attempt was made to combine Malay custom and English law. The tenth, commuted into a money payment of half a rupee an acre, was to remain the basis of payment but English land titles were to be issued. The attempt ended in failure. Thereafter the attention of officials was largely given up to inducing frightened and suspicious peasants to sign

<sup>82</sup> Fullerton's minute, 24 November 1829, SSR, V 5; T. Braddell, 'Notes on Malacca', *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 57-8.

<sup>83</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 57-8.

complicated commutation papers, couched in English legal terms.<sup>84</sup> In 1843 the Straits government estimated that less than half of the necessary commutation papers had been issued, and the cost of paying annuities and collecting the tenth amounted to twice the revenue received.<sup>85</sup>

The consequences of the failure of Fullerton's land reform in Malacca were unfortunate for all the Straits Settlements. Malacca became a burden upon its more prosperous neighbours, and its deficit made the administration of the Straits Settlements as a whole more irksome in the eyes of Calcutta. But the abuses of unsupervised *penghulu* administration weighed less heavily upon the peasants than the licensed system of extortion which had prevailed in the past. Cultivation spread: in 1828 only 15,000 acres were under cultivation, but by 1856 this had increased nearly fivefold.<sup>86</sup> In the early 1830s land on the outskirts of the town was rapidly being brought under cultivation, for rice fields, orchards and pepper plantations. During the first twenty years of British rule, while Malacca's trade stagnated, she doubled her population and multiplied her agricultural production five times over.<sup>87</sup> But this did not swell the government's coffers. Land taxes collected in 1856 produced only one-third the revenue raised in 1828.<sup>88</sup>

By the middle of the century land in Malacca was still cultivated entirely by Asians and there was no European capital investment.<sup>89</sup> If British rule ceased in Malacca, the annuities due to the proprietors would stop and all their former rights would revert to them. This meant that the government could give no clear title to land and no European developers could be attracted on these uncertain terms. In 1847 some Europeans with backing from London tried to form a Malacca Sugar Company but this exceptional undertaking was killed by the world financial crisis of 1847-8.<sup>90</sup> Those Chinese who had made their fortunes in Singapore and returned to Malacca

<sup>84</sup> E. A. Blundell, 'Notices of the History and Present Condition of Malacca', *JIA*, ii (1848), 740-2.

<sup>85</sup> L. A. Mills, 'British Malaya, 1824-67', *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 3 (1960), 132.

<sup>86</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 56.

<sup>87</sup> Blundell, *JIA*, ii (1848), 746.

<sup>88</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 56.

<sup>89</sup> F. L. Baumgarten, 'Agriculture in Malacca', *JIA*, iii (1849), 707.

<sup>90</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 63.

to retire, took up a life of ease in the town and at that time showed no interest in developing the countryside.<sup>91</sup>

In 1854 the Directors authorized the sale of waste lands in Malacca in order to encourage capitalist development,<sup>92</sup> but the real problem concerning the larger areas of land held by the grantees remained unsolved. The government offered to make the annuities perpetual provided the grantees gave up their right to reclaim the holdings if the British left Malacca, but the Dutch proprietors refused to accept this arrangement and encouraged Asian holders also to resist the offer.<sup>93</sup> In 1856 the government of India ordered a detailed survey of Malacca<sup>94</sup> and began drafting a bill for land reform, but despite prodding by Governor Blundell and petitions from Malacca residents, the draft had not been completed when Blundell retired three years later,<sup>95</sup> and he complained, 'The prosperity of the settlement is deeply injured by such uncertainty.'<sup>96</sup>

Cavenagh was shocked on his arrival to find Malacca 'in a state of decline'. He continued Blundell's pleas for land reform,<sup>97</sup> and warned Calcutta in 1860 that Malacca, which was the largest of the Straits Settlements and potentially 'the granary of the Straits', was at that time 'in a condition of utter ruin'.<sup>98</sup>

The Malacca land act was eventually passed in 1861. While respecting existing rights it abolished local customary law concerning waste lands taken up in future.<sup>99</sup> The new act was welcomed in the Straits.<sup>100</sup> Land offered at \$3 an acre in fee simple or on leases of 999 years looked attractive at a time when in Province Wellesley land was selling at \$100 an acre.<sup>101</sup> The survey was proceeding quickly,<sup>102</sup> and in 1861 Cavenagh

<sup>91</sup> Balestier, *JIA*, ii (1848), 143; T. Braddell, 'Notes of a Trip to the Interior from Malacca', *JIA*, vii (1853), 74.

<sup>92</sup> Directors to India, 16 August 1854, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 88.

<sup>93</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 64.

<sup>94</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 52.

<sup>95</sup> SSR, X 12, p. 275; SSR, V 22, pp. 266-7; SSR, R 30, pp. 256-65; SSR, R 31, pp. 6-10, 206-7; SSR, R 33, pp. 70-4; *SFP*, 22 July 1858.

<sup>96</sup> SSR, R 35, pp. 268-75.

<sup>97</sup> SSR, X 18, 6, 26 August 1859; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 265-6.

<sup>98</sup> SSR, R 38, pp. 87-9.

<sup>99</sup> Act XXVI of 1861.

<sup>100</sup> *SFP*, 30 January 1862.

<sup>101</sup> SSR, R 40, pp. 54-62, 62-70; SSR, U 45, p. 49.

<sup>102</sup> Resident Councillor Malacca to Governor, 23 January 1860, SSR, X 19.

allocated \$5,000 for constructing roads in the country districts.<sup>103</sup> Malacca appeared to be set for a development boom. But the 1861 land act did not solve her difficulties. There was still confusion about old prescriptive rights, liabilities to payment of the tenth, and the farming of taxes.<sup>104</sup> To clear up the difficulty once and for all Cavenagh urged India to redeem the annuities at fifteen years' purchase. Calcutta approved this suggestion in principle in 1862,<sup>105</sup> but two years later, in view of the impending transfer to the colonial office, the government of India rescinded its sanction, preferring that the redemption should be charged to the new colonial administration.

The one form of agriculture which the 1861 land act encouraged was tapioca planting, which expanded from 1,000 acres in 1861 to 10,000 by the end of the decade.<sup>106</sup> Malacca town became the main centre for the tapioca industry. The planters were mainly Hainanese immigrants financed by Chinese merchants in Malacca, who controlled the carrying trade and shipped most of the tapioca to Singapore. Tapioca growing required little labour, the plants did not need fertile soil, processing was easy and a return on capital could be realized within two years. At first this new branch of agriculture was welcomed, but it exhausted the soil and the tapioca factories used up large quantities of wood. Like gambier planting, tapioca encouraged shifting agriculture, and land was generally abandoned after five years.<sup>107</sup>

The long-awaited Malacca land reform remained a disappointment, and the problem was handed on to the colonial administration in 1867.

By the time the Straits Settlements passed to the colonial office the problem of land settlement was solved in Penang and Singapore. The surveyor general embarked on the first comprehensive survey of Penang island in 1851 and was very active in carrying out surveys in Singapore from 1855 to 1859.<sup>108</sup> The

<sup>103</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 5-8; SSR, R 40, pp. 62-70; SSR, S 30, Item 73.

<sup>104</sup> SSR, U 44, p. 106; SSR, U 45, pp. 45, 105, 107, 237; SSR, U 46, pp. 309, 328, 473; SSR, W 50, Items 295, 312.

<sup>105</sup> SSR, S 30, Item 40.

<sup>106</sup> SFP, 30 January 1862; J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, p. 56.

<sup>107</sup> SFP, 31 January 1861; J. C. Jackson, *Planters*, pp. 52-64.

<sup>108</sup> SSR, W 30, Item 292.

result was an appreciable increase in land revenues at both stations, particularly in Singapore where it more than doubled in the year 1858-9.<sup>109</sup> Only in Malacca could inadequate legislation be held responsible for retarding agricultural development. The dream of creating a farmers' paradise in the Straits Settlements had elsewhere been shattered by natural causes, by climate, poor soil and plant disease. Cameron in describing the Straits Settlements in 1864 had to admit that Province Wellesley was 'the only satisfactorily productive possession held by the British in these parts'.<sup>110</sup>

### TRADE

In contrast to the depressing story of agriculture in the Straits, the development of trade was one of success for private merchants. In Singapore the success was dramatic, and although Penang and Malacca lagged far behind in commercial progress, it is doubtful whether in the long term they actually lost trade to Singapore, while they benefited in many ways from the new port's prosperity. John Cameron, writing in 1864, claimed that Singapore's success was 'the strongest stimulus to the trade of the other two'.<sup>111</sup> This was certainly true of Penang.

Penang's trade with the pepper ports of Aceh in north Sumatra expanded in the 1830s and was boosted in 1845 when the Americans diverted their pepper buying from the Sumatran ports to Penang.<sup>112</sup> The consolidation of British rule in Burma after the two Anglo-Burmese wars of 1824 to 1826 and 1852 to 1854, and the restoration of the rajah of Kedah in 1841, opened up new trade to the north of Penang, and in the ten years from 1851 to 1861 her trade increased at a greater rate than at any other period in her history, largely because of the opening up of tin mines in Perak. Penang's American trade was badly hit during the American civil war,<sup>113</sup> but her total trade rose from an average annual value in the years 1853 to 1858 of Rs. 25,349,566 to Rs. 40,767,085 in 1862-3,<sup>114</sup> by

<sup>109</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 421; SSR, W 30, Item 292; SSR, DD 34, Item 78.

<sup>110</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, p. 237.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

<sup>112</sup> PG, 3 January in SFP, 15 January 1846.

<sup>113</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*.

<sup>114</sup> SSR, W 47, Item 95.

which time half of Singapore's big firms had branches in Penang.<sup>115</sup>

In some ways Penang's commerce was steadier and less subject to the violent fluctuations which plagued Singapore's entrepôt trade. Much of it was based on produce from her own territory and nearby states: tin, tapioca, sugar and nutmegs. Most important was the export of tin from Perak and the import of supplies for the mines, but this depended upon peace in the Malay states and was threatened in the 1860s by growing chaos in Larut.

By the 1840s the merchants of Singapore regarded Malacca as a dying settlement, a useless burden, a port which had been a prosperous trading centre in the past only because Singapore did not then exist.<sup>116</sup> By 1845 half of Malacca's trade was done with Singapore,<sup>117</sup> and there was no merchant resident in Malacca, either European or Chinese, who shipped direct to Europe or America.<sup>118</sup> Some produce was exported direct to China, and junks brought in labourers for the mines, but most other overseas trade went through Penang or Singapore.

The discovery of tin at Kassang and the influx of Chinese miners gave an impetus to Malacca's economy in the 1840s. The mine owners paid no rent but gave up a tenth of the output to the government, who farmed out the right to collect this tithe. In 1846-7 the tin farm fetched little more than \$1,000, but by the fiscal year 1849-50 it rose to \$18,120.<sup>119</sup> Trade and revenue also expanded. In the official year 1851-2 Malacca's imports rose to Rs. 2,485,863 and her exports to Rs. 2,160,348, while her revenue that year rose to Rs. 99,980.<sup>120</sup> Trade and revenue depended to a large extent on the export of tin from Kassang and the neighbouring Malay states and the import of opium and other supplies for the miners, so that the exodus from Kassang in the late 1850s and disturbances in Sungei Ujong

<sup>115</sup> SSR, R 34, pp. 32-3.

<sup>116</sup> G. F. Davidson, *Trade and Travel in the Far East* (London, 1846), pp. 94-6; SFP, 16 July 1840.

<sup>117</sup> Wong Lin Ken, 'The Trade of Singapore, 1819-69', *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 86-7.

<sup>118</sup> H. Crookewit, 'The Tin Mines of Malacca', *JIA*, viii (1854), 131.

<sup>119</sup> SFP, 4 January 1849.

<sup>120</sup> SFP, 14 January 1853.

in 1860-1 hit Malacca's economy,<sup>121</sup> which continued to depend largely on a precarious trade with the nearby troubled states.

From her inception Singapore blossomed as a port. Despite fluctuations, years of uncertainty and depression, commercial setbacks proved only temporary, and by 1867 Singapore was second only to Calcutta among the government of India's ports. Raffles visualized Singapore as the centre of a new British sphere of influence, dominating the commerce of the eastern archipelago, the entrepôt of trade for the Far East and southeast Asia. While the East India Company was interested in the Straits Settlements solely to support her China trade, Raffles's main commercial object in 1819 was to thwart Dutch attempts to monopolize the trade of the archipelago, and it was the trade of the eastern islands which was most immediately attracted to the new port. Singapore's early success has been attributed to the fact that it 'was like a shop opened in a crowded thoroughfare where there had been previously no shops'.<sup>122</sup> In fact there were shops already there, but they were badly sited or managed. Penang's geographical position deterred traders from the archipelago, who had to battle up the Malacca Straits against unfavourable winds. Riau, the major trading centre of the region before 1819, was well situated, but traders were plagued by impositions and dues. Trade from the eastern islands and south Sumatra, which had formerly passed through Riau or Penang, was immediately attracted instead to the new port of Singapore with its more convenient geographical location and its enlightened policy of free trade.

John Crawford, visiting Singapore for the first time in January 1822, was amazed to find such bustle and so many people in a place which was barely three years old.<sup>123</sup> No official trade records were kept before 1823, but in the following

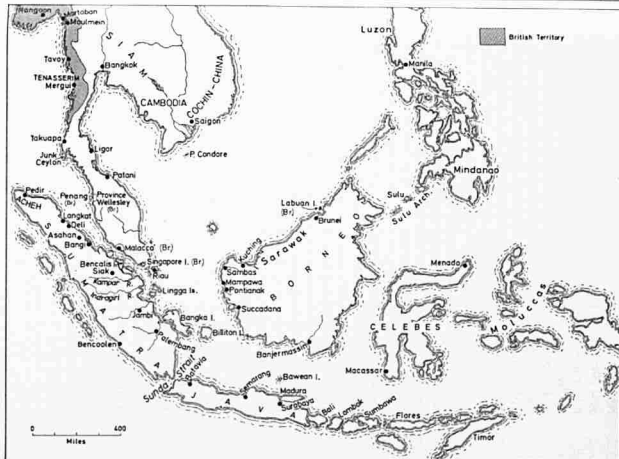
<sup>121</sup> SFP, 30 January 1862.

<sup>122</sup> R. Mundy, *Narrative of Events in Borneo and Celebes down to the Occupation of Labuan . . . together with a Narrative of the Operations of H.M.S. 'Iris'* (London, 1848), ii, 33.

<sup>123</sup> J. Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (London, 1828), i, 64.



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year Singapore's trade amounted to \$13,519,137 in value, and by the financial year 1829-30 official statistics recorded trading worth \$18,892,357.<sup>124</sup> By the end of her first decade Singapore had largely fulfilled Raffles's commercial ambitions, and her fame as a port where traders could do their business in peace, with no irksome restrictions or charges, had spread throughout the archipelago. 'The occupation of the island of Singapore by the British and the policy pursued by them ever since have caused a revolution of opinion throughout these islands', wrote Dalton, one of the few Englishmen to travel widely in the eastern archipelago at that time.<sup>125</sup> In 1830 he described the 'unusual sensation amongst all ranks of people'<sup>126</sup> in the islands caused by the rise of Singapore, how new boats were being constructed in almost every creek in eastern Borneo and the western Celebes, how people were moving from the interior to the coasts to trade, and whereas ten years before only the Dyak chiefs could afford to wear sarongs, now they were worn by even the poorest along the coast of Borneo.<sup>127</sup>

The Bugis of Celebes dominated the trade of the archipelago east of the Malay peninsula and had established colonies in Borneo and the eastern islands. For many years they had traded with Riau, but the opening of Singapore provided them with a centre free from the dues exacted in Riau and other Dutch or Asian ports, where they could bring produce collected from the islands and exchange it for opium, salt, tobacco, arms and manufactured goods. The journey to Singapore fitted conveniently into the timetable of winds, whereas the voyage up the Malacca Straits to Penang did not. By the mid-1820s large fleets of Bugis prahus came to Singapore each year, bringing cargoes of sarongs, gold dust, beeswax, edible birds' nests, agar-agar and other Straits produce, individual cargoes being worth as much as \$30,000.

The merchant Dalton, who had travelled and lived with the Bugis, wanted to see their monopoly broken by direct European trading with the eastern islands. 'In effect these are all pirates

<sup>124</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 254.

<sup>125</sup> J. H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent Countries* (Singapore, 1837, reprinted London, 1968), pp. 73-4.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

who paralyse the exertions of thousands of individuals who would be otherwise active',<sup>128</sup> 'Every Bugis prahu is a pirate and the Malay vessel lawful game wherever found: indeed the Bugis consider nature intended the Malays to be their slaves.'<sup>129</sup> The big Bugis convoys did not fear pirates. Indeed they themselves combined legitimate trade with piracy and slave dealing and were not above kidnapping their own passengers and selling them into slavery.<sup>130</sup> At that time direct European trading with many islands of the archipelago was not practicable, and the Bugis remained for many years one of the mainstays of Singapore's prosperity and her major link with the eastern islands.

In 1825 the Dutch exercised effective control only over Java, the Moluccas and southern Sumatra, with stations in Celebes, Borneo and some of the smaller islands. Most British trade went to Java direct, not through Singapore, but Singapore traders had a flourishing trade with the Dutch outposts, such as Sambas, Pontianak and Mampawa in Borneo. The foundation of Singapore stimulated trade with Brunei, particularly in antimony and sago from Sarawak, which was brought to Singapore in Malay and Bugis prahus. Singapore soon built up a healthy trade with the east coast states of central Sumatra, particularly with Siak and Jambi. One of the main exports from Sumatra was coffee from the Menangkabau territory of the interior, and this, together with rice, gambier, beeswax, rhinoceros horns and other produce, was brought to Singapore to exchange for Siamese salt, British cottons and manufactured goods, Indian textiles, opium, raw silk and firearms.<sup>131</sup> Many ports in eastern Sumatra sprang to life with the rise of Singapore. Pulau Lawan in Siak, an insignificant village before 1819, was by 1826 one of the most flourishing settlements in the Malacca Straits and a big centre for the coffee trade.<sup>132</sup> It was estimated that by 1829 \$65,000 worth of coffee was being exported from Menangkabau to Singapore through the Sumatran port of Kampar alone.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> J. R. Logan, 'The Piracy and Slave Trade of the Indian Archipelago', *JIA*, v (1851), 374.

<sup>131</sup> J. Anderson, *Acheen and the Ports on the North and East Coasts of Sumatra* (London, 1840, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), pp. 54, 171-2.

<sup>132</sup> Moor, *Notices*, p. 98.

The expansion of trade in the eastern archipelago was hampered by the commercial policy of the Dutch. While the authorities in Holland in principle favoured a liberal trade policy, the Dutch administrators in Java realized that this would benefit mainly British trade. Particularly suspicious and resentful of the prosperity of Singapore, the Batavian authorities attempted to discourage Singapore trade with their possessions in the archipelago and to bring more territories within their own commercial sphere.

By the terms of the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of London of 1824 the British were to be given most-favoured nation terms in trading with Dutch dependencies in the East, and were to pay not more than double the rate of tariff charged to Dutch shipping. Both parties were precluded from making treaties with independent states which would exclude the other's trade.<sup>133</sup> The treaty was full of loopholes and it was inevitable that the British free-trade system should clash with Dutch efforts to protect the industries of the southern Netherlands in the 1820s, and even more so when Belgium broke away from Holland in 1830 and the Dutch began to enforce the Culture system in Java and to monopolize trade in the hands of the Dutch Trading Company.

In 1824 the Dutch authorities imposed a surcharge on British textiles transhipped at Singapore. An appeal made by Singapore merchants to the Governor General of India in 1829 to protest against this blow to Singapore's entrepôt trade produced no result, nor did another plea made to the British treasury in 1831. During these years the direct export of textiles from Britain to Java was expanding, so that manufacturers in Britain were satisfied.<sup>134</sup> In 1834 the Dutch passed two edicts which hit Singapore's trade further. The first, issued in July 1834, put a prohibitive duty of seventy per cent on textiles brought in from ports east of the Cape of Good Hope, thus penalizing Singapore's entrepôt trade, and the second, in November 1834, laid down that all textiles destined for Dutch ports in the archipelago were to be brought first to the Javanese ports of Samarang,

<sup>133</sup> W. G. Maxwell and W. S. Gibson, *Treaties and Engagements Affecting the Malay States and Borneo* (London, 1924), pt 1, pp. 8-12.

<sup>134</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 42-3, 47.

Batavia or Sourabaya. This excluded Singapore traders from direct access to Dutch outports in Sumatra, Borneo, Celebes, and Timor, while the coastal trade was reserved for Dutch ships.<sup>135</sup> Malay and Bugis prahus continued to trade with Singapore and to smuggle goods into the Dutch outports. In 1835 Bugis and Malay shipping carried the entire trade between Singapore and the Celebes and ninety-three per cent of the trade with Borneo.<sup>136</sup>

The Straits merchants worried too about the possible extension of the Dutch Java tariff to the independent states of Sumatra. In 1834 the Dutch began to expand their political influence in the island and to attempt to monopolize the south Sumatra coffee trade.<sup>137</sup> They made a treaty with Jambi in 1834 which gave them the right to levy customs dues, and in 1838 they extended their control to Indragiri and some of the west coast states. Governor Bonham warned Calcutta that this was likely to injure trade with the Straits Settlements. The loudest protests came from Penang, whose Sumatran trade was at that time the main foundation of her prosperity. Penang's relations with the Sumatran states depended on treaties negotiated with Acheh in 1820, with Deli and Langkat in 1823, and with Siak in 1818 and 1823, which fixed import and export duties and forbade the rulers making agreements with the Dutch to harm British trade or allow Dutch settlements in their territories. In 1840 the chairman of the Penang chamber of commerce appealed for the British navy to patrol the Sumatra coast and to investigate alleged Dutch interference with Penang trade. Bonham sent the Company's steamer *Diana* under Captain Congalton, who reported that the Dutch seemed bent on occupying Sumatra. Shortly afterwards the Penang chamber of commerce persuaded the London East India Association to lobby with the foreign office on the question of Dutch expansion in Sumatra, and at the same time Bonham urged Calcutta to compel the Dutch to withdraw the edicts and differential tariffs which hit the trade of the Straits Settlements.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-8.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>137</sup> Moor, *Notices*, p. 125.

<sup>138</sup> Anderson, *Acheen*, pp. 15-16, 189-99, 218-21, 231-6; Bonham to Bengal, 21 July 1838, SSR, R 5; 27 September, 15 October 1840, SSR, R 6; 5 November 1841, SSR, R 7.

The British government subordinated Straits' interests to the settlement of the Belgian problem in Europe, and the foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, was unwilling to take up complaints submitted by Singapore merchants or to raise the question of Dutch political and commercial policy in the East Indies until the problems of the Netherlands in Europe were settled. The edict of July 1834 was revoked when the treaty between Belgium and Holland was signed in 1839, and in 1841 the edict of November 1834 prohibiting direct trade with Dutch outports was also withdrawn. In 1842 the Dutch decided to withdraw their control from the former independent Sumatran states, and this put an end to Anglo-Dutch friction in Sumatra for the next fifteen years.

European and Chinese traders entered those markets of the eastern archipelago which were independent of the Dutch. Singapore carried on a flourishing trade with the island of Lombok, east of Java, where a British merchant named King resided and owned several small trading vessels which plied between Lombok and Singapore. Singapore's trade with Lombok rose from \$78,981 in 1829-30 to \$395,581 in 1841-2,<sup>139</sup> and according to George Windsor Earl more British ships visited Lombok than any other island in the archipelago in the 1830s.<sup>140</sup> An Armenian merchant settled in Brunei to act as agent for a Singapore Armenian firm,<sup>141</sup> but by that stage Sarawak was in revolt and the profitable antimony trade had petered out. Bonham took the opportunity when James Brooke arrived in Singapore in 1839 to send him to Sarawak to convey the thanks of the British authorities and the Singapore chamber of commerce to the Rajah Muda of Sarawak for help given to shipwrecked British sailors, and to set up British influence at Hasim's court. When Brooke was proclaimed rajah and governor of Sarawak in 1841, the Singapore merchants hoped that at last the supposed riches of Sarawak could be exploited.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 70.

<sup>140</sup> G. W. Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (London, 1837, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), pp. 90-1.

<sup>141</sup> G. T. Lay, 'Notices of the City of Borneo and its Inhabitants made during the Voyage of the American Brig *Himmaleh* in the Indian Archipelago in 1837', *Chinese Repository*, vii (1838), 188.

<sup>142</sup> *SFP*, 22 September 1842.

The settlement of the Batavian tariff question and the halt of Dutch expansion in Sumatra were soon followed by fresh fears in Singapore that the Dutch were diverting their commercial ambitions to the islands east of Java. Ironically there was also concern lest the liberalization of Dutch policy elsewhere and the opening of Dutch free ports might capture trade from Singapore. The greatest worry was that the Dutch would declare Macassar a free port and divert the whole Bugis trade from Singapore. In 1831 Dalton, who had visited Macassar, predicted that if it were made a free port, Penang and Singapore would soon be deserted and probably reduced to eking out a bare existence in arms, ammunition and contraband goods.<sup>142</sup> In 1847 the long-dreaded threat materialized: Macassar was converted into a free port and this was the prelude to the Dutch opening other free ports: Menado and Kema in 1848; Amboyna, Banda and Ternate in 1853. The Dutch began in the 1840s to extend their control to the islands east of Java, making treaties with local rulers which put British trade at a disadvantage. In 1843 the island of Lombok came under Dutch control, and in 1849 they extended their authority to Bali, which had formerly served as a base for smuggling foreign goods into Java. The Dutch tried to turn the trade of these islands into a coastal trade confined to Dutch craft, and thus to cut out Singapore traders.

These measures did not in fact harm Singapore's trade permanently. The Dutch free ports did not capture any appreciable trade from the Straits Settlements, and indeed Macassar opened up new areas of prosperity which benefited Singapore.<sup>144</sup> In 1850 the Singapore merchants, supported by the Edinburgh chamber of commerce, presented a memorial to the British government about Dutch trade policy in Bali and Lombok, and eventually the Dutch gave way to British pressure, opening the trade of the two islands to all vessels in 1857. The Singapore merchants wanted the independence of the local rulers to be restored, but London was not prepared to push this demand.<sup>145</sup> Provided trade was left free, the British

<sup>142</sup> Moor, *Notices*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>144</sup> H. St John, *The Indian Archipelago* (London, 1853), ii, 106-7; *ST*, 10 January 1854.

<sup>145</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 72-3.

government had no objection to the extension of Dutch political control.

While the Straits merchants had won their campaign to stop the extension of Dutch political and commercial control in Sumatra in 1842 and there was no further clash of Dutch and British interests there for another fifteen years, the absence of any European control was in some ways prejudicial to British trade in Sumatra. The east coast states were in turmoil. Traders from the Straits Settlements frequently complained of exactions and abuses, and from time to time the Governor despatched vessels to patrol the Sumatra coast and investigate complaints.<sup>146</sup>

In 1856 a contender in a civil war in Siak hired Adam Wilson, a young European commercial assistant employed by Martin, Dyce & Company of Singapore, to help him gain the throne, in return for which Wilson was to receive the island of Bencalis and one-third of the revenues of Siak. Wilson recruited a mercenary force of Bugis and European sailors, and the enterprise roused considerable enthusiasm among the mercantile community in Singapore, and equally strong alarm in Batavia.<sup>147</sup> The Dutch, seeing Wilson's venture as a possible repetition of Brooke's intervention in Sarawak, sent gunboats to observe the proceedings in Siak, whereupon Wilson's Bugis and Siak allies deserted him, and he was forced to return to Singapore and abandon the venture when Governor Blundell refused to help him.<sup>148</sup>

The Wilson incident revived Dutch interest in east Sumatra. News of a treaty negotiated by the Dutch with Siak in 1858 was received with mixed feelings in the Straits Settlements. Blundell welcomed the prospect of seeing an end to anarchy in Siak,<sup>149</sup>

<sup>146</sup> SSR, W 26, Item 99; SSR, DD 25, Items 28, 54; SSR, DD 26, Item 147; SSR, U 33, pp. 163, 207.

<sup>147</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 170-3; IO, India Political Proceedings, Range 202, vol. 41, no. 161; *SFP*, 21 May 1857.

<sup>148</sup> SSR, W 25, Items 270, 275; SSR, W 26, Item 6; SSR, V 23, pp. 69-71, 73-4; SSR, V 24, pp. 53-4, 90-1, 213; SSR, R 32, pp. 34-6; SSR, S 25, Item 228; SSR, S 26, p. 36; IO, India Political Proceedings, Range 202, vol. 41, nos. 37, 40; *SFP*, 19 March, 9 April, 21 May, 11 June, 9, 23, 30 July, 6 August, 24 September, 27 December 1857.

<sup>149</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 258-60, 288-9; IO, India Political Proceedings, Range 203, vol. 27, nos. 37, 40, 41.



but the Penang merchants feared that in bringing Siak's dependencies under their control the Dutch would exclude British traders from the north Sumatra pepper ports of Asahan, Deli and Langkat.<sup>150</sup> Both the Penang and Singapore chambers of commerce protested at the Dutch encroachments in Siak, and frequent appeals for protection were made by Sumatran chiefs to the Governor and influential Europeans in Singapore and Penang: in 1861 by the Sultan of Deli, in 1862 by the Rajah of Sirdang and the Sultan of Acheh, and in 1863 by the Sultan of Asahan.<sup>151</sup>

There was in fact little that the Governor in Singapore could do, because he had no power to discuss with the Batavia authorities the relations of British or Dutch with the Sumatran states. He could only indicate his alarm<sup>152</sup> and investigate individual reports of infringements of treaties. He sent the Resident Councillor of Penang to Deli and Langkat in 1862 to secure redress for alleged wrongs inflicted on British subjects, and the following year agreed to a plea from the Singapore chamber of commerce that a British man-of-war should be sent periodically to visit east Sumatra.<sup>153</sup> In reply to repeated appeals from the Sumatran chiefs Cavenagh could do nothing but send empty messages of good wishes for their welfare and warn naval commanders only to issue 'general expressions of friendship and goodwill', without offering any hopes of concrete aid.<sup>154</sup>

Meanwhile Cavenagh warned the government of India that Batavia would take over all the states unless Britain insisted on enforcing her treaty rights.<sup>155</sup> While there were reports of isolated outrages suffered by British subjects at the hands of individual Sumatran chiefs,<sup>156</sup> Cavenagh could not cite any

<sup>150</sup> SFP, 7 January, 18, 25 February, 10 June, 19 August 1858.

<sup>151</sup> SSR, W 39, Item 26; SSR, W 43, Item 104; SSR, W 44, Item 219; SSR, W 47, Item 61; SSR, DD 33, Item 34; SSR, U 42, pp. 228-9.

<sup>152</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 7, 103; SSR, V 36, p. 372; SSR, V 37, pp. 124-6; O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), pp. 337-9.

<sup>153</sup> SSR, U 44, pp. 164, 165, 237; SSR, V 36, p. 59; SSR, R 41, pp. 62-71, 129-30; SSR, W 46, Item 273; SSR, V 37, p. 199.

<sup>154</sup> SSR, W 47, Items 44, 61; SSR, V 37, pp. 333, 334, 342-57; SSR, R 41, pp. 158-60; SSR, V 31, pp. 254-9.

<sup>155</sup> SSR, W 44, Item 205; SSR, R 41, pp. 73-4, 77-8, 173-4, 227-9, 233-4, 251-6; SSR, S 32, Item 52; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 354-5.

<sup>156</sup> SSR, V 29, pp. 190, 240; SSR, W 47, Item 38; SSR, R 41, pp. 202-3, 244-6, 266-7.

specific measures taken by the Dutch to thwart British commerce. But he placed little confidence in the benefits which Dutch rule might bring. Never an admirer of their government, which he likened to a 'bow too highly strung',<sup>157</sup> Cavenagh feared the Dutch would stir up opposition in the interior and dislocate the trade which was so profitable for Penang.<sup>158</sup> The India office did not wish to get involved in Sumatra and insisted in 1860 that British warships had no responsibility for collecting debts due to British traders.<sup>159</sup>

The foreign office in London found the issue confusing. Cavenagh's despatches and a forceful appeal to resist Dutch encroachments made by Colonel Henry Man, the Resident Councillor of Penang, who was on leave in London in 1864, suggested that Dutch activities were harming British trade.<sup>160</sup> But the Dutch government protested they had imposed no restrictions on British trade, and John Crawford, the Straits merchants' spokesman in London, could produce no statistics to support his claims of damage caused by the Dutch. While the foreign office deliberated at leisure, the Governor General and the secretary of state for India did nothing. 'There is no use in our giving ourselves any trouble about the matter', Wood told Cavenagh in December 1864.<sup>161</sup>

When the Straits gunboat *Pluto* patrolled east Sumatran waters in 1864, the commander found little evidence of Dutch interference with Penang's trade.<sup>162</sup> Despite this, goaded on by the Resident Councillor of Penang and the merchants, Cavenagh grew more suspicious of Dutch intentions and appealed for instructions from India. He repeated his pleas in a private letter to the secretary of state, seeking 'some decided expression' of the British government's views. Calcutta merely commended his 'very judicious' behaviour and passed the correspondence

<sup>157</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 340.

<sup>158</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 173, 174-5, 202-3, 227-9, 256-9.

<sup>159</sup> SSR, S 28, Item 37.

<sup>160</sup> Man to India Office, 6 June 1864, CO 273/9; Foreign Office to India Office, 16 January 1865, CO 273/9.

<sup>161</sup> Lawrence (Governor General) to Wood, 4 November 1865, Lawrence Papers, 1st ser. vol. 6, no. 65; Wood to Cavenagh, 26 September 1864, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 18, 8 December 1864, vol. 19, 10 April 1865, vol. 20; SSR, S 32, Item 292.

<sup>162</sup> SSR, W 50, Item 356.

on to the India office.<sup>163</sup> In 1865 Cavenagh gave his backing to a petition from Penang merchants against Dutch encroachments, and early the next year protested when the Dutch hauled down a Union Jack which the Asahan revenue farmer, a Penang Chinese, had put up at his house in Asahan.<sup>164</sup> Cavenagh's protests were in vain and Calcutta was embarrassed by his reaction:

It is doubtful how far the British government is justified in interfering to defend even the life and property of the innumerable Asiatic subjects of Her Majesty who for their own private advantage choose to take up their residence in foreign states under an uncivilised or weak administration, but that it should be bound as a matter of national honour to vindicate the dignity of every British flag which any such person may choose to set up is clearly out of the question.<sup>165</sup>

Despite these warnings, Cavenagh continued in face of numerous complaints by British Chinese traders to argue the 'urgent necessity of placing our political relations with the native chiefs in the above island upon a properly defined footing'.<sup>166</sup>

Although there were frequent complaints and some irresponsible newspaper reporting,<sup>167</sup> there is no concrete evidence that the Dutch inflicted any damage on British trade. On the contrary, all the statistics prove a steady expansion in Penang's commerce with Sumatra in these years.<sup>168</sup> It was fear of what the Dutch might later do which inspired most of the outcries from the Straits merchants.

After two years of deliberation and negotiation, the British foreign office decided in 1866 that it would be beneficial to let the Dutch bring Sumatra under their rule provided they granted favourable terms to British trade throughout the East

<sup>163</sup> Cavenagh to Wood, 22 February, 22 September 1865, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters; SSR, R 41, pp. 309-11, 313-14, 319-21, 322-3, 323-4; SSR, S 33, Items 246, 260.

<sup>164</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 328-30, 338; ST, 13 December 1865.

<sup>165</sup> SSR, S 35, Item 50.

<sup>166</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 372-3, 374, 378-80.

<sup>167</sup> Governor to editor, *Straits Times*, 17 November 1859, SSR, V 28.

<sup>168</sup> ST, 11, 23 December 1865, 27 December 1866; Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 63-4.

Indies.<sup>169</sup> The negotiations eventually led to the Anglo-Dutch Sumatra treaty of 1871.

Singapore's trade with the eastern archipelago rose from \$2,981,109 in 1823-4 to \$10,954,445 in 1865-6, by which time Singapore handled nearly half of all British trade with the archipelago, the only direct British trade being with Java and Manila.<sup>170</sup> In 1866 the Dutch introduced a new tariff which was the beginning of a more liberal commercial policy in the Indies and was to produce a new upsurge in Singapore's trade.

The merchants of Penang and Singapore looked on Siam in the 1820s as potentially one of their most lucrative markets and expected great results from the commercial provisions of Henry Burney's Anglo-Siamese treaty, which was signed in 1826, the same year as the amalgamation of the Straits Settlements.<sup>171</sup> Siamese junks had begun to call at Singapore in its earliest days and by 1826 she was the most important port for Siamese trade with the archipelago. By 1832 the Siamese junk trade had been diverted entirely from Batavia to Singapore.<sup>172</sup> Some European commercial firms in Singapore tried to break into the Bangkok market direct, but Siam was a difficult market for westerners, who had to compete with Siamese and Chinese junk masters accustomed to the intricate ways of Siamese commerce.<sup>173</sup> In 1835 the Siamese government reimposed a state monopoly of trade, which squeezed out European traders, and the bulk of the Singapore/Siam trade continued to be carried in junks, which brought sugar for the European market and salt for southeast Asia in exchange for textiles, opium and firearms.

The continued frustrations and difficulties of the Siamese trade led the Singapore chamber of commerce in 1848 to petition the Governor General of India and the British government to negotiate a new agreement to replace Burney's treaty.

<sup>169</sup> SSR, S 35, Item 139; Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 60-1; N. Tarling, 'The Relation between British Policies and the Extent of Dutch Power in the Malay Archipelago, 1784-1871', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, iv (1958), 191.

<sup>170</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 31.

<sup>171</sup> Moor, *Notices*, p. 223.

<sup>172</sup> Earl, *Eastern Seas*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>173</sup> Moor, *Notices*, pp. 207-8.

Sir James Brooke was sent to Bangkok in 1850 to try to obtain for British merchants the right to reside and trade in Siam and to open the Siamese trade to free enterprise.<sup>174</sup> Brooke's mission not only failed to improve trading relations with Siam but disrupted the existing Siamese junk trade with Singapore. The Singapore chamber of commerce then petitioned the British government, withdrawing their requests for a further treaty, and asked for a policy of conciliation which would revive the former junk trade.

While the majority of the European and Asian merchants of Singapore supported this petition, a minority of European firms and individual traders presented a counter-memorial, arguing that the future of trade with Siam lay with European enterprise and urging that the negotiations be renewed and the Siamese forced to open their doors to trade.<sup>175</sup> This dissension soured relationships among the Singapore mercantile community for a long time, but the issue of Siamese trade itself was solved when the accession of King Mongkut in 1851 brought a change in Siamese policy. In 1855 Sir John Bowring, on behalf of the British government, negotiated a treaty which opened Siam to British trade, established settled duties and gave the British the right to keep a consul in Bangkok and to have their subjects judged by British law by the consul and in capital cases by the Singapore courts. The British consul in Bangkok was instructed to confer on commercial and political matters with the Governor of the Straits Settlements,<sup>176</sup> and Singapore quickly became an important centre for the Siamese trade.<sup>177</sup>

The progress of trade with Cochin China was not so encouraging, although initial prospects looked promising because the country was just emerging from a long civil war at the time when Singapore was founded, and the King was prepared to welcome traders. Twenty-one junks came from Siam and Cochin China in 1820, and by 1824 the number had increased to seventy.<sup>178</sup> In the first few years Chinese merchants resident in Cochin China handled the Singapore trade, but in 1825 the

<sup>174</sup> *SFP*, 4 January 1849; Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 144-5.

<sup>175</sup> *ST*, 4 February 1851, giving texts of memorials of 31 October 1850 and 2 November 1850 with subsequent correspondence.

<sup>176</sup> *SSR*, S 25, Item 315.

<sup>177</sup> *SFP*, 21 January 1858, 7 February 1861.

<sup>178</sup> Crawford, *Embassy*, ii, 365.

King set up a royal monopoly and as an added deterrent to private traders he forbade his subjects to carry arms. This was a serious blow to the Singapore/Cochin China trade. A few Cochin Chinese continued to brave the dangers of the China Sea and to invade the royal monopoly, but their small defenceless craft were easy prey to pirates in those dangerous waters.

The founding of Singapore stimulated the growth of trade with the Malay peninsula, and throughout this period Singapore's east coast peninsular trade was more valuable than the west. It was based largely on the rich gold and tin trade of the eastern states and the demand for opium and supplies to be distributed to colonies of Chinese miners and traders.

The Chinese dominated the Malay peninsular trade. For trade between Singapore, Penang and Malacca they used mainly European-type square-rigged ships. Most of this inter-settlement commerce was speculative trading in opium, manufactured goods and textiles, Penang being the main centre for Indian textiles and Singapore for British. The rest of the peninsular trade to smaller ports was carried on largely in Chinese-owned *sampan-pukats* or *prahu-pukats*, rowing boats, which could use a sail but did not rely on the winds.

The Straits Settlements were at first regarded by the East India Company as guardians of her China trade, and by private merchants as a means of profitably invading the Company's China-trade monopoly, but they did not come up to expectations on either count. Despite the Company's monopoly, Chinese junks came to Singapore, bringing cargoes of silk, nankeens, cassia and camphor, together with immigrant labourers, and taking mainly Straits produce, gambier, opium, firearms and ammunition. They bought some British manufactured goods but few British textiles, and in this respect Singapore proved a disappointment to the British manufacturing interests which had clamoured most loudly for its retention.

The hope remained that Singapore would become the centre for the China tea trade, and the withdrawal of the East India Company's China trade monopoly in 1833 was viewed with mingled foreboding and eagerness in Singapore. It threatened to destroy Singapore's attractions as an entrepôt for manufac-

tured goods intended for China, but it encouraged the hope that Singapore might supplant Canton. European firms in Singapore encouraged Chinese junks to bring in large quantities of tea in the 1833-4 season, and the despatch of the first shipment of China tea to Britain in 1834 was hailed as the beginning of a new era in Singapore's commercial history. But Singapore's ambition to become a tea centre failed. Little progress was made until the outbreak of the first Anglo-Chinese war and the British evacuation of Canton in 1839, when the dislocation of the Canton trade sparked off wild speculation in Singapore. European firms gave advances to Chinese merchants to buy up tea, and 150 junks came to Singapore in 1842 compared with about seventeen in previous years. The resumption of direct trading to China by neutral shipping broke the boom, and the price of tea plunged. In 1843 a number of leading Chinese merchants in Singapore went bankrupt and European firms lost the capital they had advanced. This was the end of the tea trade in Singapore.<sup>179</sup>

The lifting of the China trade monopoly did, as feared, have an immediate effect on Singapore's entrepôt trade, and the figures for 1834-5 showed a significant drop, particularly in the silk trade. The transshipment trade with China was not killed altogether but the proportion controlled by Singapore fell. Direct trade between China and Europe expanded, and of eighty-eight ships arriving in Singapore from China in the official year 1836-7, less than half landed any quantity of goods.<sup>180</sup>

The founding of Hong Kong in 1841 and the opening of the five treaty ports in China at the end of the first opium war dashed the ambitions of private merchants, who had hoped to see Singapore take Canton's place in the China trade. While much of the dullness of trade in the post-war years was blamed on the opening of the China treaty ports, in fact they stole little of Singapore's former commerce. Despite the gloomy forebodings in Singapore, the unhealthy settlement of Hong Kong did not become prosperous until the destruction of the European factories in Canton during the second Anglo-Chinese war in 1856 drove foreign merchants to withdraw

<sup>179</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 116-21.

<sup>180</sup> *SFP*, 26 October 1837.

there permanently.<sup>181</sup> Anxiety persisted in Singapore for some years after that, but the increasing prosperity of Hong Kong and the China trade helped to boost the demand for Straits produce, for which Singapore remained the market.

India and Britain absorbed a large share of Straits Settlements' trade, and this was handled almost entirely by western merchants. Americans had a big trade with Penang, bringing in arms and ammunition and taking away cargoes of pepper, but American trade was slow to develop in Singapore, because it was a victim of a curious anomaly. According to an Anglo-American convention made in 1815, American vessels were permitted to trade with the presidency ports of Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and Penang, but no formal provisions were made to extend this right to Malacca or Singapore when they became British possessions. American ships traded openly with Singapore until 1825, when one of their vessels was seized on the grounds of illegal trading and taken to Calcutta for trial. After that American ships used to anchor at Battam, some fourteen miles away, or at Riau, and conduct their trade with Singapore from there. Joseph Balestier, who was appointed American consul at Riau in 1833, in practice lived in Singapore and agitated for years for the admission of American trade.<sup>182</sup> He won his battle in 1840, after which American traders flocked to Singapore. The value of American trade rose from \$13,382 in 1839-40 to \$118,513 in 1840-1 and to \$165,024 in 1842-3,<sup>183</sup> and after United States tariff restrictions were lifted in 1846, American trade in Singapore increased steadily.

Australian trade was not so successful. In October 1852 the first steamer from Australia arrived in Singapore, bringing great hopes that a flourishing trade would be built up.<sup>184</sup> These were disappointed, and in 1853 Galle in Ceylon was substituted

<sup>181</sup> Davidson, *Trade and Travel*, pp. 53, 67-9; G. B. Endacott, *History of Hong Kong* (London, 1958), pp. 30-4, 61, 64, 68, 74-7, 116-18.

<sup>182</sup> Sharom Ahmat, 'American Trade with Singapore, 1819-65', *JMBRAS*, xxxviii, no. 2 (1965), 241-53; Sharom Ahmat, 'Joseph B. Balestier, the First American Consul in Singapore, 1833-52', *JMBRAS*, xxxix, no. 2 (1966), 108-22.

<sup>183</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 246.

<sup>184</sup> *SFP*, 7 January 1853.



for Singapore as the point of return for the Australian steamers.<sup>185</sup>

Singapore soon became an important centre for trading in arms and ammunition, which had formerly been almost monopolized in southeast Asia by the Americans, since the Directors forbade the trade in the Company's territories. Attempts to extend the ban to Singapore in 1828 were ineffective, and the export of arms and ammunition from Singapore was unrestricted for nearly thirty years. A law to regulate the importation, manufacture and sale of arms and ammunition, which was passed by the Indian legislative council in 1857 as an aftermath of the Mutiny, threatened Singapore's lucrative arms trade.<sup>186</sup> Blundell, who had warned Calcutta several times that large amounts of arms were being exported to China during the second Anglo-Chinese war, approved of the act in principle but warned that it would meet great resistance in the Straits where 'there is scarce a mercantile firm in the place, English or foreign, that does not import largely guns, small arms, military stores and ammunition'.<sup>187</sup> In practice little attempt was made to check the Singapore arms trade until after the end of the Anglo-Chinese war when the British began helping the Chinese imperial forces to suppress their rebels. In an attempt to stop the supply of arms to rebels in China, Calcutta insisted in 1863 that arms could only be exported under licence. The Singapore merchants protested and Cavenagh supported their cause, modifying the ban by interpreting the Malay states, the eastern archipelago, Siam and Cochin China as areas where arms could be supplied 'for use within the Straits Settlements'. The restrictions were lifted the next year, the Governor was given the responsibility for seeing that arms did not fall into the hands of the Chinese rebels, and Singapore's arms trade remained unchallenged thereafter.<sup>188</sup>

Most trading capital in the Straits came from Britain. Of

<sup>185</sup> *SFP*, 6 January 1854.

<sup>186</sup> Act XXXIII of 1857; SSR, W 25, Item 405; SSR, S 25, Item 275.

<sup>187</sup> SSR, R 31, pp. 95-7; SSR, R 32, pp. 177-81.

<sup>188</sup> Act XXXI of 1860; SSR, R 41, pp. 119-21; SSR, W 47, Items 132, 163; SSR, W 48, Items 184, 193, 207, 220; SSR, S 32, Item 29; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 289-90, 348-9.

forty-three merchant houses in Singapore in 1846, twenty were British, six Jewish, five Chinese, five Arab, two Armenian, two German, one Portuguese, one American and one Parsee.<sup>189</sup> The first British firms were offshoots of Calcutta agency houses, and in 1824 John Crawford reported that all twelve European firms in Singapore were connected with 'good London or Calcutta houses'.<sup>190</sup>

From the 1840s continental European shipping captured a larger share of the Singapore market, helped by Britain's relaxation of her navigation laws in 1845, which permitted foreign vessels to import goods more freely into British imperial territories.<sup>191</sup> British merchants came to rely heavily on Dutch ships, which were willing to bring goods out to Singapore on their way to pick up cargoes from Java, whereas few first-class British ships were used on the Singapore run. Continental European merchants came to settle in Singapore, particularly Germans. The firm of Behn Meyer was founded in 1840 and soon came to be one of the most flourishing companies in Singapore. The firm of Rautenberg Schmidt & Company was founded by two Hamburg merchants in 1848, and in 1857 two German clerks in that company broke away to start Puttfarcken, Rheiner & Company.

British merchants generally received goods on consignment from Calcutta or British houses which they sold on commission. To support this trade they relied on Chinese middlemen, and it was a combination of European capital and Chinese enterprise which determined the commercial system of Singapore. It was customary for Europeans to supply goods to the Chinese on credit and to receive goods in exchange after a specified time. In dealing with Penang and Malacca the Singapore Chinese usually traded these goods on their own account. In the Sumatra trade, Chinese middlemen often supplied goods to Sumatran Malay traders who returned with produce in exchange.<sup>192</sup> Most of the *sampan-pukats* or *prahu-pukats* plying their trade along the coasts of the Malay peninsula or in the

<sup>189</sup> SFP, 10 December 1846.

<sup>190</sup> Resident's Report, T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', JIA, ix (1855), 468-9.

<sup>191</sup> ST, 18 November 1846.

<sup>192</sup> Wong Lin Ken, JMBRAS, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 77.

southern islands were owned by Singapore Chinese, who supplied goods to the crew on credit and held the *nakodah*, or skipper, responsible for the loss if the mission was unsuccessful.<sup>193</sup>

The European merchants frequently had their fingers burned because of the uncertainties of this trade, the dangers of natural disaster, of storm and shipwreck, the risks of piracy and of extortion by local chiefs, and the untrustworthiness of some Chinese dealers and ships' crews. Europeans handed goods to the Chinese in exchange for promissory notes generally made out for three months but normally extended to four, five or six months. Since the Chinese traded mostly on capital supplied by Europeans and many Chinese traded with no capital at all of their own, the system encouraged recklessness and wild speculation. The *Free Press* complained in 1867 that a Chinese immigrant had only to invest in a clean jacket and an English-made umbrella and any European merchant in Singapore would gladly open his door to him to grant him credit.<sup>194</sup> Sometimes the Chinese sold goods below cost in Penang and used the money for the Bugis trade. If they failed the European's capital was forfeit, and if they succeeded, they sometimes absconded, which was easy to do in the absence of any restrictions on passengers leaving the Straits ports. In 1859 the *Straits Times* suggested making it obligatory for masters of ships to exhibit lists of their prospective passengers at least twelve hours before departure,<sup>195</sup> but such an infringement of free movement found few supporters in Singapore. The extension of the Indian Insolvent Act to the Straits in 1848 encouraged more cheating, and there were cases of Chinese sending their profits to China and then declaring themselves bankrupt.<sup>196</sup>

In 1835 the European merchants met together and agreed to abandon the barter system and insist on prompt repayment in cash, but ten years later nine-tenths of remittances to Europe and India were still made in produce.<sup>197</sup> The temptation to advance large quantities of goods on credit to middlemen continued. In 1858 the European merchants made a pact to

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

<sup>194</sup> *ST*, 10 January 1867.

<sup>196</sup> *ST*, 20 January 1859.

<sup>196</sup> *SSR*, R 40, p. 52.

<sup>197</sup> *SFP*, 5 January 1837; Davidson, *Trade and Travel*, p. 66.

put a time limit on credit, but the scheme had to be abandoned because a few European firms would not co-operate.<sup>198</sup> In 1860 there were many bankruptcies among Chinese merchants. Some of them were believed to be the result of genuine over-speculation, others were fraudulent, but nearly all stemmed from the practice of granting excessive credit. Once more the European merchants of Singapore agreed almost unanimously to impose a limit of three months on credit,<sup>199</sup> and in order to avoid fraudulent bankruptcies the chamber of commerce petitioned the government to pass an act to enforce the registration of partnerships. Again the agreement broke down and over-generous credit to Asian dealers led to more bankruptcies in 1864.<sup>200</sup> No laws for the registration of partnerships were brought in for another twenty years, and the credit situation remained as precarious as ever.

Singapore's trade was almost entirely entrepôt. Her only products were gambier and pepper, and the sole industry of any note was sago manufacture. The technique of granulating or pearling sago was brought to Singapore soon after the station was founded, either from Malacca or Siak, and Singapore quickly became the centre for the production of high-quality sago. The raw material was imported mainly from Sumatra, and most of the sago factories were situated on the flat ground near the base of Pearl's Hill, west of the town, where there was plenty of pure water and the sago boats could come in by the long creeks. The first factories were small rough sheds but there was much money to be made in the business and by the middle of the century many sago factories were permanent brick structures and employed twenty to thirty men.<sup>201</sup> Nearly all the finished sago was exported to Europe or India, and in the early days it commanded a high price. In 1824 the price of sago stood at \$7 a picul, but competition from new factories depressed the price until by 1838 it was down to \$1 a picul. Increasing demand then led to a revival of prices, so that in 1845 sago was selling for \$3 a picul and remained about that

<sup>198</sup> *SFP*, 29 April 1858, 5 January 1859.

<sup>199</sup> *SFP*, 14 October, 13 December 1860.

<sup>200</sup> *SFP*, 21 May 1864.

<sup>201</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Sago', *JIA*, iii (1849), 288-313.

figure for some years.<sup>202</sup> This encouraged more factories to open, and European producers tried to invade the market, hitherto the exclusive preserve of the Chinese. They found it difficult to compete, because it was the practice of Chinese proprietors to live and work in the factory and to allow the chief workmen a share in the profits in addition to their wages. By 1849 there were fifteen Chinese and two European sago factories in Singapore, and sago exports were worth \$100,000 a year.<sup>203</sup>

The pattern of Singapore's life in the 1830s was determined by her seasonal trade, which in the days of sailing ships depended on the winds. Throughout the year there was square-rigged traffic which carried the trade between the Straits Settlements and Calcutta, and the small *sampan-pukats* and *prahu-pukats* which plied along the west coast and among the islands to the south. Each month convoys of about a dozen prahus came regularly from Sumatra, staying in port about a fortnight and selling their coffee and other produce in exchange for goods for the return journey.<sup>204</sup> Trading with the east coast of the peninsula was confined to the months from April to October, for the east coast ports were inaccessible during the northeast monsoon which blows from November to March.

There were two main trading seasons: the junk season and the Bugis season. Junks from China and Siam depended upon the northeast monsoon to bring them to Singapore, and on the southwest monsoon which sets in during April to take them home again. The first Chinese junks arrived in late December, but most came in January or February. This was a time of great bustle and excitement in Singapore, and when the first junk of the season was sighted, swarms of boats went out to escort her in. The town was thronged with Chinese labourers coming in from the gambier plantations of the interior to gather news from home, to greet new arrivals and to entrust their savings for their relatives in China. Employers went out to hire new immigrants and town shopkeepers to inspect the wares laid out on the decks: silks and nankeens for the European transshipment trade, food, medicines and other supplies in

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., pp. 306, 308.

<sup>204</sup> Moor, *Notices*, pp. 101-2.

demand among the Chinese communities of southeast Asia. Very few Europeans tried bargaining with the junk masters direct, and the trade was in the hands of the Chinese.

The junks usually left Singapore at the beginning of the south-west monsoon, taking opium and Straits produce, returning immigrants, and remittances for families in China. Sometimes these would be carried by friends or by professionals known as *seu pè kè*, who specialized in this occupation, either carrying the money on commission or using it to buy goods and trade on their own account. It appeared to be an honest trade and no complaints were heard of embezzlement or trickery among these carriers.<sup>205</sup> The behaviour of the Chinese dealers in Singapore was more open to question, and there were frequent allegations that they cheated the junk masters and kept them befuddled with liberal supplies of opium.<sup>206</sup> Most of the junks departed in April and May, a few lagged behind to try to pick up opium and supplies more cheaply, but it was dangerous to delay departure too long and stragglers who set off from Singapore in July were often wrecked.

The Bugis coming from ports mainly south of the Equator, relied upon the southeast monsoon to bring them to Singapore. Bugis and Malay traders from west Borneo often arrived about July, but the main Bugis fleet, which picked up produce from the islands on the way, did not usually reach Singapore until September or October. Their strange-looking prahus anchored along the shore at Kampong Glam and were used as floating shops. By the mid-1830s about 200 Bugis prahus came to Singapore every season, each manned by about thirty men. The European merchants of Singapore looked wistfully at this trade but left direct commercial dealings with the Bugis to Chinese middlemen. The Bugis had a reputation for violence, and although they were forbidden to carry arms on land, from time to time there were affrays with the Chinese dealers.<sup>207</sup> With the onset of the northwest monsoon in the southern tropics in November, the Bugis left Singapore for home.

The arrival of the first steamships in 1845 had a strong

<sup>205</sup> Earl, *Eastern Seas*, pp. 365-7.

<sup>206</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 110-11.

<sup>207</sup> Davidson, *Trade and Travel*, pp. 56-7.

impact on the political and social attitudes of the European community but did not immediately produce a parallel commercial revolution. Most cargoes continued to be carried in sailing ships for another thirty years. Nevertheless, the patterns of trade were changing in other ways. Up to 1842 most trade between Singapore and the archipelago was carried in Bugis or Malay ships, but from that year the tonnage of square-rigged vessels exceeded native craft.<sup>208</sup> Bugis traders continued to come in large numbers, but the future lay with the square-rigged vessels, which by 1854 were carrying more than three-quarters of Singapore's trade.<sup>209</sup>

As a port almost entirely dependent on entrepôt trade, Singapore was in a delicate position, subject to the slightest external economic change. The feeling of vulnerability in this artificial prosperity lasted throughout the period of Indian rule. By 1830 Singapore was already a centre for trade from China, Siam, Riau, Borneo, Java, Celebes and Sumatra, and had weathered its first economic crisis during the world slump of 1825-6. Yet her merchants were constantly haunted by the fear that prosperity might wither as quickly as it had grown, either by the creation of rival free ports in the region or by the undermining of its free port status by the government of India. Politically the Straits Settlements had no protector. When the East India Company lost its monopoly of the China trade in 1833, the settlements ceased to have any value for Calcutta except as a dumping ground for convicts, while manufacturing and trading interests in Britain were concerned to expand their own trade in the Far East and supported the cause of the Straits Settlements only when it coincided with their own interests.

The growth of Singapore in the ten years following the abolition of the Company's China trade monopoly was impressive in volume of trade, in revenue and in population. During the administrative year 1842-3 870 square-rigged vessels and 2,940 Asian craft came to the port.<sup>210</sup> In the year 1843-4 the revenue farms in Singapore raised \$15,050 a month, compared

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-3.

<sup>209</sup> *SFP*, 6 January 1854.

<sup>210</sup> *ST*, 19 August 1854.

with only \$620 a month in 1820.<sup>211</sup> Despite this progress, the outlook for the future seemed far from bright. 'I think the trade of Singapore has reached its maximum; and that the town has attained to its highest point of importance and prosperity', the merchant G. F. Davidson wrote in 1846.<sup>212</sup> The majority of his contemporaries agreed with this gloomy prediction.<sup>213</sup> The boom which the first opium war brought to Singapore was short-lived, and the founding of Hong Kong and opening of the five China treaty ports threatened to take away Singapore's China trade. New British free ports opened at Kuching in 1841 and Labuan in 1846 seemed destined to capture much of its Borneo trade. The opening of Dutch free ports in the eastern archipelago and the extension of Dutch control to the islands east of Java threatened Singapore's vital archipelago trade. In 1846 large stocks of goods were piling up unsold in Singapore, the Chinese junk trade had fallen off, and it was the worst Bugis trading season for years.<sup>214</sup> Many Singapore merchants feared the port faced economic depression and probable extinction.

In the long term none of these threats damaged Singapore's trade, which increased rapidly in the early 1850s. In the financial year 1849-50 the official figures showed Singapore's trade at a little under \$24,000,000.<sup>215</sup> In 1851-2 it stood at nearly \$28,000,000,<sup>216</sup> and in 1855 it reached \$38,772,094, equivalent to more than £9,000,000.<sup>217</sup> From 1855 Singapore enjoyed several boom years. The fears of the mid-1840s were forgotten and her merchants were riding on a wave of optimism and confidence. But she was hit by the general European trade slump of 1858. There were many bankruptcies and the harbour was full of idle shipping most of the year.<sup>218</sup> Penang suffered too and in one week alone seven Chinese firms suspended payment.<sup>219</sup>

The American Civil War, the rebellion in China and the

<sup>211</sup> C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, 1902, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), i, 63, 390.

<sup>212</sup> Davidson, *Trade and Travel*, p. 69.

<sup>213</sup> *SFP*, 1 January, 18 June 1846.

<sup>214</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1851.

<sup>215</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1856.

<sup>216</sup> *SFP*, 2 September 1858, 5 January 1859.

<sup>217</sup> *ST*, 18 November 1846.

<sup>218</sup> *SFP*, 7 January 1853.

<sup>219</sup> *SFP*, 5 January 1859.



extension of Dutch control over the Macassar area, which deflected some of the Bugis trade, hurt Singapore's trade in the early 1860s.<sup>220</sup> But her greatest fear was the effect of the opening of new ports in China to western trade after the end of the second Anglo-Chinese war. Cavenagh reported gloomily in 1862, 'Singapore has ceased to be the great port of transshipment, either for native produce or European goods; vessels from England now pass through without breaking bulk, whilst the native trade is naturally attracted to the nearest marts.'<sup>221</sup> These fears also proved unfounded. Even in 1864, which was a year of severe commercial crisis, when several large firms and many small ones went bankrupt and trade was brought to a standstill for a time, the *Free Press* was surprised when it came to draw up its 'Annual retrospect' to find how substantial the trading statistics were.<sup>222</sup>

By that time port facilities in Singapore were rapidly improving. The extension to the Straits of the Indian Merchant Shipping Act of 1859 proved a great boon to sailors and ship masters, and shipping offices were set up in the Straits. New Harbour was bustling with activity and in 1864 the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company was formed and started ship repairing the following year. After several abortive attempts to set up banks, reliable banking services were available in the Straits ports by the 1860s. The Oriental Bank was established in Singapore in 1846, the Mercantile Bank in 1855 and the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China in 1859. In 1861 the Chartered Bank was given authority to open branches in Penang and Malacca.

When the Straits Settlements were handed over to the colonial office in 1867, Singapore had sixty European companies, compared with only fourteen in 1827, and in the year 1868-9 her trade stood at \$58,944,141, more than four times the figure of 1823-4.<sup>223</sup> She stood on the threshold of unprecedented commercial expansion. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Malacca Straits commanded by Singapore

<sup>220</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 41-2; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*; SFP, 5 April, 15 November 1860.

<sup>221</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*.

<sup>222</sup> SFP, 12 January 1865.

<sup>223</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JMBRAS*, xxxiii, no. 4 (1960), 242-3.

supplanted the Sunda Straits as the major waterway to the East. The liberalization of Dutch policy in the 1860s made Singapore a great centre for Indonesian trade, and the accession of King Chulalongkorn in 1868 stimulated her trade with Siam. The extension of British control to the Malay states from 1874 opened up new and secure markets for which Singapore was the natural outlet. These changes brought to an end the fears and uncertainties of the precarious and vulnerable position which Singapore held during her first half century and throughout the Indian regime, and they guaranteed her permanent supremacy as a port in southeast Asia and as the gateway to the Far East.

### REVENUE, TAXATION AND CURRENCY

The upsurge of commercial prosperity in the Straits Settlements was not directly reflected in any comparable increase in government revenue. Failing to raise a satisfactory revenue from land and agriculture, precluded from taxing trade because of the free commercial policy dictated from Britain, unable to levy any direct taxation, the Straits authorities could benefit only indirectly from the increase in prosperity and expansion of population through excise revenue, licences and property taxes. Until the last few years of the Indian regime these were insufficient to cover administration costs. The Straits Settlements were run at a loss and the deficit had to be met from the general revenues of India. Singapore's revenue was sufficient to cover her local expenses and her share of the general administration, but for most of the period of Indian rule she could not meet the cost of defence and convict charges. Neither Penang nor Malacca had enough revenue to cover even their local expenditure.

The principle of free trade in the Straits Settlements was laid down by the Board of Control in 1826 and maintained throughout the Indian regime, despite periodic attempts by officials in Singapore and India to modify it. Penang and Malacca were not originally free ports but Singapore was unique in being from its foundation a port free of all duties. Raffles laid down fees for services and was initially prepared to contemplate

levying import dues once trade became firmly established and worth taxing. In November 1822, however, he issued a proclamation that, except for opium, spirits and pork, which were sources of revenue, no other impositions were to be put on any other articles of trade, and when he left Singapore for the last time in June 1823 he assured the Singapore merchants, 'No sinister nor sordid view, no considerations either of political importance or pecuniary advantage should interfere with the broad and liberal principles on which the British interests have been established . . . that Singapore will long and always remain a free port and no taxes on trade or industry will be established to check its future rise and prosperity I can have no doubt.'<sup>224</sup>

To forgo trade profits, it was necessary to keep down administrative costs. Raffles instructed the new Resident, John Crawfurd, to practise economy, 'avoiding unnecessary expense rather than seeking revenue to cover it'.<sup>225</sup> Crawfurd found it easy to follow these orders, and despite the personal antipathy between the two men and their difference over many aspects of policy, Crawfurd was even more ardent in promoting free trade and restraining government expenditure than Raffles himself. He was convinced that the key to economic success lay in British leadership combined with the energy of Chinese settlers, untrammelled by official economic shackles. By rigorously pruning administrative expenses he was able to abolish anchorage and other port fees.<sup>226</sup> The names of Crawfurd and Raffles came to be identified with free trade, which became almost a sacred tenet to the merchants of Singapore.

When the settlements were united in 1826, Calcutta at first proposed to levy a duty on goods warehoused in transit in all three stations in order to guarantee a sufficient revenue, but the Board of Control rejected this suggestion and laid down the principle that the Straits Settlements ports should be free of all import and export taxes. A suggestion made by Fullerton two years later to levy export duties of two and a half or three per

<sup>224</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, vii (1853), 328.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>226</sup> J. Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (London, 1828, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), ii, 376.

cent on goods carried in British ships, with additional charges on foreign shipping, was also rejected as running counter to the Board's ruling.

The drastic economies made in 1830 failed to achieve solvency. In 1837 revenue amounted to Rs. 523,226 against an expenditure of Rs. 1,293,471.<sup>227</sup> A petition from the Singapore merchants to Calcutta in 1835 to send an expedition to suppress piracy revived the government of India's concern with the nagging problem of how to raise revenue in the Settlements to pay for special measures. Bonham suggested the merchants should bear part of the cost, since although the Board of Control had laid a general prohibition upon import and export taxes, it seemed reasonable to expect merchants to pay fees for services such as harbour facilities, lighthouses and pilotage. Calcutta agreed the Straits merchants should pay tonnage dues to help finance protection against pirates, and in 1836 the Straits government prepared a bill providing for various port dues and transshipment charges, putting higher dues on non-British shipping but exempting Asian vessels.<sup>228</sup>

In protest the European merchants of Singapore drew up petitions to Calcutta and the British parliament, arguing that conditions in the Straits were abnormal and that Singapore in particular was an artificial creation which could wither away as quickly as it had flowered, should any unwise impediments be placed on her trade. She was blessed with few natural advantages, apart from her geographical position and her liberal trade policy, and her prosperity depended predominantly upon a fickle entrepôt trade, which was vulnerable to world economic fluctuations. The immediate success which Singapore enjoyed in her infancy deepened the foreboding that rival free ports might spring up just as rapidly to challenge her position. Acutely conscious of their precarious state, the Singapore merchants regarded the preservation of the free port status of the Straits as a precious trust to be jealously guarded. They argued that most of the traders who came to the port were ignorant and illiterate men who could not distinguish a port

<sup>227</sup> SSR, S 8, Item 19.

<sup>228</sup> Governor to Bengal, 25 May 1835, 7 March 1836, SSR, R 3; Bengal to Governor, 5 August 1835, SSR, S 3.

due from an export or import duty, and who could easily be driven away by ill-understood formalities or the trickery of rogues.

The Singapore merchants' battle was already won before their petition reached London, because the first rumours of Calcutta's intentions to impose port dues in Singapore brought determined resistance from the East India and China Association in London, which represented the interests of most of the agency houses connected with the East Indies trade. The association roused the board of trade to question Calcutta's policy, as a result of which the Board of Control and the Directors killed the scheme and reaffirmed the principle that the Straits Settlements should remain free ports.<sup>229</sup> In this way the decision to keep the Straits ports free of customs duties was extended to making all commercial services free, and for most of the period of Indian rule the Straits were exempt not only from import and export duties, but also from tonnage and port dues, wharfage and anchorage duties, port clearance fees and stamp duties. This aggravated the problem of finance which lay at the centre of the Company's difficulties in administering the eastern settlements and threw the burden on the general revenue, which was subsidized from Calcutta. Until the problem was finally settled shortly before the transfer to colonial rule, it produced a state of perennial friction between the government and the European merchants: the merchants driven by a feeling of basic insecurity into an obstinate insistence on their privileges which sometimes amounted to panicky hysteria, and the government being forced into a cautious parsimony approaching neglect because it lacked the means to pay for reforms and improvements.

During the 1850s the merchants and the government of India came into further conflict over improvements in shipping facilities, which the merchants wanted to see extended to the Straits but which Calcutta could not finance.

Since the 1820s there had been frequent demands for lighthouses to be erected in the treacherous waters round Singapore

<sup>229</sup> *SFP*, 2 February 1837 published in full the correspondence between the Board of Control, East India and China Association, and Board of Trade, August–November 1836.

which concealed many rocks and shoals. In 1842 the treasurers of a subscription raised in Canton in memory of James Horsburgh offered the money to the Straits government to erect a lighthouse on the notorious Pedra Branca reef thirty-two miles east of Singapore.<sup>230</sup> Governor Butterworth took up the scheme with enthusiasm, the lighthouse was designed by J. T. Thomson, the Straits government surveyor, and the foundation stone was laid on the queen's birthday in 1850. Butterworth attended the ceremony, together with the commander-in-chief of the navy, foreign consuls, senior officials and office bearers of the Singapore Masonic lodge, led by their Worshipful Master M. F. Davidson,<sup>231</sup> who laid the foundations with full masonic ritual.<sup>232</sup>

The technical difficulties of landing supplies and erecting the lighthouse were great, pirates were a constant danger, storms drove the workmen to seek shelter on the mainland in the early weeks of working, and the project had to be abandoned entirely during the monsoon season. The workmen suffered from exposure, sunburn and malaria. But all these problems faded into insignificance beside the labour troubles encountered.

At first the labour was supplied by a Hakka contractor who sent what Thomson described as the 'dregs of the population', all of them opium addicts. The construction site was like a Tower of Babel, for the workmen had no lingua franca, and spoke twelve languages between them. They included Malays, Chinese, Papuans, Rawas from the interior of Sumatra, and Indian convicts. The Chinese labourers were restive, frequently going on strike, and Thomson had to keep them in virtual captivity to avoid letting news of the working conditions get back to Singapore and deter the Chinese masons he needed for the building stage of his operations. Malays were employed to guard the ships and repel Chinese labourers who tried to

<sup>230</sup> *SFP*, 28 April 1842. JAMES HORSBURGH (1760-1836). Hydrographer for East India Company, 1810; published *Directions for Sailing to and from the East Indies*, 1801-11.

<sup>231</sup> MICHIE FORBES DAVIDSON. Partner in Shaw, Whitehead & Co. until 1848; partner in A. L. Johnston & Co., 1848-63; partner in Boustead & Co., 1863; trustee Singapore Institution, 1844; committee member for forming Tanjong Pagar Dock Company, 1863.

<sup>232</sup> J. T. Thomson, 'Account of the Horsburgh Lighthouse', *JIA*, vi (1852), 427.

board ships returning to Singapore, and Thomson dared not keep boats stocked with extra supplies for fear the labourers would escape in them. The Chinese refused to bathe in the sea and insisted on washing in the limited and precious supplies of fresh water. In place of the promised skilled masons, the contractor sent out ignorant labourers, and, using the prestige of his government contract, he extracted large quantities of goods on credit from Singapore merchants and absconded to China.<sup>233</sup> After that Thomson recruited his labour direct. He found a better class of skilled artisan, the new recruits were more biddable, the water problem was solved by allowing the Chinese to bathe in the fresh water before it was mixed with the mortar, and the rock lost its bad reputation as a working site.

When the lighthouse eventually came into operation in September 1851, the occasion was celebrated with great festivity. Butterworth took fifty guests on a picnic to admire Thomson's creation, cemented literally in the sweat of his labourers, and to watch the light shine out for the first time. After dinner they 'cheered the meteor-like brilliancy which will probably serve to guide the midnight path of the mariner for a thousand years to come. A breathless silence ensued as everyone seemed absorbed in watching the flashes . . . of this first Pharos of the eastern seas . . . great lion of the Straits.'<sup>234</sup>

The enthusiasm evaporated quickly when the bill came to be paid. The East India Company had agreed to advance the extra money needed to complete the lighthouse on condition that this sum, together with the amount needed to man the lighthouse, should be recovered by levying small tonnage dues on shipping leaving Indian or Straits ports to proceed east. The Singapore merchants agreed to this with great reluctance, but the act passed by Calcutta in January 1852 provided for higher dues than originally estimated and confined collection to Singapore.<sup>235</sup> In this way the act converted a charge intended for all shipping engaged in the China trade into a Singapore harbour due. All ships calling at Singapore would have to pay the charge whether they were proceeding eastward past the

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 376-465.

<sup>234</sup> *SFP*, 3 October 1851.

<sup>235</sup> Act VI of 1852; *SFP*, 13 February 1852.

lighthouse or not, while China-bound ships could avoid paying dues altogether by not touching in at Singapore. In response to fierce opposition from the Singapore merchants, the government of India modified the act in 1853, exempting Asian shipping and providing for the collection of dues at all ports of departure in India as well as the Straits and from all vessels which were to pass Horsburgh Light.<sup>236</sup>

During the 1850s the government of India brought in many measures to improve ports and shipping facilities in its territories, to establish shipping offices and curb abuses in passenger traffic, to provide lights and pilots, to register seamen, and prevent desertion. Most of these improvements were welcomed in Singapore, particularly the extension to the Straits of the Indian Ports Act of 1855<sup>237</sup> and the construction of Raffles Lighthouse, which was opened in 1855.<sup>238</sup> The merchants complained loudly whenever Calcutta hesitated on financial grounds to extend the benefits of new legislation to the eastern settlements, but the government of India was reluctant to incur extra expense which the general revenue could not meet. To solve the problem Blundell suggested in 1856 that a tax of half an anna a ton be imposed on square-rigged vessels, with a two rupees clearance fee, and a one rupee clearance fee for other Asian craft. The government of India itself doubted the legality of these proposed charges, and after the Singapore merchants put up spirited resistance, the Directors stepped in to forbid any burden to be put on the commerce of the Straits Settlements.<sup>239</sup>

The introduction of a much welcomed act in 1858 providing for the regulation of Asian passenger ships, and the setting up of a shipping office in Singapore in 1859, led to such an increase of expenditure that in 1860 Cavenagh suggested levying a small tonnage due. Calcutta reluctantly turned down the proposal,<sup>240</sup> but Sir Charles Wood, the secretary of state for India, interpreted an offer made in 1860 by the Singapore chamber of

<sup>236</sup> SSR, S 20, Items 6, 47.

<sup>237</sup> Act XXII of 1855.

<sup>238</sup> *SFP*, 3, 10 January 1856.

<sup>239</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 185; Directors to India, 25 March 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 103; Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. iii (1857), 336.

<sup>240</sup> SSR, S 28, Items 25, 180.



commerce to pay pilot fees in order to finance a harbour master's establishment, as an indication that the chamber relinquished its objection on principle to port charges. Accordingly in 1862 he rescinded the Directors' instructions of 1826 and authorized the government of India to draft an act to levy port dues in the Straits.<sup>241</sup> The Singapore chamber of commerce met in full force to protest unanimously that they had never agreed to commercial taxation, and their memorial, backed by Cavenagh, induced the government of India to abandon the scheme.<sup>242</sup>

While no other measures to impose taxation on trade were proposed during the final years of Indian rule, the Straits merchants remained uneasy and feared that the Dutch, then embarking on a more liberal commercial policy, were 'ready at any moment to engulf all that may be driven from [Singapore] by restrictive legislation'.<sup>243</sup> The merchants agreed with Cameron that 'the prosperity and progress of no country ever lay so completely at the mercy of its rulers. It is possible by one year of port imposts utterly to ruin the settlements.'<sup>244</sup> Freedom from commercial taxation was jealously guarded, and the *Overland Free Press* printed a proud heading to each issue:

In this port there are no duties on imports and exports and the vessels of every nation are free of all charges, except light dues levied on certain vessels under Act XIII of 1854, the highest of which is one anna (less than three cents) per ton.

The government had to rely upon the excise as its major source of income. Raising and collecting such revenue was difficult when the body of officials was small, the ruling class a foreign minority and the population largely transitory and mixed. The Straits authorities followed the practice of tax farming adopted by local rulers and copied by the Dutch and by the East India Company in Bencoolen whereby the collection of taxes was auctioned to private bidders. This method provided the government with a comparatively secure and

<sup>241</sup> SSR, U 41, p. 280; SSR, S 30, Items 104, 270.

<sup>242</sup> SSR, W 45, Item 24; SSR, V 37, p. 245; SSR, R 44, pp. 78-85.

<sup>243</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), p. 176.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

guaranteed source of income without any cost of administration and it left the collection of revenue in Asian hands.

The farming out of the right to make and sell spirits (or arrack), first introduced into Penang in 1789, and the opium farm, established two years later, provided the bulk of the Straits Settlements' revenue throughout the nineteenth century. A gambling farm was set up in Penang in 1792 but abolished in 1810. A gaming and cock-fighting farm was permitted in Singapore until Raffles banned it in 1823. Crawford revived the farm a few months later but it was finally abandoned in 1829. From time to time other minor taxes were imposed: on pork, toddy, sirsch, pawnbrokers' and market-stall licences.

The Indian financial year ran from April to March, and revenue farms were sold for this period. To begin with the sale was made for one year at a time, although in practice the farming rights were renewed in the hands of the same group or *kongsi*. In Penang one *kongsi* monopolized the major tax farms from 1830 throughout the whole period of Indian rule,<sup>245</sup> while in Singapore the opium and spirit farms remained in the hands of one group from 1846 until 1861, when they lost the opium farm to a rival.<sup>246</sup> The farms were disposed by private arrangement until 1856, after which they were put up for public auction for a period of two years, with the option of renewal for a third,<sup>247</sup> and public sales became the accepted practice.

Normally the system of tax farming guaranteed a certain revenue to the government with no expense or risks of collection, and there were many advantages both to the government and tax farmers in leaving the farms in the hands of the same group of experienced men. On the other hand the virtual monopoly enabled the tax farmers to keep the price paid for the farms down and to deprive the government of its full share of profit from the increase in population and prosperity, as in Malacca in 1866 when the discovery of a conspiracy to keep the bidding low induced the Governor to readvertise the farms and sell them in Singapore.<sup>248</sup> The revenue farmers were reputed to make enormous profits in normal years. A fair in-

<sup>245</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 430; SSR, DD 33, Item 36.

<sup>246</sup> SSR, W 45, Items 127, 135.

<sup>247</sup> SSR, U 32, p. 153.

<sup>248</sup> SSR, R 46, pp. 128-30.

dication of this was the bid of \$32,100 put in by a successful rival for the Singapore opium farm in 1861, in place of the \$20,754 paid by his predecessor.<sup>249</sup>

The tax farmers were generally forced to honour their bid and bear any loss that unforeseen circumstances might bring. The arrangement worked smoothly in the early 1850s when expanding population and wealth were reflected in an annual rise in the price offered for the tax farms and undoubtedly an even greater increase in the farmers' profits. But the spectacular rise in the price of Indian opium as a result of the Indian Mutiny dealt a severe blow to the revenue farmers. The price of Benares opium rose from \$450 to \$750 a chest between April and October 1857,<sup>250</sup> and to \$1,150 a chest in 1861.<sup>251</sup> Opium smoking became so expensive that many smokers had to cut down their consumption or give up the habit altogether. In October 1857 the Penang opium farmers asked either for a drastic reduction of their rent or for the government to take the farm back, but Blundell refused any concessions, and in similar circumstances a few years later Cavenagh was equally firm.<sup>252</sup>

Apart from the fluctuation in the price of their raw materials, the main hazard of the revenue farmers was smuggling. This was difficult to check while the Straits Settlements were free ports without restrictions or controls, although it was customary for excise farmers to pay rewards to the police force for help in checking infringements of the monopoly.<sup>253</sup> Attempts by rival Chinese factions holding the Penang spirit and opium farms to break the other's monopoly in 1825 and 1826 led to extensive smuggling rackets and frequently to the murder of informants, but a committee appointed in 1827 to investigate the abuses recommended continuing the tax farming system, with heavy penalties for smuggling.<sup>254</sup> Despite this, enterprising Chinese

<sup>249</sup> SSR, W 37, Item 27; SSR, W 45, Items 127, 135.

<sup>250</sup> SSR, DD 26, Item 230.

<sup>251</sup> Resident Councillor Singapore to Governor, 2 April 1861, SSR, X 21.

<sup>252</sup> SSR, DD 26, Items 132, 233, 236; SSR, U 34, pp. 30-1, 32-3, 45-7, 49; SSR, W 25, Item 430; SSR, DD 33, Item 29; SSR, V 36, p. 78; SSR, W 37, Item 27.

<sup>253</sup> SSR, U 41, p. 115.

<sup>254</sup> Wong Lin Ken, 'The Revenue Farms of Prince of Wales Island, 1805-30', *JSSS*, xix, no. 1 (1964), 63, 75-82.

continued to conduct a profitable trade in making arrack in Kedah and smuggling it into Penang in the middle of the century.<sup>255</sup>

With the opening up of Johore in the 1840s, smuggling became so bad in Singapore that the government insisted the Johore and Singapore rights be sold to the same farmers. This developed into a formal agreement in 1856 to sell the farms jointly by public auction, initially for a three-year period.<sup>256</sup> When the joint farm was discontinued in 1861, the Singapore opium farmer claimed his counterpart in Johore was smuggling opium into Singapore. He persuaded the authorities to introduce heavy penalties for infringing the monopoly and agreed to pay \$300 a month to cover the cost of posting extra policemen along the northern coast of the island.<sup>257</sup> This was effective and produced a marked drop in excise cases in the next twelve months,<sup>258</sup> but the extra force was withdrawn in 1862 because the opium farmer could not afford to pay the subsidy, and in 1863 his agents claimed that he had lost \$120,000 on the opium farm and was only saved from bankruptcy by wealthy friends.<sup>259</sup>

With the exception of Indian merchants who normally held the farm for toddy, a drink consumed mainly by Indians, the Chinese merchants had a monopoly of the revenue farms. No Europeans ever competed for them. The tax farmers employed Malay and Indian collectors to work among the non-Chinese, and no complaints of racial difficulties over collection of the revenue came to the ears of the Straits government. Nor did the Asian inhabitants, who bore the brunt of taxation, ever protest. It was only government officials and private European residents who from time to time questioned the morality of the taxation system. Some of the Governors had no compunction. 'The vicious propensities of mankind are the fittest subjects of taxation', declared Fullerton in 1824,<sup>260</sup> and he considered mistakenly that as the population became more settled vice

<sup>255</sup> SSR, DD 33, Item 36.

<sup>256</sup> SSR, U 32, p. 153.

<sup>257</sup> Correspondence between Resident Councillor Singapore, Governor and Opium Farmer, May 1861, SSR, X 21; SSR, U 42, pp. 269, 289.

<sup>258</sup> SSR, W 42, Item 203.

<sup>259</sup> SSR, W 43, Item 6; SSR, W 45, Items 127, 135; SSR, W 49, Item 20.

<sup>260</sup> SSR, H 13, 24 December 1824.

would decline and the yields on opium and spirit taxes would fall. Others were less certain and queried whether licensed taxing of vices gave official encouragement to the corruption of society, and whether it was just to tax the necessities of one community, as in the case of pork or sircih.

Some of the ruling class worried about the moral implications of farming out taxes solely on the basis of the highest bid. In 1835 Sir Benjamin Malkin objected to the opportunities this afforded for extortion and abuse and urged the abolition of the revenue farms in favour of direct taxation. This presented too many difficulties. Most officials and merchants agreed that tax farming was the only practicable answer and the opium and spirit farms continued to be sold up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

There was no argument about licensing markets, pawnbrokers or gunpowder manufacturers, and in 1863 the right to license pawnbrokers, hitherto held by the government, was farmed out on the recommendation of Singapore's commissioner of police.<sup>261</sup> The pork tax was more controversial, because pork was one of the basic foods of the Chinese, and Crawford abolished the pork tax in Singapore in 1823, on the grounds that it was legitimate to tax pleasures, vices and extravagance but not essential foodstuffs.<sup>262</sup> The Singapore pork tax was revived after Crawford's departure but finally abolished by the Bengal government in 1838. From time to time Europeans and some leading Chinese merchants of Singapore pressed for revival of the tax to provide funds for charitable purposes, but the Bengal authorities clung to their principle that it was wrong to impose a tax which fell only on one section of the community.<sup>263</sup>

No-one questioned the morality of licensing the preparation and sale of arrack, the spirits consumed by the Asian population, although there were frequent complaints about the 'liquid poison' sold in Singapore taverns, and the spirit farmers were fined on several occasions for selling inferior and dangerous

<sup>261</sup> SSR, W 45, Item 44.

<sup>262</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, viii (1854), 338.

<sup>263</sup> Butterworth to Bengal, 16 March 1846, SSR, R 13; Bengal to Butterworth, 18 December 1846, SSR, S 10; *SFP*, 19 April 1849.

mixtures.<sup>264</sup> Despite this, the spirit farm continued to be sold to the same group. There was more disagreement about the ethics of opium farming. In 1809 the Directors refused an appeal by the Penang grand jury to abolish the farm, and the opium farm was introduced in Singapore in 1819. Raffles and Crawford both considered smoking opium and drinking alcohol to be bad habits which could legitimately be kept in check by taxation,<sup>265</sup> and despite attempts by individual doctors and officials to get licensing of opium abolished, the prevalent opinion was that it was wrong for the government to ban a vice which did not interfere with law and order.<sup>266</sup>

The major battle centred round gambling. In 1808 and again in 1809 the Penang grand jury, backed by the Recorder, protested against the alleged immorality of the gambling farm, and the next year the Directors abolished it and declared gambling illegal.<sup>267</sup> They succeeded only in driving it underground, encouraging widespread corruption in the police force and creating such social abuse that in 1818 the Governor recommended reviving controlled gambling.<sup>268</sup> Fullerton drafted a regulation to revive the gambling farm in Penang, which he sent to England for consideration in 1825, but nothing came of it, although Crawford maintained that licensed gambling was the answer to the settlement's chronic financial sickness and the Company had been 'too fastidious' in abolishing it.<sup>269</sup>

In Singapore the first Resident, William Farquhar, set up a gaming farm, but Raffles, who regarded gambling and cock fighting as vices to be rooted out, declared gambling illegal in 1823.<sup>270</sup> To Raffles's horror, Crawford restored the gambling farm three months later, and it quickly became the most lucrative of all the Singapore revenue farms. In 1826, when the total population of Singapore was only about 12,000, the

<sup>264</sup> *SFP*, 7 June 1860.

<sup>265</sup> Crawford, *Embassy*, ii, 398.

<sup>266</sup> Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions*, pp. 214-17.

<sup>267</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *JSSS*, xix, no. 1 (1964), 88.

<sup>268</sup> T. Braddell, 'Gambling and Opium Smoking in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, n.s. i (1857), 66-71.

<sup>269</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, viii (1854), 408-10; Crawford, *Embassy*, i, 39.

<sup>270</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, viii (1854), 329-30.

gaming farm brought in \$36,500.<sup>271</sup> But the temptation the gaming houses offered to immigrants eager to snatch at any chance of getting rich quickly led to such misery, destitution and crime that, when the court of judicature was extended to Singapore in 1826, the first grand jury demanded that gambling should be prohibited in Singapore too. In 1829 gambling was declared illegal throughout the Straits Settlements, and the gambling farm was never restored, despite many suggestions in the years that followed that it would be a palatable means of balancing the revenue.

It was easier to raise excise revenue in Singapore than in the other Straits Settlements, because of the large proportion of Chinese among the population. Of all the communities, the Chinese spent most freely on luxuries such as opium and arrack, whereas Indians had a reputation for parsimony and saving all they could to return home. This was a serious problem in Penang where many of the most prosperous inhabitants were Indian, and in 1829 Fullerton produced a scheme which included taxing the capital exported by Chinese and Indian immigrants, but it was never put into effect. This question did not worry the Singapore authorities, who resisted any proposal to impose a capital levy which might deter immigration.

Penang's union with Singapore immediately increased her financial problems since her customs dues were abolished, and the difficulty was only partly solved by the retrenchment carried out in 1830. Penang's revenue rose in the next twenty years, but in the financial year 1849-50 receipts stood only at Rs. 185,228, against a local expenditure of Rs. 260,187. Defence and convict charges brought the overall deficit to Rs. 276,938.<sup>272</sup> Although the position improved from the mid-1850s as her population grew and the excise farms brought in more revenue, Penang could still barely cover half the total cost of her administration.

Malacca's financial position was as difficult. Her revenue in 1852-3 amounted to Rs. 120,755 and her overall deficit, when defence and convict charges were included, was Rs. 66,544.<sup>273</sup>

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., pp. 336-7, 345-7; Crawford, *Embassy*, ii, 399.

<sup>272</sup> SFP, 3 January 1851.

<sup>273</sup> SFP, 13 January 1854.

From the late 1840s Malacca enjoyed a considerable revenue from tin-mining royalties, but after 1857 this income fell and by 1862 nearly all Malacca's tin mines were closed down. The price obtained for the opium and spirits farms slumped with the departure of the mining population,<sup>274</sup> and the 1861 land act failed to compensate by boosting land revenue.

Singapore's revenue expanded in the middle years of the century with the growth of population and commerce. In 1849-50 her revenue was Rs. 386,119 against local expenditure of Rs. 258,333, but military and convict charges of Rs. 259,114 left an overall deficit of Rs. 131,328.<sup>275</sup> In 1852-3 her revenue rose to Rs. 457,207, which for the first time was enough to cover convict and military charges as well as local expenses, leaving an overall surplus of nearly Rs. 15,000.<sup>276</sup> This achievement was only temporary. While the excise farms continued to expand, producing in 1854-5 an increase of Rs. 30,000 over the previous year and a further Rs. 97,000 in 1855-6, higher costs of military defence swallowed this up and left Singapore with a deficit.

The financial crisis which followed the Indian Mutiny in 1857 led to the introduction of new taxes in India, which the merchants in the Straits regarded with foreboding. The main new source of revenue was an income tax, which was introduced with much opposition in India, and in 1860 public meetings were held in Singapore and Penang to petition the Indian legislative council and the British parliament against the extension of income tax to the Straits. In Singapore the opposition came mainly from European merchants, but many Chinese and Indians took part in the Penang meeting, and the Chinese complained bitterly that they already paid a large part of the revenue through the opium and arrack taxes. If more revenue were needed, the European and Asian merchants urged it should be raised by resurrecting the gambling farms. While Cavenagh refused to support the petitions, objecting to the way in which the Straits merchants sought to avoid taxation, he protested to India that the 'complicated and inquisitorial

<sup>274</sup> *Annual Reports on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2 and 1862-1863.*

<sup>275</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1851.

<sup>276</sup> *SFP*, 6 January 1854.



nature' of the new tax would be cumbersome to operate and unfair to the lower income group.<sup>277</sup>

Cavenagh put forward an alternative scheme for dividing the community into fifty-two classes according to income and applying a graded capitation tax, each individual declaring to which group he belonged. He thought this would produce accurate returns, since the merchants—and particularly the Asian ones—were so conscious of their status that they would tend if anything to gain face by claiming membership of a higher class and paying a higher rate of tax than their income warranted.<sup>278</sup> There was no opportunity to test this novel theory, because the government of India decided not to extend income tax to the Straits after all.<sup>279</sup> Calcutta also determined not to apply to the Settlements a law passed in 1861 imposing a tax on 'arts, trades and dealings', to which Cavenagh had objected, arguing that it would be expensive to administer and unfair to the Indians and Chinese who already bore the major burden of taxation, since it exempted officials and a large part of the European population.<sup>280</sup>

There was a great outcry from the European merchants against Calcutta's decision to impose stamp duties in the Straits. A first move to introduce stamp dues in 1851 roused such intense opposition in Singapore that the government of India withdrew the measure,<sup>281</sup> but a new Indian stamp act was extended to the Straits in 1863. Despite the initial objections, the merchants soon came grudgingly to accept the tax.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>277</sup> SSR, W 35, Item 53; SSR, V 30, p. 114; SSR, R 37, pp. 191-6, 199-201, 214-15, 252-5; PG, 7 July, 4, 11 August in SFP, 19 July, 16, 23 August 1860; SFP, 19, 26 July, 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 August 1860, 3 January 1861; text of petition in SFP, 2 August 1860.

<sup>278</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 24-32; SSR, R 40, pp. 166-7; O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), pp. 286-7.

<sup>279</sup> SSR, S 28, Items 164, 198; SSR, R 38, pp. 135-6, 271-2, 315-16; SSR, R 39, pp. 24-32; Secretary of State to India, 16 January 1861, 30 April 1862, CO 273/5; SSR, R 40, pp. 12-16, 17-18, 166-7; SFP, 8 September, 6 October, 1 December 1859, 12 January, 8 March, 5, 19, 26 July, 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 August, 20 September, 1, 8 November, 13 December 1860, 3, 17, January 1861, 10 April 1862; ST, 26 April 1862; SSR, S 32, p. 235.

<sup>280</sup> SSR, R 40, pp. 12-16, 17-18.

<sup>281</sup> ST, 23 September 1851; SSR, S 20, Item 4.

<sup>282</sup> SSR, V 30, p. 214; SSR, W 42, Items 185, 194; SSR, V 35, pp. 258, 291-295; SSR, W 43, Items 24, 58, 97; SSR, V 36, pp. 17-25, 144, 157, 299, 312, 365; SSR, U 44, pp. 197, 246, 279; SSR, W 44, Items 278, 287; SSR, U 45, p. 229;

It proved no deterrent to small-scale traders who did not use documents requiring stamps, while for the first time it provided enough revenue to eliminate the deficit which had hitherto plagued the Straits Settlements. In the financial year 1864-5 Singapore had a healthy surplus of Rs. 138,787,<sup>283</sup> and by the end of Indian rule the Straits revenue was increasing more rapidly than expenditure.

Apart from stamp dues, taxation continued till the end of the Indian regime to fall mainly upon the luxuries and pleasures of the Asian community. The excise farms still brought in two-thirds of the revenue in the Straits, and as Lord Stanley, secretary of state for India, described the situation in 1859, the revenue was 'derived more from the vices than from the industry of the people'.<sup>284</sup>

One of the major commercial difficulties throughout the Indian regime was the lack of a sound currency. From the earliest days of European trading in southeast Asia, the Spanish silver dollar was the coin in general use, but when the Straits Settlements were united in 1826, the government of India ordered that the rupee should be the currency of account for official purposes. It remained so until 1867 but in practice rupees were rarely seen except in official paper transactions. The merchants kept their accounts in Spanish dollars, which were the coins in actual use, together with small change in the form of various copper coins, some Indian and some of Dutch origin, and copper tokens manufactured in England and imported on a commercial basis by Singapore merchants. Private merchants appear to have begun importing copper tokens in 1828, and at least one of them, C. R. Read, had his own special sign stamped on the tokens which he issued.<sup>285</sup>

SSR, U 46, p. 27; SSR, W 46, Items 252, 267, 294; SSR, V 37, pp. 181-3; SSR, W 47, Item 96; SSR, S 30, Items 78, 91, 121, 159, 167, 186, 209, 244; Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 2nd ser. ii (1863), 99-100; *ST*, 24 May, 5, 12, 26 July, 23 August, 4 October 1862; *SFP*, 29 May, 3, 10, 17, 24 July, 7 August, 8, 11 September, 2, 9, 23 October, 13, 20 November, 4, 11 December 1862; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 288; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-3*.

<sup>283</sup> *SFP*, 18 January 1866.

<sup>284</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, p. 592.

<sup>285</sup> C. H. Dakers, 'Some Copper Tokens in the Raffles Museum, Singapore', *JMBRAS*, xv, no. 2 (1937), 127-9.

The establishment of a uniform currency was one of the big problems which the Company faced in continental India, where the first English collectors received revenues in more than seventy varieties of gold and sixty of silver coins.<sup>286</sup> In 1835 the Indian legislative council passed an act to establish the Company's silver rupee and its fractional parts as the standard coin for all British India,<sup>287</sup> and in 1836 Calcutta sent instructions that the rupee should replace the Spanish dollar in the Straits Settlements. The Straits officials argued it was unwise to try to drive out the dollar, which was the only coin generally current in the peninsula and the archipelago, and the Singapore chamber of commerce appealed instead for the Company to issue its own copper coins, based on fractions of the dollar.<sup>288</sup> Calcutta abandoned its attempts to enforce the rupee but refused to supply a special copper currency. The lack of such a coinage produced hardship for the mass of the population, who only used copper coins and were hard hit by fluctuations in their value, caused by the poor quality of many of the coins and the speculations of importers of copper tokens. To overcome these difficulties, Bonham asked Calcutta in 1842 to mint some cents, half and quarter cents.<sup>289</sup> Calcutta refused but sent instead Rs. 10,000 worth of Indian copper coins, which the local Straits authorities tried to fractionize at the fixed rate of 144 quarter annas to the dollar. Understandably this confusing currency never became popular, and the Straits treasury eventually had to get rid of it in payments to sepoys and convicts.<sup>290</sup>

While the rupee remained the official currency on paper, the dollars and miscellaneous copper coins which were actually used were foreign coins of fluctuating value, over which the

<sup>286</sup> H. Dodwell, 'The Substitution of Silver for Gold in Southern India', *Indian Journal of Economics*, January 1921, quoted in J. C. Coyajee, *The Indian Currency System, 1835-1926* (Madras, 1930), p. 5.

<sup>287</sup> Act XVIII of 1835.

<sup>288</sup> SSR, R 4, 28 May, 16 June 1836, 31 January, 8 December 1837; SSR, Z 11, no. 783; Singapore Chamber of Commerce Report, 24 October 1837, in F. Pridmore, 'Coins and Coinages of the Straits Settlements and British Malaya, 1786-1951', *Memoirs of the Raffles Museum*, no. 2, 1955, p. 113; SFP, 19 October 1837; W. R. Young, 'Note on the proposed reform of the Straits currency', SSR, S 6.

<sup>289</sup> Bonham to Bengal, 28 April 1842, SSR, R 8.

<sup>290</sup> Pridmore, *Memoirs of Raffles Museum*, no. 2, 1955, pp. 33-4.

Calcutta authorities had no control. Following the advice of Butterworth, who in 1844 described the situation as 'bad beyond all expression',<sup>291</sup> Calcutta agreed finally to manufacture copper coins based on fractions of the dollar and produced a bill 'for establishing a copper currency in the Settlements of Penang, Singapore and Malacca', which legalized these coins and banned the importation of private tokens. The publication of this bill in the Straits in 1846 brought an outcry from the Singapore merchants about this 'deadly blow'. In the previous twelve months they had imported \$128,000 worth of copper tokens, most of it for trading in the archipelago. The Bugis alone took \$100,000 worth that year, and the Singapore merchants argued that the prohibition would ruin the Bugis trade.<sup>292</sup> Calcutta remained deaf to their protests, and the act came into force in 1848.<sup>293</sup> Individual speculators in tokens lost heavily, but their dire predictions that the measure would drive the Bugis trade into the hands of the Dutch proved false. There were teething problems, and the new copper coins were at first so scarce that they were exchanged in the open market at only eighty-two or eighty-five to the dollar. But when the supply increased, they drove out the inferior Dutch copper coins as the most popular medium of exchange.

After that the main difficulty was the acute shortage of silver dollars, many of which were so clipped, punched or defaced that by 1852 the shroffs were deducting as much as twenty per cent on imperfect dollars.<sup>294</sup> The Singapore chamber of commerce appealed to Blundell as acting governor to legalize clipped dollars at the full rate,<sup>295</sup> but Blundell proposed instead to Calcutta that they substitute a rupee currency. To the merchants' relief the government of India rejected such a drastic measure, and as a temporary solution agreed to accept clipped dollars at the full rate and to increase the supply of copper change.<sup>296</sup>

<sup>291</sup> SSR, R 10, no. 40.

<sup>292</sup> SSR, R 13, no. 781; *SFP*, 19, 26 November 1846; *ST*, 25 November 1846.

<sup>293</sup> Act VI of 1847.

<sup>294</sup> *SFP*, 5 November 1846, 17 December 1852, 6 January, 11 February 1854; *ST*, 21 December 1852.

<sup>295</sup> *SFP*, 24 September 1852.

<sup>296</sup> SSR, R 18, 16 November 1852; SSR, S 19, Item 123; SSR, S 20, Item 71; *ST*, 14 December 1852; *SFP*, 6 January 1854.

The high rate of exchange in China, however, drained the Straits of silver dollars, and in 1854 the Calcutta authorities had to send five lacs of rupees to the Straits Settlements to replenish empty government treasuries. Calcutta ordered that all officials' salaries be paid in rupees, that the revenue farms be contracted for in rupees, and that treasuries were to pay out dollars only when contracts specifically said so.<sup>297</sup> The payment in rupees caused great hardship among officials and sepoys, who had to change them for dollars and cents at a twelve per cent discount, while to make matters worse, there was such a shortage of copper in India that the Calcutta mint stopped producing copper cents for the Straits.<sup>298</sup>

While there were obvious disadvantages in allowing the circulation of a fluctuating currency over which the government had no control, Calcutta did not propose at that stage to supplant the dollar. But it appeared illogical to have a legal silver rupee currency for which no regular small change was provided, and in 1854 a bill was introduced into the Indian legislative council 'to improve the law relating to the copper currency in the Straits', which provided for a copper currency based on fractions of the rupee. There were to be two legal copper currencies: special Straits Settlements cents and fractions minted in Calcutta, and the Company's Indian pice, double pice, half pice and pie. Each was to be legal tender for either silver currency, so that one pice would be equal to a hundred and fortieth part of a dollar, and a quarter cent to a hundred and eightieth part of a rupee.<sup>299</sup>

Despite frenzied resistance from the Singapore merchants, who misinterpreted the measure as a first step to oust the Spanish dollar, on which they insisted the security of trade in the Straits depended, the currency act was passed in 1855,<sup>300</sup> but in face of continued objections from the mercantile community of Singapore, the Directors ordered the act to be repealed in 1857.<sup>301</sup> While the Directors' ruling was received with

<sup>297</sup> *SFP*, 10, 17, 24 February 1854; *ST*, 14 February, 27 June 1854; *PG*, 25 February, 22 July in *SFP*, 3 March, 11 August 1854.

<sup>298</sup> *SFP*, 3 February 1854; *SSR*, S 21, Item 43.

<sup>299</sup> Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. i (1854), 69.

<sup>300</sup> Act XVII of 1855, text in Pridmore, *Memoirs of Raffles Museum*, ii (1955), 115.

<sup>301</sup> Directors to India, 14 January 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal,

relief, the practical difficulties of reverting to the former currency were very great. 'There is not a dollar or a cent at this time in any one of the Straits treasuries', Blundell complained in May 1857.<sup>302</sup> The first new shipments did not arrive in the Straits until November 1857.<sup>303</sup> At the beginning of 1858 Blundell appealed to Calcutta for 2½ lacs of rupees to settle government debts, and six months later had to send for another three lacs of rupees.<sup>304</sup> By that time the worst shortage was over, but empty treasuries remained a constant worry to the Governor, and the position was aggravated by the drain of funds during the China war and the practice of the accountant general in Calcutta of ordering the movement of bullion without consulting the Governor.<sup>305</sup> In 1860 the Resident Councillor of Penang had only Rs. 700 in his treasury to meet claims of Rs. 6,000.<sup>306</sup> The shortage and confusion benefited only the makers of counterfeit coin, who prospered greatly in Singapore and Penang in the last years of Indian rule. A former convict, who had been transported from India for coining counterfeit currency, enrolled a gang which operated for two years in Penang, before he transferred his business into Malay territory and enlarged it into a considerable enterprise.<sup>307</sup>

In passing an act in 1862 to regulate the coinage of India, the legislative council made special provision for the Straits, and between 1862 and 1867 copper cents for the first time bore the name 'Straits Settlements'.<sup>308</sup> Agitation for a British dollar continued,<sup>309</sup> but it was not until 1895 that a British dollar was minted for the British colonies in the Far East, and a special Straits Settlements dollar was issued for the first time in 1903.

The complications of the government accounting system vol. 102; Pridmore, *Memoirs of Raffles Museum*, ii (1955), 116-17; SSR, S 25, Items 82, 97.

<sup>302</sup> SSR, R 31, p. 174.

<sup>303</sup> SSR, S 25, Items 148, 221, 249, 271, 304, 314, 316, 317.

<sup>304</sup> SSR, R 32, p. 273; SSR, W 26, Items 59, 77; SSR, R 33, pp. 1-2, 176-7; SSR, V 24, pp. 159-60.

<sup>305</sup> SSR, S 25, Items 19, 36, 55; SSR, R 36, pp. 202-6, 272-4.

<sup>306</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 117-21; SSR, R 37, pp. 138-9; *PG*, 18 August in *SFP*, 23 August 1860.

<sup>307</sup> SSR, W 50, Item 262; SSR, DD 34, Item 143; *SFP*, 23 January 1862.

<sup>308</sup> Act XIII of 1862. Pridmore, *Memoirs of Raffles Museum*, ii (1955) 39.

<sup>309</sup> SSR, W 46, Item 275; SSR, V 37, p. 200; SSR, R 45, pp. 80-1; *ST*, 30 January 1864; *SFP*, 21 January 1864.

remained. With the exception of postage and commercial stamps, which could be bought either for rupees or dollars, all receipts and payments were normally made in dollars but had to be accounted for in rupees. Cavenagh repeatedly complained of the work involved, but his pleas to be allowed to produce more realistic accounts were rejected.<sup>310</sup> Sir Hercules Robinson, who was sent to report on the Straits Settlements in 1864, dismissed the accounting system as 'unsound and productive of nothing but needless labour and confusion'.<sup>311</sup> Robinson described how revenues were paid in dollars but accounted for at a par of Rs. 224.8.6.40/100 per \$100 in Singapore and Malacca, and at Rs. 220 per \$100 in Penang. Officials' salaries were fixed in rupees but paid in dollars at all stations at Rs. 220 per \$100. There was a special rate for stamps of Rs. 227.4.4.4/11 per \$100. Thus a \$100 stamp was bought at Rs. 227.4.4.4/11, brought to account in the treasury books at Rs. 224.8.6.40/100, and then paid to an official for Rs. 220. The accounts then had to be balanced by a 'loss of exchange' entry. Robinson's recommendation that the public accounts should be kept in dollars and cents, with the silver dollar as the only legal tender, was embodied in one of the first acts passed by the colonial administration in 1867, which made the Hong Kong dollar, the Spanish and other silver dollars the sole legal tender. Copper coins continued to be sent from Calcutta, but after 1872 they were minted by private firms in England. The 1867 act legalized a currency which was already assured, and by the time the transfer to the colonial office took place the currency issue was virtually resolved.

<sup>310</sup> SSR, R 45, p. 196; SSR, S 35, Item 127.

<sup>311</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 705-6.

## CHAPTER V

### Social Conditions: Health, Poverty and Education

VISITORS approaching the Straits Settlements from the sea were impressed with the beauty of the scenery and the setting of the three towns, particularly Singapore, which had been planned and laid out with care. On landing they were struck by the dirt, stench and squalor. Before the enforcement of the municipal and conservancy laws in 1857, the government and municipal authorities had neither the resources nor the inclination to provide many amenities. Compared with the Indian presidency towns, the ports of the Straits Settlements were neglected, ill-kempt and dirty.

Yet the towns of Penang, Malacca and Singapore were considered some of the healthiest colonial settlements in the East, the haven of invalids from India.<sup>1</sup> The rural areas in all three settlements were unhealthy. Fever was endemic in the country districts of Penang and Malacca, and particularly bad in Province Wellesley, where the death rate among the peasantry was the highest in the Straits Settlements and officials were so often sick that the administration was sometimes brought to the verge of breakdown.<sup>2</sup> On Penang island, while the planters and town merchants escaped the cholera, which was such a scourge in the crowded poorer quarters of the town, malaria or 'Penang fever' was a dreaded disease in the country among rich and poor, and in 1832 it killed George Brown, probably the wealthiest British planter and the son of David Brown, one of Penang's most successful pioneers.<sup>3</sup> It obstructed the much-needed Penang land survey. Edmund Blundell, appointed first

<sup>1</sup> R. Little, 'An Essay on the Coral Reefs as the Cause of Blakan Mati Fever', *JIA*, ii (1848), 464.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Resident, Province Wellesley to Governor, 4 June 1860, SSR, W 34.

<sup>3</sup> P. J. Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula* (Madras, 1834, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), p. 376.



special assistant collector in 1823, had to resign the post on account of sickness after a few months, and his successor fared no better.<sup>4</sup>

Singapore was by far the healthiest of the three settlements, which surprised medical men, since the island appeared to offer ideal conditions for tropical diseases: a constantly hot wet climate, marsh and swamp, rotting vegetation, filth and stench. There were few cases of malaria or dangerous fevers, and Crawford, writing in 1828, claimed no-one had fallen victim to fever since Singapore was founded.<sup>5</sup> The town area remained fever-free, but in the 1840s, when Europeans began moving to live on the outskirts of town and convicts were sent to fill in swamps and construct roads in the country, many cases of intermittent fever were reported. Attempts to grow rice on Siglap plain to the east of the town had to be abandoned because the farmers fell sick with fever.<sup>6</sup> These fevers were rarely fatal. Dr Robert Little,<sup>7</sup> who conducted a survey in 1848, discovered that of the thirty-one deaths from fever in the Singapore hospitals over the previous four years, nearly all were known to have been contracted outside the settlement, or on the island of Blakang Mati on the other side of New Harbour.<sup>8</sup> This island was inhabited mainly by Bugis, nearly all of whom died of fever, and by 1848 only two Bugis households remained.<sup>9</sup> For a few years the government kept a signal station on the island, but was forced to abandon it since most of the men who manned it died.<sup>10</sup> The island was regarded with dread, yet there were no swamps, the air was fresh, and the Bugis, who grew pineapples, caught fish and sold high-quality sarongs woven by their womenfolk, enjoyed a higher standard of living than their compatriots in crowded Kampong Bugis.

This anomaly aroused the curiosity of doctors and sparked

<sup>4</sup> Lee Chye Hooi, 'The Penang Land Problem, 1786-1841', B.A. academic exercise, University of Malaya (Singapore), 1957, pp. 28-9.

<sup>5</sup> J. Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina* (London, 1828, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), ii, 351.

<sup>6</sup> Little, *JIA*, ii (1848), 469, 481.

<sup>7</sup> DR ROBERT LITTLE. Came to Singapore 1840; in practice with uncle, Dr M. J. Martin, 1840-7; founder of Presbyterian Church 1846; Coroner 1848; non-official member of 1st Straits Settlements Legislative Council, 1867; died in London 1888. His two younger brothers, John and Matthew, formed John Little & Co.

<sup>8</sup> Little, *JIA*, ii (1848), 572.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 573.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

off an international controversy about the origin of malaria. In his investigations carried out in 1848, Dr Robert Little found no fever at all in the crowded town area of Singapore. It was commonly assumed that the revolting stench of sulphuretted hydrogen was a major cause of malaria, yet none of the Chinese and Malay families living on boats on the filthy Singapore river and none of the workers among the stinking refuse of the saw factories suffered from fever, and not one of the 1,447 prisoners living in the malodorous jail had died of fever during the previous four years, although the jail was flanked by a murky canal and the swamp in front was used as the town rubbish dump.<sup>11</sup> Not suspecting the role of mosquitoes, Little concluded that malaria was caused by decomposing animal and vegetable matter, intensified by warmth and moisture but counteracted by sea water and sulphuretted hydrogen fumes. He argued that perhaps the most deadly decomposition arose on coral reefs exposed to the air at low tide, and in this way sought to explain how it was that no-one living near the tidal swamps of the town contracted fever, whereas mild forms were common in the freshwater swamps of Siglap plain, and dangerous fevers ravaged islands like Blakang Mati which were surrounded by coral. Sceptical critics could not shake Little from his theory.<sup>12</sup>

As Cameron wrote, 'The climate of Singapore has been established beyond all doubt to be kinder and more genial to the European constitution than any other in the east.'<sup>13</sup> The chief complaints among European men were disorders of the liver caused by over-indulgence in food and alcohol. After practising medicine in Singapore for eight years, Little concluded that high living caused seventy per cent of the diseases among the well-to-do, among whom he included Jews, Armenians, Eurasians and Parsees, as well as Europeans.<sup>14</sup> To some extent these maladies were counteracted by the vigorous physical exercise which was fashionable. It was customary for

<sup>11</sup> Little, *JIA*, ii (1848), 487.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 573; J. C. Ross, 'Observations on Dr Little's Essay on Coral Reefs as the Cause of Fevers in Various Parts of the East', *JIA*, iv (1850), 607-16.

<sup>13</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), p. 249.

<sup>14</sup> Little, *JIA*, ii (1848), 475.

European men to go on long walks in the early morning and to ride or sail in the evening, while the younger ones played fives and cricket or went swimming. A fives club was founded in 1836, the Singapore Cricket Club in 1852, and a swimming club in 1866. For the European mercantile community life was leisurely, except on mail days, and work rarely interfered with regular sport. 'We are the healthiest community in the East', the *Straits Times* claimed in 1861, 'and attribute no small share of it to our activity and love of outdoor sports.'<sup>15</sup> European men dressed more informally and sensibly in the Straits than their counterparts in Calcutta.<sup>16</sup> Their womenfolk did not fare so well. Shrouded in heavy clothing and condemned by custom to a life of physical inactivity, they found the climate trying.<sup>17</sup> Most European men lived to retire to the west, and the Christian cemeteries in Singapore were filled mainly with infants, young women and visiting sailors.

Among the mass of the Asian population the greatest health hazards were poverty, malnutrition, overcrowding and the habit of opium smoking. The annual influx of penniless Chinese, the fluctuations of demand for labour and the high rate of sickness threw many immigrants on to the streets of Singapore. A Chinese poor house was opened in 1834 and maintained from the proceeds of the pork tax to support 'the deserving poor', who were too ill to work, but it had to be closed four years later when the Bengal government abolished the pork farm. After that it was left to private charity to rescue unfortunates from starvation or a life of crime. A few Chinese merchants provided homes for the destitute, but the streets were infested with beggars.<sup>18</sup>

In 1844 the wealthy merchant Tan Tock Seng contributed \$7,000 to build a hospital for diseased paupers, but while the hospital was under construction the situation became desperate. Public subscriptions raised sufficient funds to feed 150 paupers each day, but the streets were still full of beggars, and in 1845 at least seventy Chinese were known to have died of starvation. In opening the criminal sessions in Singapore in October 1845, the Recorder devoted most of his charge to the question of

<sup>15</sup> *ST*, 17 August 1861.

<sup>17</sup> Little, *JIA*, ii (1848), 452.

<sup>16</sup> *SFP*, 26 October 1866.

<sup>18</sup> *SFP*, 5 October 1843.

destitution among the Chinese. He urged the restoration of the pork farm to finance charity and called for ships' captains to be forbidden to land sick or disabled immigrants.<sup>19</sup> In 1849 his successor, Sir Christopher Rawlinson, commenting on two recent coroner's inquests in which verdicts of death through starvation had been returned, called such deaths 'a disgrace to a Christian community like Singapore'.<sup>20</sup>

The opening of the hospital did not solve the growing problem of destitution. It was a grim place. The air in the building was foul, and it was badly sited overlooking a swamp in which dirt and refuse were thrown. In the year 1852-3 a third of the patients died,<sup>21</sup> and of 848 inmates treated in the official year 1854-5, 365 died of ulcers, sores, dropsy and general decay.<sup>22</sup> 'No-one will enter who can crawl and beg, unless compelled by the police', the hospital's committee admitted in 1857.<sup>23</sup> Many of the inmates had become destitute through opium smoking and were reduced to living on decayed vegetables and rotten fish picked up round the markets. Many were brought in with limbs dropping off with gangrene. Blundell described the hospital to Calcutta, 'crowded with horribly diseased Chinese paupers, beggars and abandoned outcasts of all descriptions and in the last stage of disease and loathsomeness', where 'the horrid sights around them and the foul air inside are most sickening and tend to bring on fever if not hospital gangrene'.

Tan Tock Seng died suddenly in 1850 without making any arrangements for an endowment to maintain the hospital. His heirs were generous and further money was raised by public subscription among Chinese and Europeans. The subscribers appointed a committee in 1851, comprising the Resident Councilor, the senior surgeon and Tan Tock Seng's son, Tan Kim Ching, as permanent members, with others chosen from the Chinese and European communities. This arrangement inevitably led to friction with the government, which was responsible for repairs and providing medicines and medical supervision. Calcutta, regarding the establishment as a poor house and not

<sup>19</sup> *ST*, 14 October 1845.

<sup>21</sup> *ST*, 2 August 1853.

<sup>22</sup> *SSR*, S 25, Item 152.

<sup>20</sup> *SFP*, 29 March 1849.

<sup>23</sup> *SSR*, S 25, Item 152.

as a medical institution, criticized the conditions and in particular the provision of opium at government expense, whereas the doctors insisted it was necessary to prescribe opium medicinally to addicts.<sup>24</sup>

In 1857 the government took over the building as a military store and built a more suitable pauper hospital further out of town near its present site at Balestier's former estate. The hospital committee protested, but the move benefited the inmates and removed from view 'the disgusting objects that used to infest the public streets'.<sup>25</sup> It gave the patients more space and air, and the mortality rate fell rapidly.<sup>26</sup> In 1857 Blundell recommended constructing a lunatic asylum, a dispensary and a general hospital to treat ordinary patients, so that 'decent persons requiring medical treatment should not be mixed up with the scum of [Tan Tock Seng's hospital] . . . whose inmates are invariably the vilest of the Chinese population'.<sup>27</sup> From 1862 healthy beggars were set to light work in the house of correction, instead of being sent to the pauper hospital.<sup>28</sup>

The worst remaining problem was how to deal with lepers, of whom there were many in the pauper hospital.<sup>29</sup> In 1852 the Singapore grand jury complained, 'It is impossible to turn the eye in any direction when passing through our streets without seeing several leprous Chinese.'<sup>30</sup> There was no leper hospital in Singapore, and Dr Oxley, the senior surgeon, and his successor, Dr Rose, wanted to remove lepers to an off-shore island.<sup>31</sup> Blundell would have liked to agree, but he had no powers forcibly to remove and confine lepers. Calcutta was indifferent to the problem, not wanting to pass a special law to empower the Straits authorities to seize and seclude lepers when they had no intention of passing such legislation for India as a whole.<sup>32</sup> The Singapore government could only make minor improvements. A special ward was designed for leper prisoners

<sup>24</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 362.

<sup>25</sup> SSR, V 25, p. 227.

<sup>26</sup> SSR, R 31, pp. 145-6; SSR, W 27, Item 236; SSR, V 25, pp. 222-7; SSR, W 30, Item 285.

<sup>27</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 238-41.

<sup>28</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-3*.

<sup>29</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 152.

<sup>30</sup> ST, 10 August 1852.

<sup>31</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 27.

<sup>32</sup> SSR, W 26, Item 40; SSR, V 22, pp. 52-3, 158-9; SSR, W 24, Item 160; SSR, R 31, pp. 108-11; SSR, S 25, Item 151.

in the new house of correction, and in 1861-2 a separate shed was built for twenty inmates of Tan Tock Seng's hospital who were suffering from advanced leprosy.<sup>33</sup> Without a leper settlement and legal powers to force patients into it, little could be done to rid Singapore of this scourge, which was on the increase in the last years of Indian administration.<sup>34</sup>

In Penang the grand jury appealed in 1858 for a leper hospital to accommodate the numerous 'helpless but disgusting objects of public charity' to be seen on the roads and market-places.<sup>35</sup> Five years later, at the suggestion of the wealthy Koh Sin Tat, a public subscription was launched and quickly raised \$20,000 to build a leper asylum.<sup>36</sup> In Malacca town a special building was set aside for lepers, until a new hospital was built for them on a nearby island in 1861. The lepers refused to move there, but the Resident Councillor solved the problem by removing the roof of the old building, cutting off their food supplies and then arresting them as vagrants and committing them to the leprosarium. Cavenagh was a little dubious about this procedure, but visited the leper island a few months later and was satisfied that the hospital was adequate and the inmates were comparatively happy and able to get about and tend their gardens.<sup>37</sup>

Provision for the poor and sick continued to be inadequate, although Cavenagh took a keen personal interest in the supervision of hospitals, and in Singapore and Penang the standards in the general and prison hospitals improved under his administration. Chinese and European merchants and the revenue farmers gave generously to Tan Tock Seng's hospital. Tock Seng's widow added a female ward in 1858,<sup>38</sup> and proceeds from *wayangs* and entertainments were often donated to it.<sup>39</sup> Despite this, by 1866 the hospital was in debt to the tune of

<sup>33</sup> SSR, W 31, Items 332, 344; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*.

<sup>34</sup> SSR, W 29, Item 49; *ST*, 3 October 1863.

<sup>35</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 239.

<sup>36</sup> SSR, U 46, pp. 347, 425; *PG*, 5 September in *SFP*, 17 September 1863; *Penang Argus*, 10 September 1863, 31 March 1864 in *SFP*, 8 October 1863, 7 April 1864.

<sup>37</sup> Resident Councillor, Malacca to Governor, 30 April 1861, SSR, X 21; O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), p. 319.

<sup>38</sup> SSR, R 33, p. 19.

<sup>39</sup> SSR, BB 111, Item 80.

\$3,000.<sup>40</sup> In 1861 Penang had large numbers of beggars and sick paupers for whom there was no room in the poor house which was run by the Anti-Mendicity Society, and which was in such a shocking state that the government demanded closer supervision.<sup>41</sup>

Medical progress in the Straits was hampered not only by lack of buildings and money but also by lack of trained staff. The medical board in Calcutta failed to exercise any effective supervision over the Straits medical department. The first two senior surgeons, William Montgomerie and Thomas Oxley, showed more interest in nutmegs than in medicine, but after Oxley retired in 1857 government medical officers were forbidden to engage in commercial or agricultural pursuits.<sup>42</sup> There was an acute shortage of subordinate medical staff and most of the hospital attendants were convicts. The Singapore lunatic asylum, with more than a hundred patients in 1859, had only one trained attendant.<sup>43</sup> In 1857 Blundell faced a crisis when the commander-in-chief ordered a naval hospital to be set up in Singapore to accommodate sailors wounded in the China war but sent no staff to run it.<sup>44</sup> With the completion of the Singapore general hospital in 1860, Calcutta sanctioned an increase of Rs. 16 a month for salaries for subordinate medical staff, making a total of Rs. 792 a month.<sup>45</sup> It was completely inadequate.

The Straits authorities found great difficulty in preventing the spread of contagious diseases. Free vaccination against smallpox, which was offered in Singapore and Penang, attracted only the Chinese, and even they became discouraged because the vaccine deteriorated rapidly in the hot, humid climate and a large proportion of vaccinated people still succumbed to the disease.<sup>46</sup>

The worst scourge was cholera, which was endemic in the Straits towns, and there were frequently serious outbreaks. Cholera was widespread in Province Wellesley all the time<sup>47</sup> and attacked Georgetown nearly every year. In Singapore

<sup>40</sup> SFP, 18 January 1866.

<sup>41</sup> SSR, DD 34, Item 82; SSR, U 44, pp. 22-4.

<sup>42</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 220; SSR, R 30, pp. 234-6.

<sup>43</sup> SSR, BB 111, Item 86.

<sup>44</sup> SSR, V 23, pp. 293-4.

<sup>45</sup> SSR, S 28, Item 176.

<sup>46</sup> SSR, R 35, pp. 97-9; SSR, W 48, Item 359.

<sup>47</sup> J. D. Vaughan, 'Notes on the Malays at Penang and Province Wellesley', *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857), 160.

outbreaks were somewhat less frequent but on occasions were severe. Between two and three hundred people died in an outbreak which persisted in Singapore from 1841 through to 1843.<sup>48</sup> Well over two hundred people died in another in the early months of 1851,<sup>49</sup> and the disease took a heavy toll in deaths in 1852 and 1853.<sup>50</sup> Normally it was confined to the overcrowded slums of Singapore, but in 1858 it swept through the seamen's hospital and produced a scare among the well-to-do.<sup>51</sup> In 1861-2 over a third of the patients in the Singapore lunatic asylum fell ill with cholera, from which twelve of them died,<sup>52</sup> and in 1873 more than a hundred people died of cholera in Singapore in one month.<sup>53</sup>

The disease was spread partly from the notoriously overcrowded ships which brought pilgrims from Mecca. For years there were demands in the Straits, both from European merchants and well-to-do Arabs, for this traffic to be regulated, but when an act 'for the regulation of native passenger ships' was finally brought into force in 1858, it was full of loopholes and referred only to the trip from the East to Mecca, making no provisions for the return journey. The horrors of the journey and their consequences continued.<sup>54</sup> The pilgrim trade was only one of the difficulties created by an open immigration policy. In 1857 the Singapore municipal committee appealed for medical inspection of every craft on arrival, for sick passengers to be quarantined and for penalties to be enforced against ships' captains allowing sick persons to disembark. Blundell dismissed these suggestions on the grounds that strict quarantine regulations would interfere with trade. In any event, in view of the recent resistance to payment of port dues intended to finance improvements, it was clear that no means would be available for creating a health establishment.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iv (1850), 21.

<sup>49</sup> *SFP*, 25 April 1851.

<sup>50</sup> *SFP*, 7 January 1853, 6 January 1854.

<sup>51</sup> *SSR*, W 26, Item 123; *SFP*, 15 April 1858, 5 January 1859.

<sup>52</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*.

<sup>53</sup> *ST*, 17, 18, 21 July, 1, 21 August 1863.

<sup>54</sup> Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. 19 July 1856; *SSR*, R 30, pp. 68-72, 277; *SFP*, 6 January 1854, 7 August, 12 November 1856, 15 July 1858; *ST*, 11 December 1865.

<sup>55</sup> *SSR*, W 24, Item 215; *SSR*, V 23, pp. 20-3.



A major cause of the disease was the pollution of water arising from the filth and bad drainage in the Straits towns, and this was appreciated at the time, even though the exact nature and cause of cholera were not known.<sup>56</sup> The press, grand juries and public meetings repeatedly called for the provision of proper drainage, but the government had no money for such schemes. Singapore's sago factories constituted a further major health hazard. Two-thirds of their raw material became waste product, and by the mid-1850s about twenty thousand tons of sago waste was put out each year and left to rot.<sup>57</sup> Round some of the older factories decaying vegetable matter had accumulated for thirty years and was six or seven feet thick.<sup>58</sup>

Another threat to health, which was peculiar to the Straits Settlements and the centre of controversy, was the widespread practice of opium smoking. The opium farm was the mainstay of the revenue, it was an easy way to raise money and readily accepted by the Chinese. Opium smoking was regarded by most of the European community as at worst a bad habit, soothing and soporific, discouraging violent crime, pernicious only if taken to excess. And taxation, it was argued, discouraged excess. Visitors to the squalid opium dens of the Straits Settlements saw only the exotic bliss of opium smoking, but the doctors had to face the demoralizing after-effects, and in 1848 Dr Robert Little began a campaign to open the eyes of the European community and the government to the physical and social evils of opium smoking.

Little estimated in 1848 that \$33,000 a month was spent on opium in Singapore, and by 1857 he put the figure at over \$50,000, or the equivalent of £135,000 a year. There was an opium den in every street in town and in every country hamlet.<sup>59</sup> More than one in five of the entire population, and more than half of Chinese adults were addicts.<sup>60</sup> At first a Chinese immigrant might spend a dollar a month on opium, but within two years he would be spending two to three dollars and would

<sup>56</sup> SSR, W 26, Item 123; *SFP*, 25 April 1851; *ST*, 10 August 1852, 11 December 1865.

<sup>57</sup> *SFP*, 8 December 1854.

<sup>58</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Sago', *JIA*, iii (1849), 302; *SFP*, 1 December 1854.

<sup>59</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 152.

<sup>60</sup> R. Little, 'On the Habitual Use of Opium in Singapore', *JIA*, ii (1848), 1-79.

eventually spend all he earned. The initial contentment would give way to debility, so that he could no longer work to get money for the opium he craved for. Plagued by ulcers and dropsy, he could not stop the habit, because sudden withdrawal caused dreadful pain and drove many to suicide.<sup>61</sup> Penniless addicts would beg and steal to get opium, and eventually finish up in the pauper hospital or in prison.

High-quality opium, or chandu, needed specialized refining by skilled workmen who had learned their trade in China and commanded high wages. The bulk of smokers bought tye or tinco, made from the refuse of chandu, and eventually sank to smoking samshing, the pernicious refuse of tinco. Most addicts were Chinese, but Little found heavy smokers among the Javanese, Bugis and even the Indian sepoys. Opium smoking was heavier in some trades than in others. Among tailors only one in five was an addict, whereas eighty-five per cent of gambier planters, boatmen and barbers were addicts.

In theory the official regulations were designed to keep opium smoking within reasonable bounds. The Governor controlled the number of opium shops and fixed the hours of opening. In practice the safeguards were ignored. Most opium dens had private rooms, which remained open outside official hours. Butterworth attempted in 1844 to reduce the number of opium shops in Singapore to forty-five but this merely resulted in the opium farmer removing the red boards with the words 'Licensed opium shop' in English and putting mats down bearing the sign 'Opium shop' in Chinese. Little claimed that in 1848 Singapore had forty-five legal opium shops with English signs and forty others with Chinese designations.

Little called on Chinese leaders, such as Tan Tock Seng, Tan Kim Seng, Seah Eu Chin and Whampoa, to form a society for the suppression of opium addiction, and he urged Butterworth to give government support.<sup>62</sup> He roused little response. As secretary of the Tan Tock Seng hospital committee, Little continued his fight, and he used public meetings as a platform to argue the case against opium smoking.<sup>63</sup> He found an ally in Thomas Braddell, who estimated in 1857 that nearly

<sup>61</sup> R. Little, 'Opium Smoking', *JIA*, iii (1849), 454-7.

<sup>62</sup> Little, *JIA*, ii (1848), 1-79.

<sup>63</sup> *SFP*, 5 March 1857.

\$1,000,000 a year was spent on opium in the Straits Settlements, and that there were some 40,000 addicts, 15,000 of them in Singapore, 13,000 in Malacca, and 12,000 in Penang and Province Wellesley.<sup>64</sup> No heed was paid to their arguments. The opium farm was too profitable to the government and to the Chinese merchants for it to be abandoned, and the rest of the Chinese community did not complain.

There was one section of the European community which presented problems of destitution and poverty and proved an embarrassment for many years to European residents, particularly in Singapore. These were sailors, who were often stranded in Singapore for months looking for work. The perennial deadlock between Calcutta and the Straits merchants over revenue and taxation held up for many years the enforcement of legislation urgently needed to control seamen and their conditions of service, to supervise taverns and regulate prostitution.

Sailors could afford no better accommodation than low public houses and could find no entertainment except the beer shops and the brothels. No licence was required to set up the disreputable punch houses, which mushroomed in Singapore in the 1850s, opened by former convicts or ticket-of-leave men from Australia and other dubious characters. Sailors were easy prey and were lured into taverns by touts, plied with drugged alcohol and then robbed of all they possessed and thrown out on the street. Many of them died in hospital after drinking bad liquor.<sup>65</sup> In 1862 there were more than 200 ale houses in Singapore, which were in the words of the Resident Councillor, 'a most crying evil'. After much pleading by Cavenagh, Calcutta extended Indian legislation controlling taverns to the Straits in 1863, after which the police were able to close down many taverns and beer shops. Many of the disreputable characters who preyed on drunken sailors left Singapore,<sup>66</sup> and tavern brawls ceased to be a regular feature of Singapore's night life.

A sailors' home was established in 1853 to house destitute

<sup>64</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Penang', *JIA*, n.s. i (1857), 81-3.

<sup>65</sup> *ST*, 25 April 1854, 21 May 1859.

<sup>66</sup> *SSR*, R 36, pp. 194-5; *SSR*, R 38, pp. 52-6; *SSR*, W 35, Item 31; *SSR*, W 42, Item 203; *SSR*, W 43, Item 61; *SSR*, W 46, Item 292; Act III of 1863; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-3*.

sailors,<sup>67</sup> but this was only a beginning, and with the increase in shipping in the early 1860s, the numbers of stranded unemployed seamen swelled. In 1864 there were fifty-eight destitute American and European sailors living in boarding houses in Singapore, some of them on the charity of the lodging-house keepers, others supported by their consuls, while numbers of desperate sailors had taken to crime and were in prison.<sup>68</sup>

Growing numbers of destitute Australians were also a problem. Many of them arrived in charge of shipments of horses, were discharged in Singapore and unable to find work. By 1863 the position was so bad that, at the suggestion of the Singapore commissioner of police, the Australian state governments warned people not to go to the Straits unless they had work.<sup>69</sup>

The problem of prostitution was not tackled during the Indian regime. In 1861 Henry Man, the Resident Councillor, declared of Penang that 'a more complete sink of iniquity can scarcely be found'.<sup>70</sup> From revelations made soon after colonial rule was introduced, it would appear that the condition of women was even worse in Singapore. The one aspect which worried the governing minority was the number of European prostitutes. The *Straits Times* complained in 1864 that there were almost as many prostitutes as respectable women among the female European population of Singapore.<sup>71</sup> The concern was not with prostitution itself but with maintaining the dignity and authority of the ruling class, and it was left to the colonial administration to begin to tackle the overall problem of prostitution and the protection of women and girls.

Some of the early pioneers had ambitious plans for developing education in the Straits, and Raffles in particular dreamed of Singapore as the centre for resurrecting an old indigenous civilization and revitalizing it through the spread of British influence and the benefits of western economic progress and education. Characteristically, it was at a meeting held in 1823 to discuss setting up a school in Singapore that he put forward his ideas for the political, economic and cultural future of

<sup>67</sup> *ST*, 25 April 1854, 21 May 1859.

<sup>68</sup> *SSR*, V 37, p. 52; *SSR*, W 46, Item 247.

<sup>70</sup> *SSR*, DD 33, Item 32.

<sup>69</sup> *SSR*, W 49, Items 114, 120.

<sup>71</sup> *ST*, 18 June 1864.

southeast Asia. Raffles did not regard the settlement as the nucleus for British political power and direct rule, and apart from a few stations occupied for security, he considered that the neighbouring states should be left in political independence.

However inviting and extensive their resources, it is considered that they can be best drawn forth by the native energies of the people themselves: and that it is by the reciprocal advantages of commerce and commerce alone that we may best promote our own interests for their advancement . . . but education must keep pace with commerce in order that its benefits may be ensured and its evils avoided.

Raffles visualized a southeast Asia where the virtues of its various peoples could combine, where the proud and independent Malays could be rescued from the piracy and degradation to which he considered European destruction of their political power and legitimate trade had reduced them, where the culture of the Javanese and the adventurousness of the Bugis could complement the energy and drive of Chinese immigrants, and where the British would guide the way in freedom of trade and the encouragement of learning to create a new civilization for southeast Asia, with Singapore, 'placed as we shall be in the very centre of this archipelago, the life and soul of its extensive commerce, and maintaining with its most distant parts and with the adjacent Continent a constant and rapidly increasing intercourse'.<sup>72</sup> Raffles's vision of Singapore as the centre of civilization and learning in southeast Asia was to remain a dream. Partly as a result of government policy and partly because of the nature of the population, the story of educational development in the mid-nineteenth century was one of indifference and failure, which would have disappointed the early enthusiasts.

The earliest western-type school was the Penang Free School, established in 1816 for 'the training of a race of intelligent and honest servants for the government'.<sup>73</sup> It continued to be

<sup>72</sup> S. Raffles, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* (London, 1830), App., pp. 23-38.

<sup>73</sup> K. G. Tregonning, *The British in Malaya: the First Forty Years, 1786-1826* (Arizona, 1965), p. 71.

geared to this practical object. Teaching was in English and concentrated on basic reading, writing and arithmetic. By 1830 the school was well established with over a hundred pupils, and it remained under government control until 1866.

A more ambitious project was launched in Malacca in November 1818, when William Farquhar, the former British Resident, in the presence of the Dutch governor, laid the foundation stone of the Anglo-Chinese College. This was sponsored by the British Protestant Mission to China, one of the founders being the celebrated missionary and scholar of Chinese, the Reverend Robert Morrison, and the first headmaster was Dr Milne, described by John Crawford as industrious, highly respected and 'one of the best Chinese scholars living'.<sup>74</sup> The college aimed to spread Christianity and promote the study of English and Chinese language and literature. It had an excellent library and a press attached to the school. When the Company took possession of Malacca, it gave \$1,200 a year to the school, but this grant was withdrawn during the economy cuts of 1830. In 1834, when the Anglo-Chinese College had an enrolment of seventy boys, it was made over to the London Missionary Society, which also supported several Malay and Chinese schools in Malacca.<sup>75</sup>

When Singapore was founded, Morrison was at first in favour of transferring the Anglo-Chinese College to the new British settlement, and Milne applied for ground in Singapore to build a school,<sup>76</sup> but soon abandoned the idea. Morrison then suggested to Raffles that the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca should concentrate on Chinese studies, and a separate school be opened in Singapore to cover Malay, Javanese and Siamese studies, with a view perhaps to eventually combining the two into one institution in Singapore.

Raffles called a public meeting to launch the project in 1823. Regarding education as a vital part of his policy to stimulate the revival of wealth and civilization in southeast Asia, Raffles intended his school to combine research into the customs, language, history and religion of southeast Asia with the spread of knowledge of western civilization, 'the light and knowledge

<sup>74</sup> Crawford, *Embassy*, i, 52.

<sup>75</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, p. 369.

<sup>76</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, ix (1855), 442.

and the means of moral and intellectual improvement'.<sup>77</sup> He saw the proposed institution as a means of instructing the Company's officials about the background against which they worked, educating the sons of native chiefs, and creating a class of Asian teachers and government servants. He anticipated a great demand for education from all over southeast Asia.

Raffles, Morrison, Sultan Hussein, the Temenggong, the Resident and other officials and private residents quickly raised a sum of over \$17,000 to build the school, and the East India Company grudgingly allotted a maintenance grant of \$300 a month. But the ambitious project soon foundered, and the contributions ran out in 1827 before the building was finished. It failed not only because of the Company's parsimony but also because Raffles had miscalculated the demand for education. Singapore did not provide a powerful magnet for learning in the way that it attracted those who sought wealth. The Company gave no lead and showed no enthusiasm in educating officials in the languages and customs of the area, nor was there any response from local rulers to educate their sons in Singapore.

In 1835 a public meeting was called with a view to reviving the Singapore Institution. A Singapore School Society took over and completed the building, which admitted forty-five boys in 1835 for instruction in the English medium. In 1838 the school was divided into an upper school in which English was the medium of instruction, and a lower school in which boys studied partly in English and partly in their own vernacular, Chinese, Malay or Tamil.<sup>78</sup> While the emphasis was on teaching English, the school committee was anxious to promote vernacular education, particularly among the Malays, but their attempts failed. Since appeals to the rulers in neighbouring states to send their own and their chiefs' sons to the Institution produced no pupils,<sup>79</sup> the committee invited all the influential Malays in Singapore to attend a meeting in 1838 to support an appeal for Malays to send their sons to the school. Five hundred copies of the appeal were printed, some for distribution in Singapore and others sent to Sumatra, Celebes,

<sup>77</sup> Text of speech, 15 April 1823, in S. Raffles, *Memoir*, App., pp. 23-8.

<sup>78</sup> *Singapore Institution, 4th Report, 1837-8.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Java and the Malay states.<sup>80</sup> This produced some response and the school was able to run five Malay classes the following year, but the interest was short-lived, and by 1841 the only regular Malay pupils were a handful of boys from prominent families who attended English classes. In 1843, horrified at the apathy of Malay parents, who asked for compensation from the school funds for the loss of their children's services while attending school, the committee closed down Malay classes altogether.<sup>81</sup> Attempts to set up a Bugis department in 1837 were unsuccessful,<sup>82</sup> Tamil classes were abandoned in 1840,<sup>83</sup> and of the Chinese classes, by 1843 only one Hokkien group of twenty-five pupils remained.<sup>84</sup>

After 1840 the majority of the Institution's pupils were sons of well-to-do Chinese traders, who only remained in school long enough to learn to read, write and speak English well enough to find a job or carry on commercial dealings with European customers.<sup>85</sup> They had no interest in the general education offered by the Institution, whose curriculum was admittedly unrealistic. The only history taught was that of Greece, Rome and the Near East in ancient times, with 'The Age of Cyrus to Alexander the Great' as the major course. A girls' school was added to the Institution in 1844, but the response was disappointing: after nine months there were only eleven pupils, six of them orphans.<sup>86</sup>

The school struggled on but fees and subscriptions barely covered the running costs and by 1851 the building was in a dangerous state of dilapidation. The government would provide no money for repairs, and the committee had to borrow funds on their own personal security while they appealed for private subscriptions from the Singapore community and other well-wishers, including the king of Siam.<sup>87</sup> It was even more difficult to obtain regular subscriptions for running expenses. In

<sup>80</sup> *Singapore Institution, 5th Report, 1838-9.*

<sup>81</sup> *Singapore Institution, 8th Report, 1842-3.*

<sup>82</sup> *Singapore Institution, 4th Report, 1837-8.*

<sup>83</sup> *Singapore Institution, 6th Report, 1839-40.*

<sup>84</sup> *Singapore Institution, 8th Report, 1842-3.*

<sup>85</sup> *Singapore Institution, 6th Report, 1839-40.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Singapore Institution, Report for 1853.*



1852 the income was \$374 a month and the salary bill alone was \$380, but few people were interested in supporting education, and only thirteen attended the annual meeting of the Singapore Institution in 1853.

Roman Catholic missionaries had been active in the field of education in Malacca since Portuguese days and established a mission school in Penang in 1826. The protestant missionaries were responsible for setting up the Anglo-Chinese College. But the part played by western missionaries in education during Singapore's first half-century was small. There was no resident Roman Catholic priest in Singapore until 1832 and the Roman Catholic community was so tiny throughout the 1830s that there was no demand for a special school. The protestant missions, both English and American, had their eyes set on China, and when missionaries were admitted to the Chinese mainland after the first Anglo-Chinese war, the protestant mission societies withdrew from Singapore. Only one protestant missionary remained, Benjamin Peach Keasberry,<sup>88</sup> who stayed on independently and devoted the rest of his life to the cause of education among the Singapore Malays.

The first Roman Catholic school, which was opened in Singapore in 1852, was the inspiration of a French priest, Father Beurel, who came to Singapore in 1839 as a young man of twenty-seven and remained for nearly thirty years, falling victim to paralysis and returning to Paris, where he died four years later in 1872. Father Beurel failed to persuade the Society of Brothers of the Christian Schools to finance a school in the Straits Settlements but was given permission to open a school if he financed it himself. He launched an appeal on his own in Singapore in 1848 and raised \$1,352, including donations from a number of leading non-Catholic merchants.<sup>89</sup> He then went to France and brought back six brothers, three for St Joseph's Institution, which was opened in Singapore in 1852, and three

<sup>88</sup> BENJAMIN PEACH KEASBERRY (1811-75). Son of Indian army colonel, who served with Raffles in Java; educated Mauritius and Madras; set up general store in Singapore early 1830s; attended American missionary college, 1834; returned to Singapore with American Mission to work among Malay community; transferred to London Mission Society, 1839; taught in Malay Department of Singapore Institution prior to setting up own school; died in Singapore.

<sup>89</sup> *SFP*, 22 June 1848.

for St Xavier's in Penang. While primarily intended for Roman Catholic boys, St Joseph's quickly gained a good reputation and non-Catholic children were admitted. The East India Company gave Father Beurel land for St Joseph's Institution but refused it for a girls' convent, and eventually he bought the land for this himself. The schools relied on private donations, contributions from the French government and the Singapore masonic lodge, and on Father Beurel's private income, which he devoted entirely to the church and the schools.<sup>90</sup>

Apart from the individual labours of Keasberry and Beurel, there was little cause for pride in the field of education in the Straits in the mid-1850s. The missionary societies had diverted their attentions to China, and the Singapore grand jury frequently deprecated the Company's apathy towards education.<sup>91</sup>

Blundell's appointment as Governor of the Straits Settlements in 1855 coincided with a change in the East India Company's educational policy, which was embodied in a despatch of Sir Charles Wood, president of the Board of Control, in 1854, sometimes described as 'the Intellectual Charter of India'. This provided for the promotion of higher education, with a concentration on vernacular teaching and the provision of government funds to match private contributions. Blundell was in sympathy with the Company's new policy. Not content merely to continue his predecessor's lukewarm support for English education, he wished to revive Raffles's educational ambitions, to promote a comprehensive system of vernacular teaching in the Straits and to make Singapore the centre of education in southeast Asia.<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately the measure brought little benefit to the Straits Settlements. There were no institutions of higher learning, while the extension of vernacular education was a complex and controversial matter, and the principle of parity of private and public subscriptions threatened the existing educational institutions, causing conflict between the government and the mercantile community and revealing how ill-suited Indian educational policy was for the Straits Settle-

<sup>90</sup> C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, 1902, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), i, 247.

<sup>91</sup> *SFP*, 19 August 1853, 1 December 1854; *ST*, 28 November 1854.

<sup>92</sup> *SSR*, R 31, pp. 73-84; *SSR*, S 25, Item 210; *SSR*, U 34, pp. 27-30; Directors to India, 1 April 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 104.

ments, particularly when there was no money to enforce it effectively.

Despite the large proportion of Chinese in the population, Blundell insisted there was no demand for Chinese education, and he recommended concentrating upon teaching in Malay as the easiest lingua franca for immigrants to learn. On the other hand he did not recommend diverting any part of the existing government grant from the English medium schools, of which he reported in 1858, 'No high degree of education is attained at any one of these schools, still something is done.'<sup>93</sup> Instead he wanted the Company to increase its annual education grant to the Straits of a little under Rs. 12,000 by a further Rs. 5,000 to provide elementary Malay education in rural areas.<sup>94</sup> But Calcutta was unwilling to do this during the post-Mutiny financial crisis.<sup>95</sup>

While providing no immediate improvement in vernacular education, the Company's change of policy had adverse effects upon most of the existing educational institutions in the Straits towns. The religious schools were free charity schools and could not profit from the general principle whereby the government sanctioned grants equivalent to funds raised voluntarily to subsidize fee-paying pupils. 'Purely charity schools should be left to pure charity', Calcutta informed Blundell, and they withdrew grants he had sanctioned to the Roman Catholic schools. They also cut the grant to the Singapore Institution, because the existing government grant of \$180 a month exceeded private subscriptions which by then amounted only to \$70.<sup>96</sup> The one institution which Calcutta did commend was Keasberry's Malay school, to which the Temenggong donated Rs. 300 a month. The Company readily matched this amount and praised the Temenggong for his 'enlightened policy'.<sup>97</sup>

Blundell's support of the Company's educational policy concerning vernacular schools and withdrawal of grants to charity schools brought him into conflict with the Singapore merchants, and in particular W. H. Read, who argued that Indian education policy was irrelevant in the Straits Settlements, where the burden of charity work, including education, fell on

<sup>93</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 297-309.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> SSR, S 26, Items 64, 135.

<sup>96</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 55.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

a small minority and the bulk of the inhabitants were transitory and too poor to pay for educating their children.<sup>98</sup> Most of the European merchants and the press wanted to see English rather than Malay as the lingua franca.<sup>99</sup> The *Penang Gazette* argued against 'the decadence of Malay being artificially arrested',<sup>100</sup> and the *Straits Times* urged that 'every local-born child belonging to Chinese, Malay, Kling or other Asiatic parentage' be taught English, to bring the mass of the population in touch with the ruling class.<sup>101</sup>

When Sir Charles Wood became secretary of state for India he renewed the interest he had shown in education as president of the Board of Control, and in 1860 he demanded that education in the Straits Settlements 'be put on a more systematic footing'.<sup>102</sup> Cavenagh advised leaving town schools as they were but urged the setting up of schools in the rural areas to provide western-type education in the Malay language.<sup>103</sup> In 1862 Calcutta sanctioned his schemes, which involved an annual increase in expenditure of Rs. 12,760 (or \$5,800),<sup>104</sup> and Cavenagh opened many village schools, particularly in Malacca.<sup>105</sup> As the post-Mutiny financial troubles receded, he persuaded Calcutta to allot an extra \$180 a month towards the salary of Chinese teachers at the Singapore Institution, and in 1864 a Chinese class was opened with twenty-six pupils.<sup>106</sup> Several British residents of Singapore gave money for scholarships and prizes for Chinese studies, and in 1865 Tan Seng Poh raised a further \$500 from Chinese merchants to encourage Chinese education among Europeans and Eurasians.<sup>107</sup>

Education for girls improved after 1856 when the Directors relaxed the rules about granting state aid to girls' charity schools, since few parents in the Straits were prepared to pay fees to send girls to school.<sup>108</sup> But the sums granted were very

<sup>98</sup> 'Delta' in *SFP*, 3 April 1856.

<sup>99</sup> *SFP*, 3, 10 April, 1 July 1856; *PG*, 31 May in *SFP*, 26 June 1856.

<sup>100</sup> *PG*, 31 May in *SFP*, 26 June 1856.

<sup>101</sup> *ST*, 29 October 1859.

<sup>102</sup> *SSR*, R 37, pp. 280-6.

<sup>103</sup> *SSR*, S 28, Item 175.

<sup>104</sup> *SSR*, S 30, Item 187.

<sup>105</sup> *SSR*, U 45, p. 113; *SSR*, U 46, p. 242; *SSR*, S 32, Item 212; *Singapore Institution, Reports for 1856-7 and 1859-60*.

<sup>106</sup> *Singapore Institution, Report for 1864*.

<sup>107</sup> Song Ong Siang, *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (London, 1923, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1966), p. 134.

<sup>108</sup> *SSR*, S 23, Item 244.

small. In Penang nine nuns ran an orphanage and school for eighty-one destitute girls, the only girls' school in Penang.<sup>109</sup> In Singapore Mrs Cavenagh supported education for girls and was patroness of the girls' school attached to the Singapore Institution. In 1864 it had twenty-eight boarders, eight of them maintained free, and forty-three day pupils, many of them daughters of the well-to-do.<sup>110</sup> The standard of the school showed a great improvement on the situation seven years before when the pupils exhibited pretty needlework but the public examination was a fiasco since they were all too shy to speak.<sup>111</sup> In addition, the Roman Catholic convent school in Singapore had an enrolment of 145 girls, of whom 82 were orphans. It was divided into two departments, one for the well-to-do and the other for the poor, 'each class receiving the education suitable to their position in life'.<sup>112</sup>

Cavenagh took an active interest in educational progress and by the time the Indian regime came to an end in 1867 the Calcutta authorities were pleased with the improvements in the standard of education. But achievements were superficial. English education touched only a tiny minority and was valued merely as a qualification for a job. Chinese education, apart from the classes for the westernized in the Singapore Institution, had virtually disappeared. Despite the emphasis of the government of India and the support given by Blundell and Cavenagh to Malay education, the results were disappointing. Even in Keasberry's school, which was the model for westernized Malay education, lavishly endowed by the Temenggong and the government, there were only fifty-two boys on the roll in 1863, and half of those were invariably absent.<sup>113</sup> Keasberry succeeded only in educating the handful of upper-class Malay boys from the Temenggong's household. In this respect he did well, for he provided the trained men who were to build up administration in Johore and he taught Abu Bakar, Temenggong Ibrahim's heir. Keasberry's school was largely responsible for the subsequent westernization and the spirit of religious

<sup>109</sup> SSR, DD 33, Item 32.

<sup>110</sup> *Singapore Institution, Report for 1864.*

<sup>111</sup> *Singapore Institution, Report for 1856-7.*

<sup>112</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-3.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

toleration among the Johore ruling class, but it did not provide a basis for the spread of Malay education throughout the Straits Settlements, and in later years it was the English and Chinese media which eventually prevailed. After years spent encouraging education in the Straits, Cavenagh was depressed at the results and at the 'entire apathy' of all classes towards education.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>114</sup> SSR, R 46, pp. 42-3.

## CHAPTER VI

### External Defence

EUROPE was at peace for nearly forty years after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and the Straits merchants had no worries about the possibility of an international war. Nor did officials in Calcutta or the Straits show much energy or concern in providing for the defence of the settlements.

Penang was protected by Fort Cornwallis, a small fort constructed at the beginning of the Company's occupation of the island, but by 1836 much of its outworks had been swept away by the tide. The garrison consisted of a small force of Madras Native Infantry with a detachment of European artillery, which was sufficient for internal policing purposes but inadequate to resist any strong attack from outside. Malacca's fortifications had been pulled down by the British during their wartime occupation.

In Singapore Raffles instructed the first Resident to build a fort and erect one or two coastal batteries to protect shipping, and he also ordered that the high points round the town be reserved for defence positions.<sup>1</sup> The East India Company deferred consideration of plans for fortifying the settlement until it was certain that it would be retained permanently, and after the Straits Settlements were united, Captain Edward Lake of the Bengal Engineers was sent in 1827 to advise on fortifications. He recommended constructing a line of batteries to protect Singapore town from attack or bombardment from the sea,<sup>2</sup> but nothing was done except to begin erecting a battery at the entrance to the Singapore river, which fell victim to Bentinck's economy campaign and was left half-finished.

<sup>1</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, vii (1853), 328-9, ix (1855), 449.

<sup>2</sup> Lake to India, May 1827, IO, Board's Collections (Bengal Military), no. 107094, vol. 2188, 1846-7.

Singapore remained unfortified, with just a few guns mounted on the sea front.<sup>3</sup>

In 1843 Captain Best of the Madras Engineers was sent to Singapore to recommend a scheme 'to protect the town from insult' and to advise on the construction of a small fort suitable for a garrison of fifty or a hundred men.<sup>4</sup> Best was carried away by enthusiasm and drew up ambitious plans for a chain of twelve batteries along the coast, with forts to accommodate 3,000 men, although even then he considered the harbour could only be protected effectively by warships. These expensive suggestions, which would have cost some three lacs of rupees, were ignored. Nothing was done and Singapore remained virtually defenceless. In 1845 the officer in command of the troops asked the Governor, 'What is to prevent a fleet or even a single man-of-war or steamer from levying a heavy contribution or knocking the town about our ears?'<sup>5</sup> Two years later the commander-in-chief of the East India naval station repeated the warning.<sup>6</sup> Calcutta refused to spend more money in Singapore, maintaining that the settlement would have to depend on the royal navy's protection in time of war, while a few batteries of heavy guns would suffice to ward off a buccaneering attack.<sup>7</sup>

Visitors to the settlement were amazed at the lack of protection in so prosperous a town, but the resident merchants complained that the Company spent too much on keeping troops in Singapore.<sup>8</sup> Proposals made in 1851 to construct fortifications and station large bodies of troops in the Straits, coupled with plans to introduce stamp duties to augment the revenue, provoked great opposition in Singapore, where the residents resolved at a public meeting that Calcutta should pay all defence charges for the Straits Settlements.<sup>9</sup>

The merchants would have liked to see Singapore converted into a naval base, and Henry Keppel<sup>10</sup> surveyed the New Har-

<sup>3</sup> *SFP*, 9 November 1843.

<sup>4</sup> Best to Governor, 18 January 1844, IO, Board's Collections (Bengal Military), no. 107094, vol. 2188, 1846-7.

<sup>5</sup> SSR, V 10, pp. 259-65.

<sup>6</sup> SSR, V 12, pp. 194-5.

<sup>7</sup> SSR, V 13, 14 March 1848; SSR, S 17, 17 September 1850.

<sup>8</sup> *SFP*, 29 July 1841.

<sup>9</sup> *SFP*, 26 September 1851.

<sup>10</sup> HENRY KEPPEL (1809-1904). Commanded H.M.S. *Dido*, China station,



hour to the west of Singapore town and reported its advantages to the admiralty in 1848.<sup>11</sup> But the report met with no response from the admiralty and the proposal languished.

In 1852, in face of rumours and fears of a European war, Blundell, as acting Governor, asked Calcutta to reconsider the question of fortifying Singapore, and the following year Lieutenant Yule of the Bengal Engineers was sent to draw up a new scheme of defence.<sup>12</sup> Yule, thinking Lake and Best had been over-enthusiastic, did not favour any expensive attempt to make Singapore impregnable, but suggested how a few guns could be placed to the best advantage to protect the town and shipping against a sudden attack by one or two warships.<sup>13</sup>

By that time the merchants' indifference was giving way to fear that Singapore's prosperity would make her a major point of attack in a war between European powers, and there were several moments of panic during the Crimean War for fear the Russian navy might make a surprise attack on the port.<sup>14</sup> The Chinese riots of 1854 increased the alarm. The European merchants had goods worth about \$1,000,000 in their Singapore godowns, and Butterworth appealed for help to the naval commander-in-chief of the East India and China station, 'Singapore's importance in a commercial point is very great and its loss would be to us not only great but a disgrace.'<sup>15</sup> No Russian attack materialized but anxiety persisted even when the Crimean War came to an end. The merchants were conscious of the power of the Chinese secret societies, they were beginning to realize that cheap convict labour was being recruited at the cost of flooding the settlement with dangerous criminals, that pirate activity was increasing, and that international peace could not last for ever. Singapore was incapable of warding off

1841; co-operated with Sir James Brooke in suppressing pirates in Sarawak, 1843; commanded H.M.S. *Macedon* in Borneo waters; returned to Britain, 1851; China station, 1856-7; K.C.B. 1857; vice admiral, 1864; commander-in-chief China station, 1866; admiral, 1869. *DNB*, Supp. 1901-11, pp. 393-4.

<sup>11</sup> H. Keppel, *A Sailor's Life under Four Sovereigns* (London, 1899), ii, 77; V. Stuart, *The Beloved Little Admiral* (London, 1968), pp. 82, 112; *SFP*, 24 August 1849.

<sup>12</sup> SSR, S 20, Items 68, 77.

<sup>13</sup> SSR, S 21, Items 44, 51.

<sup>14</sup> *ST*, 23 August, 20 September, 18 October, 6 December 1853, 10, 21 March, 11 April 1854; *SFP*, 24 February, 14 April 1854.

<sup>15</sup> SSR, V 18, pp. 320-1; *SFP*, 14 April 1854; *ST*, 27 June 1854.

a surprise attack by an isolated enemy warship, which might blast the heart out of the town before the inhabitants were even aware that war had been declared in Europe.

In 1856 Blundell appealed to India to sanction the construction of a place of refuge and defensive works for Singapore. The Directors were opposed to increasing the military force in Singapore but agreed to construct a citadel as a refuge for the European population in the event of a local rebellion. Plans were drawn up to build permanent barracks to house the Madras troops, who had hitherto been prone to sickness in their swampy cantonment of temporary huts, and it was agreed to send a company of European artillery to Singapore once barracks were available. Permission was given to build a new commissariat and arsenal, for at that time arms, ammunition and supplies were stored in private houses in the centre of town, which could be destroyed by one shot from the sea. In addition, two gunboats were to be sent to Singapore to protect the harbour and put down local pirates.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately the discussions about improving Singapore's defences coincided with a time of retrenchment and reorganization in the Indian public works department and of shortage of convict labour in the Straits, and it appeared at the beginning of 1857 as if the military works would be postponed indefinitely.

Troubles in China, India and the Straits Settlements themselves in 1857 accentuated the growing fears of the European community. In March 1857 the commander of the troops warned Blundell of the 'total insecurity' of the unprotected dwelling houses, which were still being used as arsenal and commissariat in Singapore, because he feared all the munitions and supplies could easily be seized by hostile mobs.<sup>17</sup> Blundell was forced to commandeer the jail for his arsenal and the Chinese pauper hospital for barracks because of the pressing demands of the China war.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> SSR, S 23, Items 99, 120, 162, 172, 187, 199, 254, 256; SSR, S 26, 21 April 1856; India to Directors, 3 July 1856, IO, Letters from India and Bengal, vol. 104; P.W.D. military narratives for first half 1856, SSR, X 26, Collections 17, 18, pp. 100-3, 103-4; SSR, S 25, Item 28; SSR, R 30, pp. 267-9.

<sup>17</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 151.

<sup>18</sup> SSR, R 31, pp. 139-46, 276; SSR, V 22, pp. 283-5; SSR, S 25, Items 139, 156, 161.

In 1858 Captain Collyer of the Madras Engineers arrived to draw up plans for military works, including a citadel. Blundell at first welcomed the appointment, hoping that Collyer would create an efficient public works department.<sup>19</sup> In Penang Collyer merely suggested repairing Fort Cornwallis.<sup>20</sup> In Malacca he warned it would cost about Rs. 75,000 to make the town defensible against an internal rising or external attack, and Blundell considered this expense would not be justified in 'a place without trade or harbour', which no-one would be likely to attack.<sup>21</sup>

The main part of Collyer's task related to Singapore, where, like his predecessors, he was appalled at the lack of defence. He produced a voluminous report, in which he recommended constructing extensive fortifications on Government Hill overlooking the town and the harbour, with an arsenal, workshops, commissariat, powder house and barracks for two companies of European artillery. He proposed erecting smaller forts on other hills surrounding the town and building a refuge area at the foot of Government Hill, enclosing the government offices, the court house, the church and the town hall, turning the whole area into a quasi-military cantonment. Collyer considered that the navy would always have to be the main defence against external attack and he submitted another long report on the sea coast defences of Singapore island. Concluding that Raffles had sited Singapore town in the wrong place, Collyer was tempted to advise constructing a naval base at the eastern end of the island, connected with the town by a railway and canal. Since the town was so built up, however, he admitted that New Harbour might be the most practical location for a naval base, and he advised cutting a canal from New Harbour to the town. In addition he planned a long line of shore batteries with forts on the islands commanding New Harbour.<sup>22</sup>

While the officer commanding the troops in the Straits gave general support to Collyer's plans,<sup>23</sup> Blundell was stunned by the proposals, which went far beyond his initial scheme to provide a simple place of refuge. He warned Calcutta that the

<sup>19</sup> SSR, S 25, Items 266, 278; SSR, R 33, pp. 215-19.

<sup>20</sup> SSR, X 28, Collection 6, pp. 52-5.

<sup>21</sup> SSR, W 27, Item 231A.

<sup>22</sup> SSR, R 33, pp. 145-62.

<sup>23</sup> SSR, W 27, Items 227, 229.

cost of fortifying Government Hill would be prohibitive, and the conversion of Singapore into 'a great military fortress' might have a disastrous effect on her trade. 'A perfectly free port and a military fortress seem in a great measure to be incompatible', he declared.<sup>24</sup> Calcutta was also taken aback at Collyer's ambitious schemes, which he was ordered to modify. Collyer was most reluctant to do this. He had already demolished the old Government House and levelled off the top of the hill to make way for new fortifications, and he argued that Singapore's position was endangered by the strong naval force maintained by the French in the East.<sup>25</sup>

The government of India was concerned not only about the initial expense of building the defence works Collyer recommended but also about the long-term cost of manning them. In March 1859 the adjutant general of the army in Madras warned Calcutta, 'It is positively mischievous and a waste of public money to provide extensive fortifications and a heavy armament unless full provision is also made for furnishing an adequate garrison', and he suggested sending to Singapore four complete companies of European artillery and two full regiments of infantry, one European and one Indian.<sup>26</sup> The military command in Calcutta supported his view, particularly as Singapore was a healthy station for European troops and increasing in importance as a port and a link in the chain of communications with China and Australia.<sup>27</sup>

As a soldier, Cavenagh took a deeper personal interest in the question of fortifications than his predecessor, and shortly after his arrival in 1859 he prepared a detailed report advising that Singapore should be considered as a military post as well as a commercial entrepôt and urging that a European corps be posted there immediately.<sup>28</sup> By that time the India and colonial offices were discussing the transfer of the Straits Settlements to colonial rule and neither was willing to consider detailed defence schemes.

<sup>24</sup> SSR, R 33, pp. 187-206.

<sup>25</sup> SSR, W 29, Item 66; SSR, W 31, Item 471.

<sup>26</sup> India to Secretary of State, 29 July 1863, CO 273/6.

<sup>27</sup> Fort William military consultation June 1859, nos. 443, 444, in India to Secretary of State, 29 July 1863, CO 273/6.

<sup>28</sup> SSR, R 36, p. 33; PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, pp. 610-11.

Collyer's fortress on the former Government Hill was completed in 1860 and named Fort Canning. Cavenagh considered it a first-class field fortification but stressed that it could only guard Singapore for a short time against a hostile squadron until the British navy came to the rescue.<sup>29</sup> The merchants did not share Cavenagh's admiration for these military works. Ships could come near enough to destroy Singapore town without coming within range of the guns at Fort Canning. As a refuge in time of riot Fort Canning was useless, because it had no water supply. Indeed it was said that the only water in the fort was to be found in the magazines of the guns, in one of which fish several inches long had been caught.<sup>30</sup> Fort Fullerton at the mouth of the Singapore river, the now completed battery left half constructed since the 1820s, was incapable of doing much damage to enemy shipping but was likely merely to draw ships' fire into the centre of the town, and Collyer himself admitted the fort would have to be abandoned in face of attack.<sup>31</sup> The merchants were worried too about the cost of manning the fortifications.<sup>32</sup> The most immediate complaint was that Collyer had monopolized the convict labour force since August 1858,<sup>33</sup> and by the end of 1860 all other public works in Singapore were at a standstill. The whole of the 1861-2 public works budget was earmarked for constructing barracks for European troops and repairing and completing the military works already sanctioned.<sup>34</sup> Labour costs soared, while the prospect of stocking the big commissariat depot threatened to send the price of food rocketing.<sup>35</sup> Then in May 1861 the secretary of state for India ordered a stop to all military construction work in Singapore until the transfer question was settled.<sup>36</sup>

Nearly three years later when Sir Hercules Robinson was sent to report on the general state of the Straits Settlements,

<sup>29</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 144-5, 149-50, 199-201, 226-9, 256, 287-90; SSR, R 37, pp. 55-62; O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), p. 283.

<sup>30</sup> ST, 13 June 1862; 'Delta', SFP, 24 July 1862.

<sup>31</sup> SSR, R 39, p. 288.

<sup>32</sup> SFP, 19 July, 6 December 1860.

<sup>33</sup> *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1858-9*; PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, p. 614.

<sup>34</sup> SSR, W 36, Item 319.

<sup>35</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 86-7; SFP, 10 January 1861; ST, 16 January 1861.

<sup>36</sup> Secretary of State to India, 2 May 1861, CO 273/5.

the war office deputed Colonel Freeth of the Royal Engineers to report at the same time on the defences of Singapore and whether the settlements could pay for their own protection.<sup>37</sup> While the report satisfied the war office, it did not share the high opinion held by Sir John Lawrence, Governor General of India, of the strategic value of Singapore as a counter-weight to growing French power in Cochin China.<sup>38</sup>

There was no fear of the French among the Singapore merchant community at that time. Pro-French feeling was very strong in Singapore during the second Anglo-Chinese war when the French and British were allies,<sup>39</sup> and at first most of the merchants saw French expansion in Cochin China not as a threat but rather as a guarantee of peace.<sup>40</sup> Even news of the French seizure of Pulau Condore, still nominally a British possession, took second place in the *Straits Times* in December 1861 to a leader on amateur theatricals.<sup>41</sup> Later on, while critical of the destruction caused by the French in Cochin China and anxious lest the damage should spread to Siam and disrupt the profitable Singapore/Siam trade, the British merchants in Singapore were complacent about the prospects of an international war.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, in their desire to save revenue, Crawford and other former Straits residents in London urged the colonial office in 1865 that the Straits needed only a force of perhaps 200 European troops, with a small body of Indians and Malays, supported by the European Volunteer Corps, in order to 'give confidence to peaceable inhabitants and . . . give security against lawlessness to property'.<sup>43</sup> Cavenagh and the senior military officers were far more worried about the concentration of French troops in Saigon, and Collyer, in submitting elaborate plans for 1862-3, feared that Singapore would fall at the first attack in any Anglo-French war.<sup>44</sup> The Governor General of India urged in 1864 that French activities in Indo-

<sup>37</sup> SSR, W 48, Items 231, 272.

<sup>38</sup> Lawrence to Wood, 19 September 1864, CO 273/6.

<sup>39</sup> ST, 22 April 1856.

<sup>40</sup> SFP, 13 January 1859, 7 February 1861.

<sup>41</sup> ST, 28 December 1861.

<sup>42</sup> ST, 31 August, 30 November, 7 December 1861, 1 March, 26 April 1862.

<sup>43</sup> PP, 1866, C[3672], lii, p. 722.

<sup>44</sup> Cavenagh to India, 11 January 1860, SSR, R 36; SSR, W 40, Items 185, 315; SSR, V 33, pp. 423-6.

China should make Singapore rather than Hong Kong the strategic centre for the British empire in the Far East,<sup>45</sup> but the British government did not accept this argument.

While the transfer negotiations dragged on in London, hinging largely on defence expenditure, the barracks and other military works in Singapore remained half-finished. The officer in charge of the troops had warned the Madras military authorities in 1858 that there were insufficient men to man the guns in Singapore.<sup>46</sup> In 1861 the Singapore chamber of commerce complained about Singapore's defencelessness, with no warship in the harbour for weeks on end and the garrison so weak and disease-ridden that it was doubtful if it could muster a hundred fit men to deal with any disturbance.<sup>47</sup> Cavenagh could make only small improvements, such as reducing the sickness rate and making the force more efficient by stricter attention to the diet and comfort of the troops.<sup>48</sup> But he could do nothing to change the unsatisfactory basis of defence. After all the expense and building activity, John Cameron wrote in 1864, 'Singapore is in no condition of defence whatever, and the town might be shelled and knocked to pieces with impunity by a vessel mounting modernly heavy ordnance.'<sup>49</sup> This view was borne out by expert opinion, for in March that same year the officer commanding the troops in the Straits reported confidentially to Madras that the defences of Singapore were so defective they could meet neither land nor sea attack.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence to Wood, 19 September 1864, CO 273/6.

<sup>46</sup> Officer Commanding Straits troops to Madras, 25 August 1858, Cavenagh to India, 18 July 1861, in Military Proceedings, October 1861, CO 273/6.

<sup>47</sup> SSR, W 40, Item 207.

<sup>48</sup> India to Wood, 29 July 1863, CO 273/6.

<sup>49</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865), pp. 245-6.

<sup>50</sup> Lawrence to Wood, 19 September 1864, CO 273/6.

## CHAPTER VII

### Piracy

WHILE the merchant community in the Straits were continually uneasy about internal security and sometimes feared for their safety from external attack, it was piracy on the seas which was the greatest and most constant threat to their lives, property and commerce. Encouraged by the dislocation of the old political and economic patterns of the region by European encroachment, and nourished in turn by the expanding trade fostered by the European settlements, by the early 1830s piracy was increasing in southeast Asian waters at a time when it had been effectively checked elsewhere in the world.

Most rampant of all were the pirates from the Sulu archipelago, and the Illanun pirates, who originated in Mindanao and whose fleets of large, well-equipped prahus made annual voyages to ravage the waters of the eastern archipelago and the Malay peninsula. Trade in the archipelago east of Singapore was prey to the Bugis, who were particularly active as pirates and slave traders, and even tried in the early days to sell slaves to the Chinese in Singapore.<sup>1</sup> The merchant, Dalton, who sailed from Singapore in a Bugis prahu in 1827 and spent a considerable time with them, considered the Bugis 'the most mercenary, bloodthirsty inhuman race in the whole [archipelago] and most deadly foes to all Europeans'.<sup>2</sup> He alleged the Bugis chiefs were engaged in systematic piracy and carrying dozens of European sailors and passengers into slavery.<sup>3</sup> Dalton claimed to have met one pirate chief who boasted he had killed twenty-seven European ships' captains with his own hands.<sup>4</sup>

The west coast of Borneo was ravaged by Dyak pirates,

<sup>1</sup> J. R. Logan, 'The Piracy and Slave Trade of the Indian Archipelago', *JIA*, iv, (1850), 144.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago and Adjacent Countries* (Singapore, 1837, reprinted London, 1968), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Moor, *Notices*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Logan, *JIA*, iv (1850), 52.



while Singapore island itself, before the founding of the British station, was part of a large-scale pirate organization under the command of the local ruler, the Temenggong. In 1818 pirates from the Riau-Lingga archipelago were organized into two fleets, one of which made regular voyages each year round the island of Java and across to southern Sumatra, with Singapore as one of its focal points.<sup>5</sup> Western ships were never attacked in the waters near to Singapore in the first few years of British occupation, but the swarms of small Asian craft coming to the port quickly attracted pirates. It was known that they were receiving information from the Temenggong, who, from his centre on the Singapore river, was in an excellent position to observe the movements of small boats.<sup>6</sup> Temenggong Abdul Rahman died in 1825 and no successor was appointed, but by the early 1830s the mantle of his authority passed to a nephew, Daing Ibrahim, whom the *Singapore Chronicle* in 1835 openly accused of controlling piracy. Lieutenant Henry James of H.M.S. *Wolf* described him as 'the chief pirate' of Singapore in 1836,<sup>7</sup> and on one occasion, Samuel Congalton, captain of the East India Company's steamship *Diana*, stormed up to Ibrahim's house and, finding him away, shook his fist and warned his womenfolk that he would thrash him if he had the opportunity.

Malay pirates sometimes operated in fleets of up to thirty prahus, with thirty-six oars apiece, banked in tiers, and armed with four-pounders, swivel guns, muskets and spears.<sup>8</sup> They often attacked sailing boats as they lay helpless during the calms which plagued shipping in the Malacca Straits. Combining piracy with fishing, they had a seasonal programme dependent on the monsoons and patterns of trade, preying on the east coast peninsular trade in April and May, generally plying among the southern islands and the creeks of Johore

<sup>5</sup> Logan, *JIA*, iii (1849), 585.

<sup>6</sup> Colonel Nahujs, 'Extracts from the Letters of Colonel Nahujs', trans. H. E. Miller, *JMBRAS*, xix, no. 2 (1941), 195.

<sup>7</sup> H. James, *Life of Commander Henry James, R.N.*, ed. E. G. Festing (London, 1899), p. 265.

<sup>8</sup> 'Oriental Pirates', *United Service Journal*, xix, pt 3 (1835), 31-42; 'The Malay Pirates; with a Sketch of their System and Territory', *United Service Journal*, xxi pt 1 (1837), 458-65; James, *Life*, p. 262.

between June and September, cruising along the Malacca Straits between October and January, and fishing, gathering seaweed and stocking up for new expeditions in February and March.<sup>9</sup>

The unrestricted trade in arms and ammunition in the Straits ports stimulated piracy, from which some Singapore merchants derived considerable indirect profit. A large part of Singapore's arms trade went to the Bugis, and the big Chinese community who dominated the market in slaves, stolen boats and goods in Endau, then part of Pahang, kept up a regular trade with their compatriots in Singapore for the supply of powder and firearms for the pirates.<sup>10</sup>

Legitimate trade was gravely threatened along the east coast of the Malay peninsula in the early 1830s. Apart from pirate settlements, the off-shore islands were uninhabited. Tioman, formerly a rich source of birds' nests, was raided by pirates about 1830, its population taken into slavery and the island left deserted.<sup>11</sup> Pulau Aur, off the Johore coast, was a centre for restocking pirate expeditions and a flourishing mart for slaves, loot and stolen boats.<sup>12</sup> Pulau Tinggi was the haunt of *orang laut*, sea gypsies, who were on the look-out particularly for the small, unarmed Cochin Chinese boats.<sup>13</sup> The biggest slave mart in the region was Endau where the Illanuns brought in captives from Borneo and Java for sale as labourers for Pahang's gold and tin mines.<sup>14</sup> In 1831 a group of *nakodahs* complained that pirates off Pulau Tinggi had set up a virtual blockade of the east coast trade, and if such piracy continued they would have to abandon trading from Singapore.<sup>15</sup> However well-armed, the *sampan-pukats* could not withstand the attacks of pirate fleets. In October 1832 a Singapore-Chinese-owned *sampan-pukat*, sailing to Pahang with a valuable cargo of opium, raw silk, piece-goods, rice and tobacco, and manned by

<sup>9</sup> T. J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca* (London, 1839, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), i, 38-9.

<sup>10</sup> J. T. Thomson, 'Description of the Eastern Coast of Johore and Pahang, and Adjacent Islands', *JIA*, v (1851), 137.

<sup>11</sup> J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, v (1851), 136.

<sup>12</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Pulo Aur', *JIA*, iv (1850), 194.

<sup>13</sup> J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, v (1851), 140.

<sup>14</sup> J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, v (1851), 137; Logan, *JIA*, iii (1849), 585-7; Logan, *JIA*, iv (1850), 194.

<sup>15</sup> Logan, *JIA*, iv (1850), 145.

thirty-three sailors armed with seven small guns, was overwhelmed by a fleet of fifteen or sixteen pirate boats.<sup>16</sup> Traders found it increasingly difficult to obtain opium and other goods on credit in Singapore for the east coast trade, because they were so often lost to pirates.

In Singapore vessels were attacked within view of the sea-front by pirates who were openly trading in arms and loot in the town. In 1832 and again in 1833 a group of Chinese merchants fitted out four large, well-armed boats to patrol the approaches to Singapore harbour. In November 1833 pirates attacked the Company's gunboat off the Kedah coast and put her to flight, and in December 1835 pirates kidnapped fifty people in a slave-raiding expedition along the coast of Province Wellesley and in Penang harbour itself.<sup>17</sup>

Some Chinese merchants of Singapore petitioned the Governor General for help in 1832, but the European merchants were reluctant to submit a formal petition for fear that the cost of government action against pirates might bring increased taxes. Nor in fact was there much prospect of getting help from India at that time. The Calcutta authorities were well aware of the dangers,<sup>18</sup> but had neither the means nor the inclination to take any action. The East India Company had a small navy based on Bombay, and a subordinate Bengal marine from which the Straits Settlements were supposed to derive their protection. Bentinck's economy campaign was at its height, and he had little interest in protecting the Straits Settlements or the China trade, which was obviously about to be lost to the Company. He was proposing to abolish the Company's navy,<sup>19</sup> not to extend its commitments in southeast Asia.

The Straits Settlements also lacked the legal means to punish effectively any pirates who were caught, because the charter of justice did not provide for admiralty jurisdiction. Pirates had to be taken to Calcutta for trial, and it was common practice among ships' captains to inflict summary justice by throwing captured pirates overboard.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147, 152, 160.

<sup>18</sup> NAI, Secret Consultations, 16 September 1831, 1-3; 16 December 1831, 1-3; 12 March 1832, 20.

<sup>19</sup> C. R. Low, *History of the Indian Navy 1613-1863* (London, 1877), ii, 12.

<sup>20</sup> James, *Life*, p. 261.

In 1835 Bonham complained to Calcutta that piracy was threatening the Asian trade of the Straits Settlements and the archipelago with 'total annihilation',<sup>21</sup> and he pleaded for a British naval vessel to be sent on permanent patrol in the Straits of Malacca. By that time the prospects for obtaining help from India were brighter. With the renewal of the Company's charter in 1833 for a further twenty years and the restoration of its financial solvency by the end of Bentinck's regime in 1835, the obsession with economy died down for a few years, and Calcutta was more ready to listen to pleas for help. In addition, the loss of the Company's China trade monopoly meant that from 1834 the British navy began gradually to take over responsibility for protecting British trade in the Far East, although until 1841 the Governor General in Council remained the centre of authority in the East India station.<sup>22</sup>

When the European merchants finally met together in 1835 and decided to petition the Company to take action against piracy, and at the same time to appeal to the crown to grant admiralty jurisdiction to enable the Straits courts to try cases of piracy, their pleas met with a ready response. Letters patent granting admiralty jurisdiction to the Straits courts were issued in 1837.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile in 1836 the sloop H.M.S. *Wolf* was despatched to the Straits to co-operate with the Company's steamer, *Diana*, to sweep the seas free of pirates. The *Wolf* and the *Diana* brought terror to the pirates who were unaccustomed to steamers, and their campaigns changed the situation dramatically. By the end of 1836 there were no pirates left in the waters round Singapore,<sup>24</sup> and the two ships were wreaking havoc among pirate fleets further afield. In May 1838 the *Diana*, operating off the coast of Trengganu, with a small complement of three officers and thirty Malay sailors, annihilated a fleet of

<sup>21</sup> SSR, R 3, 25 May 1835.

<sup>22</sup> G. Fox, *British Admirals and Chinese Pirates, 1832-69* (London, 1940), pp. 47-49.

<sup>23</sup> Petition in SSR, R 3, 25 May 1835; Correspondence between Singapore merchants, East India and China Association, and Board of Trade in *SFP*, 2 February 1837; J. W. N. Kyshe, *Cases Heard and Determined in H.M. Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements, 1808-84* (Singapore, 1885), vol. i, p. lxxx.

<sup>24</sup> *SFP*, 5 January 1837.

six large Illanun pirate boats manned by some three hundred and sixty men.<sup>25</sup> In June 1838 the Singapore merchants gave a public dinner in honour of the *Wolf's* captain, who was presented with an address and a sword by the chamber of commerce. He also received 100 guineas, and £20 a head for each pirate killed or captured, but the unfortunate captain of the *Diana* and his men, who were deemed merely to be doing their duty, received no reward or acknowledgment.<sup>26</sup>

These measures gave only temporary relief, and within a few years the position deteriorated. In 1837 the Temenggong settled a group of *orang laut* on the eastern coast of Singapore island, where they preyed on the defenceless Cochin Chinese shipping. In the early 1840s a collection of boats anchored on a sandbank in the middle of the estuary of the Singapore river, a few yards from the shore, housed a community which was openly receiving pirates' loot.<sup>27</sup> In 1843 the *Singapore Free Press* accused the Temenggong Ibrahim of controlling all the pirates in the neighbourhood of Singapore, and urged that his allowance be cut off and put towards the upkeep of government gunboats if he refused to co-operate with the authorities to put down piracy.<sup>28</sup> Bonham realized he could not combat piracy effectively without the Temenggong's help, since Ibrahim was the only influential Malay leader in Singapore, but the assistance Ibrahim gave the Governor was nominal, and behind a façade of friendship he continued throughout Bonham's time to conduct his piratical ventures.

Twenty years earlier Raffles had come to the conclusion that piracy could only be checked by a co-ordinated effort between the Dutch, the British and the native states. Fullerton too considered that piracy could only be suppressed by a combination of physical force and the co-operation of local chiefs, and in 1827 he had argued that to achieve this the

<sup>25</sup> Governor to India, 15 June 1838, SSR, R 5; J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1864), pp. 217-25.

<sup>26</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, pp. 219, 222; James, *Life*, passim; 'A Midshipman's Reminiscences', *United Service Journal*, xx, pt 1 (1836), 490-7; *SFP*, 5 January 1837.

<sup>27</sup> C. Dyce, unpublished MS, Singapore, circa 1846 (attached to folio of pictures in University of Singapore Art Museum).

<sup>28</sup> *SFP*, 25 May 1843.

British would have to extend their influence over the Malay states.<sup>29</sup>

To curb pirates effectively meant flushing out their haunts throughout southeast Asia and this involved co-operation with other colonial powers. The Dutch had been active since the beginning of the eighteenth century in attempting to curb piracy in the East Indies, and when they reoccupied their possessions after the Napoleonic war they embarked on a vigorous campaign.<sup>30</sup> Under the terms of the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824, the British and Dutch agreed to co-operate in the suppression of piracy, but nothing came of this until 1836 when Calcutta appointed Bonham, as Resident Councillor of Singapore, to be commissioner for piracy on a joint Anglo-Dutch commission, which set out to destroy pirates and to negotiate with local chiefs.<sup>31</sup> Together the British and Dutch wiped out pirate strongholds, including a major centre at Galang in June 1836. An expedition was made up the east coast of Malaya, Endau was destroyed, and the Bendahara of Pahang was forced to give up many slaves who had been brought to Pahang for sale.<sup>32</sup> In 1837 the *Diana* joined with the Dutch in a campaign against pirates in Lingga.<sup>33</sup> But by 1838 the Straits authorities were becoming suspicious of their Dutch allies, fearing that the Dutch were using the suppression of piracy as an excuse for extending their own political influence.<sup>34</sup> Anglo-Dutch co-operation petered out, but the Dutch went ahead on their own to make arrangements with the sultan of Lingga, which had some effect in curbing piracy in neighbouring waters.<sup>35</sup>

After Illanun attacks in Trengganu in 1838, Calcutta authorized Bonham to work with the royal navy against Illanun pirates. Bonham also wanted to send a warship to Sulu

<sup>29</sup> N. Tarling, 'British Policy in the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, 1824-1871', *JMBRAS*, xxx, no. 3 (1957), 45, reprinted as *British Policy in the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, 1824-71* (Kuala Lumpur, 1970).

<sup>30</sup> Logan, *JIA*, iii (1849), 629-34.

<sup>31</sup> Bengal to Governor, 4 May 1836, SSR, Z 10.

<sup>32</sup> Logan, *JIA*, iv (1850), 406-7.

<sup>33</sup> *SFP*, 20 July 1837.

<sup>34</sup> Bonham to Bengal, 21 July 1838, SSR, R 5.

<sup>35</sup> G. F. Davidson, *Trade and Travel in the Far East* (London, 1846), pp. 74-7; Tarling, *JMBRAS*, xxx, no. 3 (1957), 49, 51-2.

as a warning to the sultan,<sup>36</sup> but the Sulu and Illanun pirates had their bases in the Spanish sphere of influence, where foreign intervention was not welcomed. The Spaniards undertook their own schemes against pirates, but despite this the Sulu pirates continued to be an active menace.

The campaigns of the *Wolf* and the *Diana*, followed by the activities of the Dutch and the exploits of Captain Henry Keppel in putting down pirates in the waters of Malaya and Borneo in 1843 and 1844,<sup>37</sup> induced the Temenggong to divert his men into a new, profitable and legitimate occupation, the gutta-percha trade. Ibrahim's decision to abandon his career as a pirate produced dramatic effects. In 1845 no cases of piracy were reported in or near Singapore harbour. The Temenggong sent out his armed prahus to work with the government's gunboats in rounding up pirates, and in 1845 he made a personal visit to Pahang in the Straits government steamer to persuade the Bendahara to free Cochin Chinese traders, who had been captured by pirates. At an impressive ceremony on Government Hill the following year, the Governor presented a sword to the Temenggong in token of his vigilance in suppressing piracy. The *Straits Times*, in a scathing description of this glittering occasion, commented on the notorious pirates who appeared openly in the Temenggong's train, nudging each other and sniggering at the pious speeches which both parties were making about suppressing pirates.<sup>38</sup> Many of the European merchants considered the occasion a mockery,<sup>39</sup> but the Temenggong's decision to change his policy and co-operate with the British authorities helped to make the seas immediately round Singapore once more safe for small ships. In the middle 1840s pirate attacks were very rare near the island, and it was not uncommon for small craft to ply about unarmed.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile the vigorous campaigns of the Dutch and

<sup>36</sup> Bonham to Bengal, 2 July 1838, SSR, R 5; Bengal to Bonham, 14 October 1838, SSR, S 5.

<sup>37</sup> H. Keppel, *The Expedition to Borneo of H.M.S. 'Dido' for the Suppression of Piracy*, 3rd edn (London, 1847).

<sup>38</sup> *ST*, 5 September 1846.

<sup>39</sup> W. H. Read, *Play and Politics: Reminiscences of Malaya by an Old Resident* (London, 1901), p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> *SFP*, 1 January 1846; Davidson, *Trade and Travel*, p. 302.

the Spaniards, and the expeditions of Sir James Brooke, who with the help of the royal navy effectively crushed the notorious Sarebas and Sekarran pirates in 1849,<sup>41</sup> dealt a heavy blow to the Malay, Dyak, Illanun and Sulu pirates.

All these measures brought only temporary respite. To suppress piracy completely required keeping a permanent naval force in the Straits Settlements, which the Company could not afford to do, and the Singapore merchants were disappointed when Hong Kong became the centre of the royal navy's operations instead of Singapore at the end of the first opium war. The Company continued to be parsimonious in its naval provisions for the Straits Settlements. A new steamer, the *Hooghly*, was sent to Singapore in 1846, but her main function was to transport the Governor and Recorder between the three stations. She survived almost until the end of the Indian regime, slow and cumbersome, the butt of the merchants and the press, who dismissed her as 'no good for anything but creeping up and down the Straits'.<sup>42</sup> She broke down frequently, and on one occasion in 1851 at a critical time during the junk season she had to be sent off to Calcutta for repairs.<sup>43</sup> There were also two small sailing gunboats, one stationed at Penang and the other at Malacca. None of these could give chase to pirates in the maze of shallow creeks and mangrove swamps which fringe the coasts of most of Singapore, Johore, Selangor and Perak.

A new menace arose in the early 1850s in the form of large-scale Chinese piracy in the Far East, which the Chinese imperial government was too weak to suppress. The British navy destroyed the main Chinese pirate fleet in 1849, but new fleets assembled, and with the crumbling of the Taiping rebellion and increasing disorder in southern China, piracy reached a new peak.<sup>44</sup> By 1852 Chinese pirates brought trade between Cochin China and Singapore to a standstill. They attacked large junks as readily as smaller craft and in 1851 drove the Formosa junks away to Hong Kong instead of Singapore.<sup>45</sup> In 1853 Chinese

<sup>41</sup> 'Destruction of the Fleet of the Sakarebas and Sakarran Pirates by the Expedition from Sarawak on the Night of 31 July 1849', *JIA*, iii (1849), 589-93.

<sup>42</sup> *SFP*, 21 January 1853.

<sup>43</sup> *ST*, 8 April 1851.

<sup>44</sup> Fox, *British Admirals*, pp. 86-123; *SFP*, 3 January 1851; *ST*, 29 April 1851.

<sup>45</sup> *SFP*, 29 October 1852.



pirates were using Singapore port openly, stocking their boats, collecting information and selling their plunder.<sup>46</sup>

So many valuable junks were looted in the China Sea and the Gulf of Siam in the early months of 1853 that the Singapore chamber of commerce appealed to the rear admiral in charge of the China station to protect trade, and to the Governor to apply to India for legislation to permit the arrest of suspected pirates. The royal navy threw the responsibility on to the government of India, who were hard pressed by the second Anglo-Burmese war and even less sympathetic than usual to requests for help. Nor would Calcutta consider passing any law to permit the detention of suspicious junks. The Indian authorities were alarmed to learn that the Governor in Singapore had on occasion commissioned the royal navy to send armed cruisers against pirates in areas outside his jurisdiction, and were more worried about the political complications this irregular situation might cause than about the damaging effects of piracy on trade.<sup>47</sup> The next year pirate attacks became so frequent that the Singapore press alleged only half of the Asian craft from the eastern archipelago ever reached Singapore.<sup>48</sup> As the China junk season began, heavily armed junks with large crews and carrying no cargo began to leave Singapore openly every day. They were obviously bent on piracy, but there was no legal means of stopping them.<sup>49</sup> By the beginning of 1855 the Singapore merchants were becoming desperate about Chinese piracy, while local piracy was reviving along the west coast of the Malay peninsula as disorder increased in Perak and Selangor. Even the crossing between Penang and Province Wellesley was jeopardized by pirates.<sup>50</sup>

The much sought-after admiralty jurisdiction granted in 1837 had accomplished little, since it provided for charges to be brought only against piracy committed within three miles of the settlements. Despite the fact that thousands of cases of piracy were reported, only seventy-four civil suits and seventy-nine criminal cases of piracy were brought to court in the

<sup>46</sup> *ST*, 8 April 1851; *SFP*, 29 October 1852; H. St John, *The Indian Archipelago* (London, 1853), ii, 352.

<sup>47</sup> *SSR*, S 20, Items 90, 97; *SSR*, S 21, Item 45; *SFP*, 29 July 1853.

<sup>48</sup> *SFP*, 17 March 1854.

<sup>49</sup> *SFP*, 17, 31 March 1854.

<sup>50</sup> *SFP*, 13 January 1854.

twenty years following the grant of admiralty jurisdiction.<sup>51</sup> An act passed by the British parliament in 1849 to allow admiralty courts in British colonies to try cases of piracy on the high seas was not extended to India until 1860.<sup>52</sup>

A public meeting held in Singapore in May 1855 decided to send memorials to the Governor General, the naval commander-in-chief and both houses of the British parliament, and resolved that if the authorities did not take vigorous steps to offer protection against pirates, the merchants would hire a ship to escort junks in convoy.<sup>53</sup>

Blundell, newly appointed as Governor, submitted to Calcutta a bill of his own, which provided for a vessel 'uncumbered with naval discipline and etiquette', whose proceedings 'should not be hampered with common law definitions of piracy' and whose commander should have the right to stop and search all Asian vessels and send suspicious ones to the nearest Straits port, without liability at law for compensation in the event of error. Nothing could be more calculated to alarm Calcutta, and Blundell was asked to devise some measure 'of a less arbitrary and exceptional character'.<sup>54</sup> He then asked Calcutta to send more gunboats and to restrict the sale of arms and ammunition. In the meantime he ordered suspicious junks to be detained and searched in Singapore harbour. This action angered Calcutta, who forbade him to exceed the law in this way and refused to consider restricting the arms trade, but recommended to the Directors that gunboats should be allocated to Singapore.<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile the Straits piracy petition roused some sympathy in the British parliament, where the government spokesman admitted in February 1856 that provisions for suppressing piracy in the area were inadequate. In jubilation the Singapore merchants took this confession as an indication that the admiralty was prepared to increase the naval forces in south-east Asia. At the same time the Directors showed more understanding than Calcutta of Blundell's difficulties and instructed

<sup>51</sup> SSR, S 23, Items 5, 20.

<sup>52</sup> SSR, S 28, Item 230.

<sup>53</sup> ST, 29 May 1855.

<sup>54</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 59.

<sup>55</sup> IO, India Political Proceedings, 3 September 1856, Range 203, vol. 29, nos. 51, 54, 58; SSR, S 23, Item 143; India to Directors, 3 July 1856, IO, Letters from India and Bengal, vol. 104; Fox, *British Admirals*, p. 149.

the government of India to devise legislation to deal with pirates in the Straits. In September 1856 the Indian legislative council began debating a bill to give the Governor powers of search, and Calcutta promised to send two new steam gunboats then under construction.<sup>56</sup>

The Straits merchants' optimism was short-lived. In 1856 the newspapers reported cases of piracy in nearly every issue, and the danger grew worse the following year. The outbreak of the Anglo-Chinese war and the consequent massing of British naval craft in Hong Kong drove pirates south to the comparative safety of the archipelago,<sup>57</sup> and after the despatch to Hong Kong and Sarawak of the few ships which were usually stationed in the Straits, the position early in 1857 seemed desperate. The Straits piracy bill, which was finally passed late in 1857, proved to be inadequate. While it gave the right of search and imposed a sanction if evidence was found, it did not solve the problem of proving intent.<sup>58</sup>

Petty piracy by Malays and *orang laut* troubled the waters round Singapore island and preyed on the profitable pepper and gambier trade with Riau, while Chinese pirates operated freely in the Gulf of Siam from established bases along the coast of Cochin China and killed the trade between that country and Singapore.<sup>59</sup> In 1859 the *Hooghly*, repulsed in an encounter with two pirate junks, had to retreat to Singapore, and the press urged that she should be kept out of reach of pirates for fear they might capture her.<sup>60</sup> In 1860 Malay pirates from Riau-Lingga infested the waters round Singapore and attacked shipping in the harbour itself.<sup>61</sup> The Illanun fleet,

<sup>56</sup> *Hansard*, 18 February 1856, 3rd ser. cxi, 912-14; Directors to India, 16 August, 6 September 1854, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 88, 2, 28 January 1857, vol. 102; SSR, S 24, Item 76; SSR, S 23, Item 166; Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. ii (1856), 539, 567-8, 581, 596; *ST*, 7 October 1856; *SFP*, 24 April, 22 May, 9 October 1856.

<sup>57</sup> *SFP*, 12 March 1857.

<sup>58</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 170; SSR, R 31, p. 126; SSR, R 33, pp. 240-1; SSR, R 35, pp. 300-1; Directors to India, 13 January 1858, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 110; O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), pp. 301-2; Act XII of 1857.

<sup>59</sup> *SFP*, 9 June 1859; *ST*, 11 June 1859.

<sup>60</sup> *SFP*, 28 April 1859.

<sup>61</sup> SSR, U 40, pp. 266-7; SSR, U 41, pp. 101-3; SSR, V 31, pp. 27-30; *SFP*, 27 December 1860, 7 February 1861.

recovering from the blows of the previous decade, sailed unmolested round Borneo in 1860, wreaking havoc.<sup>62</sup>

The growing Siamese trade opened up as a result of Bowring's treaty of 1855 provided a new source of pirate attack, particularly on the west coast of Siam. This increased with the expansion of trade with Burma which followed the second Anglo-Burmese war. Junk Ceylon and Takuapa on the west coast of Siam were the main pirate centres, and by 1858 pirate junks patrolled the waters off Takuapa regularly and many traders from Burma feared to come south to Penang. The British commissioner of Tenasserim supported appeals from traders for the British to annex Junk Ceylon or Takuapa if the local Siamese authorities would not deal with pirates.<sup>63</sup>

Legislation could only be effective if it was backed by gunboats, but Calcutta made no improvements in the naval force allocated to the Straits Settlements in the last years of its rule. In 1860 the Governor General himself described the Indian navy as 'a service extravagant to the state, disheartening to the officers and utterly inefficient'. The force was disbanded in 1863 and the maritime defence of India was transferred to the royal navy. In the economy campaign which preceded this change an attempt was made to reduce the number of gunboats in the Straits, which Cavenagh successfully resisted. In 1861 two small steamers, the *Tonze* and the *Mohr*, were transferred from China to the Straits to replace two of the settlements' three antiquated sailing gunboats, and in 1862 the *Hooghly* was condemned and replaced by a more reliable iron steamer, the *Pluto*.<sup>64</sup> These three small gunboats constituted the whole of what John Cameron described in 1864 as the Straits government's 'lilliputian fleet'.<sup>65</sup>

At the beginning of 1866 the *Singapore Free Press* complained about Chinese pirates plundering ships 'within sound of our

<sup>62</sup> J. D. Ross, *Sixty Years: Life and Adventure in the Far East* (London, 1911), i, 25-9; SSR, W 39, Item 120.

<sup>63</sup> SSR, W 26, Item 125; SSR, W 27, Item 183; SSR, V 24, pp. 277-80.

<sup>64</sup> SSR, R 37, pp. 209-11; SSR, R 38, pp. 2-4, 289-98; SSR, R 47, pp. 13-19; NAI, Marine Consultations, 10 February 1860, 13-15; *Annual Reports on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2 and 1862-3*.

<sup>65</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), pp. 251-2.

guns',<sup>66</sup> but the hey-day of piracy in southeast Asian waters was nearly over. In May 1862 the Sarawak steamer *Rainbow* annihilated the Illanun fleet.<sup>67</sup> Treaties made by the western powers with China in the 1860s provided for co-operation to wipe out piracy, and the British devised local measures to control shipping in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong 'Ordinance for the suppression of piracy', which was passed in 1866, was the first real blow delivered against Chinese piracy.<sup>68</sup> With the end of civil war in Pahang, the extension of Dutch power in Sumatra from 1858 onwards and the spread of British influence in the west coast Malay states after 1874, large-scale piracy was destined almost to die out by the mid-1870s.

<sup>66</sup> *SFP*, 18 January 1866.

<sup>67</sup> SSR, W 42, Item 191; SSR, R 41, p. 33; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 325.

<sup>68</sup> Fox, *British Admirals*, pp. 143-6, 153-4, 158-9.

## CHAPTER VIII

# The Straits Settlements and the Malay States

### THE NORTHERN STATES AND SIAM

THROUGHOUT the Indian regime in the Straits Settlements, the Calcutta authorities, the Directors, the Board of Control, and later the India office in London, maintained a policy of non-intervention in the Malay states. On the whole this policy worked effectively in the northern states of Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu but came under increasing strain in the southern states. In Malacca the Company was drawn into war in Naning, and from the middle of the nineteenth century the Straits government became involved in the political complications following the disintegration of the former Johore-Pahang-Riau-Lingga empire and in the troubles arising from the development of tin mining.

The Company's policy in northern Malaya was determined by the terms of Henry Burney's Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1826. The British acknowledged Siamese rule in Kedah and Perlis, Siam agreed not to enforce suzerainty over Selangor, and after long-drawn-out arguments over Perak, both sides agreed not to interfere in the state. The sultan of Perak was to send the *bunga mas*, or tribute of gold and silver flowers, to Bangkok only if he wished. Arrangements concerning Trengganu and Kelantan were more ambiguous. The Siamese promised not to obstruct trade there, and the British undertook not to interfere in the political affairs of the two states. Nothing was mentioned about the *bunga mas*, and the relationship between Siam and these east coast states was far from clear. Singapore merchants were concerned to foster and preserve trade with Kelantan and Trengganu, for Kelantan was the most populous and richest of the Malay states in the 1830s, but they were not otherwise

interested in the states' internal politics, and the Siamese exerted considerable influence which the population appear on the whole to have accepted as legitimate.<sup>1</sup>

The clauses about Kedah and Perak were a disappointment to Governor Fullerton and to some of the Penang merchants, who wanted to see Siamese influence removed from these states, which adjoined British territory. In 1821 the rajah of Ligor, on instructions from Bangkok, had overrun and conquered Kedah, whose ruler fled to Penang. Most of the Malay community in Penang and many British officials and merchants considered that Calcutta had a legal and moral obligation to protect the independence of Kedah, whose ruler had ceded Penang and Province Wellesley to the East India Company in return for an annual pension. The most vocal of the anti-Siamese party was John Anderson,<sup>2</sup> a senior covenanted official, who prepared a paper in 1823 in which he argued that the Company was obliged under the terms of its treaty to see that Kedah was restored to independence, and that in its own commercial interests it should abandon its policy of isolation and use its power to ensure the peace and independence of the potentially rich Malay states.<sup>3</sup>

Fullerton published Anderson's manuscript and accepted his views as the basis for his policy in resisting Siamese encroachments. The European merchants of Penang and some senior officials feared the Siamese were planning to dominate the whole peninsula. In face of rumours that they intended to invade Selangor and Perak, the Governor sent gunboats to watch the Siamese fleet and despatched Captain Henry Burney, his military secretary, to Ligor, where he succeeded in extracting a preliminary treaty by which the Siamese promised not to attack these two states and the British undertook to settle differences between them. While Burney went to Calcutta to get the treaty ratified, John Anderson was sent to Selangor and Perak, whose rulers confirmed their commercial treaties made

<sup>1</sup> C. Skinner, *The Civil War in Kelantan in 1839* (Singapore, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> JOHN ANDERSON (1795-1845). Appointed to Penang as writer 1813; Secretary to Penang government, 1827-9; retired to Britain 1829. *DIB*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> J. Anderson, *Political and Commercial Considerations Relative to the Malayan Peninsula and the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca* (Penang, 1824), reprinted in *JIA*, viii (1854), 134-57, 266-84, 365-72, and as *JMBRAS*, xxxv, no. 4 (1962).

with the Company in 1818 and settled the Bernam river as their common boundary.

The government of India approved Burney's preliminary treaty and sent him to Bangkok to settle all outstanding differences. Calcutta's main interest was to obtain commercial rights and persuade Siam that the Company, then at war with Burma, had no territorial ambitions beyond Tenasserim. Resisting Siamese ambitions in the Malay states was a secondary consideration, to be abandoned if it prejudiced the commercial arrangements. Fullerton's emphasis was different. He urged Burney to seek the restoration of the rajah of Kedah and to see that any further Siamese advances in the Malay states were checked.

Burney's failure to get the ruler of Kedah reinstated, and the ambiguous arrangements over Perak, did not please Fullerton, but by quick action, which in fact exceeded British rights under Burney's treaty, he succeeded in removing Siamese influence from Perak. When Bangkok sent an embassy to Perak soon after the treaty was signed, Fullerton despatched Captain James Low to assure the sultan of Perak that he was not obliged to send tribute to Siam. In October 1826 Low made a treaty with Perak in which the ruler agreed not to send the *bunga mas*, nor to receive embassies or bodies of Siamese troops, and in return Low promised the British would protect Perak's independence. The rajah then expelled his pro-Siamese officials, offered to cede the island of Pangkor and the coastal area of the Dindings to Penang, wanted to hoist the British flag and wrote to Fullerton, 'I regard Perak as under the superintendence or in the safe keeping of the Honourable East India Company, which must protect it and superintend its government as if it were an English state.' Calcutta was furious. Low had exceeded his instructions and made promises which flouted the Company's policy of non-intervention. The government of India never ratified his treaty, but it took no steps to repudiate it nor to negotiate a new arrangement, and in the course of time Low's treaty, together with Anderson's earlier arrangement, came to be regarded as the basis of the relationship between the Company and Perak. The Siamese did not seek to assert further power in the state.



There was little contact between Penang and Perak up to the middle of the century, although James Low and others looked hopefully at the state as a granary for the Straits Settlements, a region rich in tin and potentially suitable for sugar cultivation.<sup>4</sup> There were some Chinese miners in the interior, under a Perak-born kapitan, Tan Ah Hun, whose activities in Perak are obscure but who also farmed the Singapore and Johore revenues and whose eldest daughter was married to Seah Eu Chin.<sup>5</sup> At that time Penang had an unenviable reputation as a centre for a flourishing slave trade, in which captives from Sumatra were consigned to the Perak tin mines, a practice which the Penang authorities found it difficult to suppress.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the agreement made by the British under Burney's treaty to remove the ex-rajah of Kedah from Penang and prevent him attempting to regain control of the state, the former ruler, his relatives and supporters were not content to give up their ambitions. Many Malays in Penang and Province Wellesley supported the ex-rajah, and many Europeans, including some of the Company's officials, felt the authorities had behaved shabbily towards him. James Low, who became the Company's superintendent in Province Wellesley, was almost alone in holding that the British should support Siamese authority in Kedah as a government superior to the former Malay administration.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the ex-rajah's relatives settled in Province Wellesley, stirring up trouble against the Siamese. The most restless was a nephew, Tuanku Udin (Kudin). Half-Arab by birth and a resolute Muslim, Kudin was fanatically opposed to the Siamese, and in 1831 raised a holy war, invaded Kedah with about 5,000 supporters and drove the Siamese out. About 2,000 of Kudin's force came from Penang, including eighty former

<sup>4</sup> J. Low, 'Observations on Perak', *JIA*, iv (1850), 497-8.

<sup>5</sup> Wong Choon San, *A Gallery of Chinese Kapitans* (Singapore, 1964), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iv (1850), 370.

<sup>7</sup> J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iii (1849), 599-617, and J. R. Logan's editorial comment p. 617; P. J. Begbie, *The Malayan Peninsula* (Madras, 1834, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), pp. 94-126; J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1864), pp. 158-9.

British sepoys, and many of his other soldiers wore sepoy uniforms bought in Georgetown.<sup>8</sup> Anxious to dispel this apparent evidence of British support for the rebels and to honour the treaty obligations with Siam, Governor Ibbetson blockaded the Kedah coast to prevent help and supplies reaching Kudin from Penang.

This action was criticized by officials, by the Malays of Penang and by some European and Chinese merchants. Partly this arose from genuine sympathy for the ex-ruler, partly from commercial interest because some Penang merchants had profitable contacts with the old Malay regime in Kedah. Most of these were through Kota Kuala Muda on the Kedah side of the Muda river, which marked the boundary with Province Wellesley. Kuala Muda was a bustling prosperous town in the early years of the nineteenth century, with a fairly large Chinese community under a kapitan, Baba Seng. It was 'a small Monte Carlo of the East',<sup>9</sup> a gambling centre which attracted Malays and Chinese from Penang. The rajah of Kedah leased the port and trade dues of Kuala Muda to two prominent Penang Chinese, Che Seong and Che Toah, who also held the arrack and opium farms in Penang. The British authorities regarded Kapitan Baba Seng as a disreputable adventurer and in 1818 Governor Bannerman had tried unsuccessfully to put pressure on the rajah of Kedah to dismiss him. After their invasion of Kedah in 1821 the Siamese imprisoned Baba Seng, but he later went to live in Province Wellesley, where he was at the heart of intrigues to restore the old regime.

Most of the leading Chinese on the other hand supported the Siamese, the most influential of the pro-Siamese party being Koh Kok Chye, who was governor of Kuala Kedah from 1821 to 1841, throughout the Siamese regime in Kedah. He was also rajah of Pungah, the rich tin area on the mainland opposite Junk Ceylon, and agent for the rajah of Ligor, who was himself half-Chinese. Koh Kok Chye's family had strong connections with the Siamese, and his eldest son became a district governor in Siam.<sup>10</sup> At the same time Koh Kok Chye was the respected

<sup>8</sup> J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iv (1850), 362-3.

<sup>9</sup> Wong Choon San, *Chinese Kapitan*, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

and trusted go-between of the Chinese community and the Penang government, and was reputed to be one of the leaders of the Ghee Hin in Penang. The Hai San also backed the rajah of Ligor.<sup>11</sup>

The Siamese soon marshalled their forces, returned to Kedah and finally overran Kedah fort in October 1831. Kudin committed suicide, in the eyes of the Penang Malays and many of the European community dying a hero's death.<sup>12</sup> About 16,000 refugees fled to Province Wellesley. The British transferred the ex-rajah to Malacca, where he lived for several years in comfortable but enforced retirement. In 1836 he applied for permission to visit Sumatra but instead went to Bruas in Perak, where hundreds of his former subjects flocked to join him. He negotiated for help from the rajah muda of Perak and planned another religious crusade against the Siamese,<sup>13</sup> who called on the British to remove him. Governor Bonham sent a ship to seize the former ruler and sent him back to Malacca to live on a reduced pension.

This did not put an end to intrigues in Penang. Early in 1838 Tuanku Mohammed Saad, the ex-rajah's uncle, with the support of the former Kapitan Baba Seng, began rousing Malays in Penang and Province Wellesley to renew the holy war against the Siamese. Once more the Malay rebel army swept the Siamese out of Kedah. Not only did they receive support from the Malay community in the British territory, but several European, Chinese and Indian merchants made bargains to supply the rebels with arms in return for promises of rice and other commercial concessions if they won.<sup>14</sup> Governor Bonham blockaded the Kedah river and issued a proclamation warning British subjects not to aid the rebels. He would have liked to give more positive support to the Siamese in order to put an end for good to the intrigues concerning Kedah which threatened the peace of Penang itself, but Calcutta forbade any stronger measures than a blockade of the Kedah coast.<sup>15</sup> Even

<sup>11</sup> M. L. Wynne, *Triad and Tabut* (Singapore, 1941), p. 232.

<sup>12</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, pp. 156-7.

<sup>13</sup> J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iv (1850), 371.

<sup>14</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 210.

<sup>15</sup> SSR, V 7, 22 July 1838; IO, 'Papers relating to Kedah, 1838-57', p. 127; Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, pp. 210-11.

this aroused bitter opposition from some Europeans, who had complained to the Governor General in 1837 that Siamese misrule in Kedah provoked revolts and disrupted trade.<sup>16</sup> And in 1839 the *Singapore Free Press* condemned the Company's policy in Kedah as 'a dark spot in the annals of the British government in the Straits of Malacca'.<sup>17</sup> Among the Penang Malays intense ill-feeling against the British policy of impeding the revolt centred round the Arab priest, Haji Macawi, who was probably an active ally of Mohammed Saad.<sup>18</sup>

Once again the Siamese mustered their forces and drove the rebels out of Kedah in 1839. Thousands of Malays fled to British territory, including Abdullah, the ex-rajah's eldest son, who was one of the rebel leaders. Only a remnant of Mohammed Saad's army remained to follow their leader in flight to Perlis, which the Siamese also ravaged.

Embarrassed by the activities of his would-be supporters, and with all his former territory laid waste by war, the ex-rajah wanted to make peace with the Siamese. Bonham too was anxious to see peace restored and an end put to intrigues and unrest in Penang.<sup>19</sup> The death of the rajah of Ligor in 1839 removed a major obstacle to reconciliation, and the Company was relieved when the Siamese in 1842 restored the title and a large part of his territory to the former ruler. The East India Company then raised his pension to the original sum of \$10,000 and recognized his position as a Siamese vassal. The rajah's relationship with the Straits government was strained when almost immediately after his restoration he made an unsuccessful bid to reassert his authority over land between the Krian and Kurau rivers which had previously been part of Kedah. His claims were repudiated, since the British had in the meantime made their treaty with Perak marking the Krian river as the boundary between them and thus incorporating the district into Perak, but many of the Krian Malays continued to regard the area as the property of the rajah of Kedah.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> IO, 'Papers relating to Kedah', p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1839.

<sup>18</sup> Wynne, *Triad and Tabut*, p. 219.

<sup>19</sup> IO, 'Papers relating to Kedah', p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Notes at Penang, Kedah, etc.', *JIA*, v (1851), 63-4.

After this incident there was no further friction between the rajah and the Straits government, but it was a long time before the ravages of war were mended in Kedah. Probably the most prosperous and fertile of the Malay states at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Kedah was a deserted land by 1841. Some chiefs drifted back, but most of the population remained in Province Wellesley, where they could escape the exactions of forced labour. Before the original Siamese invasion Kedah had supported a population of more than 100,000 people, but by the mid-1840s this had shrunk to fewer than 25,000.<sup>21</sup> Some put the figure much lower. J. R. Logan, who visited the state in 1850 and found Alor Star a dilapidated village and the former rich plain a wilderness, estimated the population was little more than 11,000.<sup>22</sup> In the early nineteenth century the revenue of Kedah had amounted to about \$100,000 a year, in addition to the pension paid by the Company to the rajah. By the time the ruler was restored in 1842 the revenue had shrunk almost to nothing.<sup>23</sup>

#### MALACCA AND NANING

In taking over Malacca from the Dutch, the East India Company unwittingly became involved in the politics of the interior when it set out to extend its administration over the inland district of Nanning. This area of some 240 square miles was marked on old maps as coming within the Dutch sphere of influence, but the Dutch had made no attempt to grant away the lands of Nanning in the same way as in Malacca itself.

Like the other inland states behind Malacca, Nanning had been peopled in the days of the Malacca sultanate by settlers from the Menangkabau region of Sumatra. The Naningites proved troublesome to the Dutch and on occasions had raided the outskirts of Malacca town, until they made a treaty whereby Nanning undertook to pay the tenth to the Dutch authorities. In practice the Dutch never tried to collect the tenth and

<sup>21</sup> J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iii (1849), 601.

<sup>22</sup> Logan, *JIA*, v (1851), 53-8, 60.

<sup>23</sup> J. Low, 'An Account of the Origin and Progress of the British Colonies in the Straits of Malacca', *JIA*, iii (1849), 601.

accepted instead a small amount of rice and other produce each year, a token tribute rather than a realistic tax. In 1801, during the wartime occupation of Malacca, the British Resident made a treaty with the *penghulu* of Naning, which repeated the stipulations of the Naning-Dutch agreement making payment of the tenth obligatory, but the British continued the practice of taking a mere tribute of rice and fowls. In 1807, however, they deprived the *penghulu* of his right to inflict the death penalty and required him to send capital cases to Malacca for trial.

When the British returned to occupy Malacca permanently in 1825, Fullerton, taking the treaties made in the past by the Dutch and the British at their face value, assumed that Naning must be an integral part of Malacca. He determined to extend to Naning the Malacca land system, the collection of the tenth, and the jurisdiction of the court of judicature. In 1827 W. T. Lewis, deputy Resident Councillor of Malacca, was sent to Naning to investigate and report on the situation. Impressed by the potential of Naning and appalled at the *penghulu's* exactions, Lewis urged Fullerton on financial and humanitarian grounds to exert what he deemed to be the Company's full rights in Naning, and he estimated the tenth would yield a revenue of \$4,500 a year.<sup>24</sup> This advice met with opposition in the Penang council. Both Samuel Garling, the Resident Councillor of Malacca, and John Anderson, then secretary to the Penang government, doubted if Naning was part of Malacca territory.<sup>25</sup> Overruling these objections, Fullerton sent Lewis to superintend arrangements to impose the tenth at Naning and make the *penghulu*, Abdul Said, and his chiefs salaried revenue and police officials of the Company.<sup>26</sup>

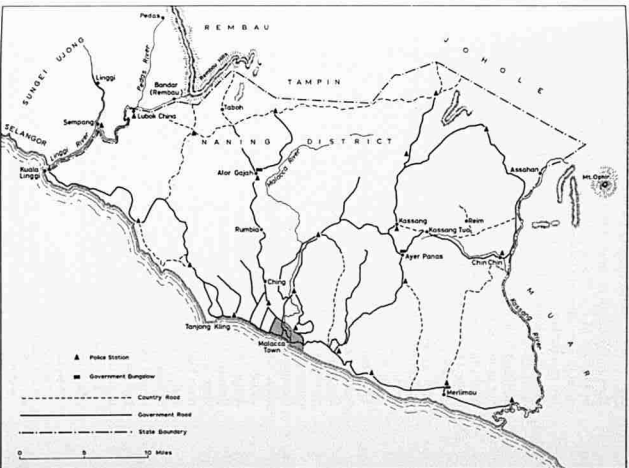
Abdul Said, who enjoyed a reputation for supernatural powers and whose ailing subjects came to be healed by drinking the water in which his foot had been dipped,<sup>27</sup> objected to the humiliating abolition of his judicial powers perhaps even more

<sup>24</sup> SSR, A 33, 13 March 1827; SSR, O 3, 24 July 1828.

<sup>25</sup> SSR, A 33, 7 March 1827; Resident Councillor Malacca minutes, 26 February 1829, SSR, A 63.

<sup>26</sup> Penang Council minutes, 3 November 1828, SSR, A 57; Penang Council to Resident Councillor Malacca, 1 November 1828, SSR, I 32.

<sup>27</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, p. 157.



Malacca in 1867  
 Based on maps by Quintin, Surveyor General Straits Settlements, 1860,  
 and J. F. A. McNair, Surveyor General Straits Settlements, 1878

than to the loss of revenue.<sup>28</sup> In December 1828 he flouted the jurisdiction of the Straits court of judicature by passing judgment in a murder case instead of referring it to Malacca,<sup>29</sup> and two months later he refused to obey a summons from Fullerton to come to Malacca. Thomas Church, the new deputy Resident of Malacca, was sent to confer with the *penghulu* and warned him that if he obstructed the Company he would be deposed, but promised the Company would not demand payment of the tenth until Naning could afford it. At the time the mission seemed to be a success. Church managed to dispel the *penghulu*'s fears for his personal safety, while he appreciated the mystical hold which Abdul Said had over his people and warned the authorities that extension of the court's jurisdiction would produce trouble.<sup>30</sup>

All the good effects of Church's visit were quickly undone. The Dutch residents of Malacca, resentful of the new British regime and ever anxious to cause trouble, probably rekindled the *penghulu*'s suspicions, which were fanned by an inaccurate report in the *Malacca Observer*, which had slipped through the censorship of the easygoing Garling, to the effect that the Company intended to send an army to take over Naning, to establish a political agent there and collect the tenth. Fullerton withdrew the *Malacca Observer*'s licence,<sup>31</sup> but the damage was done. Once more the *penghulu* was convinced that the British threatened his liberty and perhaps his life, but he was sure they were weak and he could resist them. He refused to come to meet Fullerton, and the Governor, against the advice of Garling and Anderson, gathered a force in Malacca to punish his defiance. Nevertheless, with the memory of Calcutta's reprimands over his vigorous policy in Perak still fresh in his mind, Fullerton decided to submit the question first to Calcutta, who in turn referred it to the Directors in London.

The postponement of the military expedition convinced Abdul Said of the Company's weakness. Shortly afterwards he

<sup>28</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, p. 158.

<sup>29</sup> Penang Council minutes, 30 December 1828, SSR, A 57.

<sup>30</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notes on Naning, with a Brief Notice on the Naning War', *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 202-3.

<sup>31</sup> C. A. Gibson-Hill, 'The Singapore Chronicle, 1824-37', *JMBRAS*, xxvi, no. 1 (1953), 189-91.



seized produce from an orchard in Malacca territory adjoining the Naning border. Many people in Malacca regarded this as a deliberate trial of the Company's strength.<sup>32</sup> If so it was unfortunate. The court was still closed as a result of the abolition of the presidency, and the owner of the land could obtain no redress.

The Straits authorities did not receive general approval of Fullerton's proposals until June 1831,<sup>33</sup> when preparations were made for a military expedition. It was a subject of much merriment and derision in Malacca, a large force of professional soldiers armed with big guns, going off to fight a handful of peasants. The expedition was described as a 'picnic',<sup>34</sup> and the troops set off in fine feckle, convinced the peasants would welcome them as deliverers from their chiefs' oppression.

Unknown to the British, the Naning dispute had in the meantime become involved in the Malay politics of the hinterland. In 1758 the Dutch had made a treaty with Johore putting the inland states of Sungei Ujong, Rembau, Johole and Naning under Dutch protection. A Menanagkabau prince from Sumatra was invited to come to preside as *Yang di-pertuan Besar* over the rulers or *penghulus* of the four states, but he had no executive powers and no rights to raise revenue, and the rulers continued to carry out the actual administration and to dispense justice in their own states. Originally the *Yang di-pertuan Besar* passed through Malacca to obtain permission from the Dutch before proceeding inland to take up his office, but this practice was dropped when the British occupied Malacca. In 1813, and again in 1828, the *Yang di-pertuan Besar* elect proceeded direct to the interior, and the inland states became independent of British influence.<sup>35</sup> By 1831 the office of *Yang di-pertuan Besar* was in dispute. When Rajah Labu came from Sumatra with the usual credentials in 1828, he was supported by the Dato Klana, chief of Sungei Ujong and most senior of the four rulers of the confederation, but the election was opposed by Rajah Ali, ruler of Rembau, an ambitious, half-Bugis nephew of Sultan

<sup>32</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> Bengal to Singapore Resident, 2 April 1831, SSR, M 6.

<sup>34</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, p. 164.

<sup>35</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 232.

Ibrahim of Selangor. Ali had taken advantage of family quarrels to seize power in Rembau, but he remained insecure and saw in the election of Labu, whose wife was Ali's aunt and one of his most bitter enemies, a threat to his newly acquired position. Labu was forced to retreat to Malacca, where he was living in 1831 and calling himself *Yang di-pertuan Besar* of Sri Menanti.

While the British were assembling their troops and supplies in Malacca, Abdul Said succeeded in convincing Rajah Ali that the Company intended, after subduing Naning, to install Labu as *Yang di-pertuan Besar* and to annex Rembau themselves. Ali sent a force to help Naning, under the command of his son-in-law, Syed Saban, a half-Arab adventurer with political ambitions of his own. Ali's decision encouraged other chiefs to come to Naning's support, notably some of the minor chiefs of Muar.<sup>36</sup> The chiefs' distrust of the British was enhanced by the arrival in Malacca in June 1831 of the disgruntled ex-rajah of Kedah, now forcibly transferred from Penang.<sup>37</sup>

Unaware of these complications, the British expedition set off in high hopes of quickly finishing a simple campaign. The outcome was a fiasco. Within a few hours the supply boats ran aground in the river and had to return to Malacca, where their arrival put the town in a state of panic.<sup>38</sup> The troops found no welcoming peasantry in Naning. Many fled and the village leaders were unwilling to furnish messengers or porters. The Naningites did not lay themselves open to a pitched battle but harried the advancing troops from the jungle. The army pressed on, fearing the enemy might have large forces, which in fact he did not. Morale was low among the troops and worse among the camp followers. The porters took to wearing white flowers in their hair as a secret sign to the Naningites that they were friendly towards them, and gradually they slipped off into the jungle. By the time the Company's force came within striking distance of Abdul Said's capital at Taboh, only seventeen of their seventy porters remained. Their nerves strained by the feeling that they were constantly being watched from the

<sup>36</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, pp. 134, 138, 142, 162-3, 167.

<sup>37</sup> N. Tarling, 'British Policy in the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago, 1824-1871', *JMBRAS*, xxx, no. 3 (1957), 38-9; Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, p. 168.

<sup>38</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, p. 175; T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 206.

jungle, the soldiers feared their opponents might attack Malacca town, which was left unguarded. They decided to call off the campaign. The retreat was a nerve-racking nightmare. The Naningites, following the instructions of Syed Saban, had cut down trees to block the retreat, and the British had to abandon their guns and heavy baggage. After much skirmishing the troops reached Malacca, to find the town panic-stricken, the inhabitants behind barred doors polishing their rusty swords.<sup>39</sup> In this inglorious way the first three-week campaign against Naning came to an end.

In the meantime Abdul Said complained to London about the injustice perpetrated against himself and his people, and Robert Ibbetson, examining the past records, came to the conclusion that Lewis was wrong, while Anderson and Garling were right in thinking that Naning was not part of Malacca. The government of India was furious that so much had been spent on an unsuccessful war which now was shown to be unjustified, but the Company had no choice but to continue the war in order to save face and to restore peace to the countryside, because Abdul Said and his Muar allies were taxing villages on the Malacca side of the border.

Before despatching another military expedition, Ibbetson set out to break up the league of Malay states. He met Rajah Ali, Syed Saban, and other minor chiefs at Sempang on the Linggi river in January 1832. Both sides approached the meeting in an atmosphere of suspicion, but Syed Saban appreciated the long-term advantages of siding with the British, while Raja Ali above all wanted to be recognized as the rightful ruler of Rembau. At length a treaty was signed, whereby Rembau and the Company undertook not to make war against each other, and the British acknowledged the independence of Rembau.<sup>40</sup> Abdul Said was left with the support only of the Muar chiefs, but there was no response when the Malacca authorities issued a proclamation offering a reward of \$1,000 for the capture of the *penghulu*. To make sure of victory the British assembled a larger force than before, which set off in March 1832. Progress

<sup>39</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, pp. 179, 182; A. H. Hill (trans.), 'The Hikayat Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, xxviii, no. 3 (1955), 226-7, reprinted as *The Hikayat Abdullah*, Kuala Lumpur, 1970.

<sup>40</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, pp. 195-9.

was very slow because the troops had to fell the jungle trees to make a track wide enough to avoid any repetition of having their lines of communication blocked. Even with the elimination of Abdul Said's major allies, the Company's troops found the campaign arduous. The peasants were either hostile or too frightened to help them. There was continual sniping and many soldiers fell sick. By the end of April they had not advanced far. Then they were joined by Syed Saban and his Rembau men, and the whole character of the war changed. The British officers disliked and distrusted Syed Saban, with his lust for plunder and power, but his entry was the turning-point of the war. Fighting on the same terms as the Naningites, knowing the disposition of their forces, Syed Saban's defection to the other side was the greatest blow to Abdul Said. His Muar allies and then his own subordinate chiefs and peasants started to abandon him. In June 1832 Taboh fell with little resistance.<sup>41</sup> It had taken two campaigns, with an army of some 1,200 to 1,400 men and an expenditure of £100,000 to capture this miserable, disease-ridden village of some thirty houses.

Having conquered Naning the Straits authorities did not know what to do with it. Not wanting to annex more territory themselves, they sounded out the possibility of giving part of Naning to Rembau but discovered Rajah Ali and Syed Saban wanted payment for their services in money not in land. When Abdul Said finally surrendered to the Malacca government in 1834, after wandering about as a fugitive for nearly two years, Thomas Church, then acting Governor of the Straits Settlements, suggested restoring the ruler and the *status quo ante* in Naning. This would have been such an embarrassing loss of face after all the expense and ignominy of the war that the idea withered. Abdul Said was given a pension, a house and orchard. He retained his magical reputation as a healer, set up as a doctor and trader, and eventually died in 1849, a much-respected member of the Malacca community.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile Naning was absorbed into Malacca, but for years the cost of ruling the district exceeded the revenue which the Company derived from it. Despite this, the exactions of the

<sup>41</sup> Begbie, *Malayan Peninsula*, pp. 204-5, 256-8.

<sup>42</sup> SSR, R 2, pp. 30-5, 243-5; T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 217.

*penghulu* and his chiefs were lifted, and the peasants could make more profit, even if little of this found its way into the Malacca treasury. J. R. Logan, travelling in Naning fifteen years later, found the country fairly prosperous, and flourishing villages with rows of Chinese shophouses in places which had been the centre of operations in the war. He found the inhabitants quite friendly and so peaceful that it was difficult to believe the Company could ever have come to be at war with such people.<sup>43</sup> Little blood was shed and little damage was done by this war, unjustified though it may have been. But for the government in Calcutta and the Directors in London, the Naning war remained synonymous with waste, muddle and expense, and a warning to restrain local officials from meddling in the affairs of the interior.

#### THE OLD JOHORE EMPIRE: JOHORE AND PAHANG

Under the terms of the Anglo-Dutch treaty of March 1824, the British and Dutch divided their spheres of influence, the Dutch surrendering Malacca to the British and undertaking not to set up any station or enter into any treaty with any ruler or state in the Malay peninsula, and Britain in turn ceding Bencoolen to Holland and engaging not to form any settlement or enter into any treaty with any ruler or state in Sumatra. This treaty effectively removed any danger of Dutch interference in the Malay peninsula, but neither the East India Company nor the British government had any intentions of using this freedom to extend British control beyond the Straits Settlements.

Five months later the Company made a treaty of friendship and alliance with Sultan Hussein and Temenggong Abdul Rahman, by which the Johore chiefs ceded Singapore island in perpetuity to the East India Company. The Company had two objects in signing this treaty. The first was to remove the Malay chiefs from any control or influence in the British station, and in this they partly succeeded. The second purpose of the treaty was to insulate Singapore from Malay politics, but in this the Company failed.

<sup>43</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Five Days in Naning', *JIA*, iii (1849), 278\*-87\*.

The disintegration of the once-powerful Malay empire had begun with the fall of Malacca to the Portuguese in 1511. For nearly three centuries afterwards the sultans continued to exercise a waning authority over the peninsula, eastern Sumatra and the Riau-Lingga archipelago from capitals along the Johore river and in the Riau-Lingga islands. Early in the eighteenth century the sultan of Johore called in Bugis adventurers to help him recover his throne, and from that time the Bugis played a dominating part in Malay politics, and their leader who was given royal rank with the title of *Yamtuan Muda* or junior king, was often in practice more powerful than the sultan himself. The sultan moved his headquarters to the island of Lingga and the Bugis *Yamtuan Muda* to Riau. The sultan's vassals and subordinate chiefs gradually threw off his control. Perak became independent in the sixteenth century, and by the end of the eighteenth century Trengganu, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and the Sumatran states were virtually independent, their rulers owning only nominal allegiance to the sultan of Johore-Lingga. The Bendahara, formerly the sultan's chief minister, built up considerable local autonomy as his representative in Pahang, while the Temenggong held sway over Singapore and many other southern islands, as well as the almost unpeopled mainland of Johore. Sultan Mahmud of Johore-Lingga, who died in 1812 after a long and troubled reign, still held much of the mystical power and prestige of the old Johore sultanate and enjoyed the respect and homage of the subordinate chiefs, but he had little control over revenue or administration outside of his own small domain.

Mahmud left no male heirs by his royal wives, but had two sons by commoner wives of Bugis stock. The elder son, Hussein, seems to have been favoured as successor by Mahmud himself, and was the favourite and adopted son of Tuanku Putri Hamidah, Mahmud's fourth wife, the spirited daughter of the celebrated Bugis warrior, Rajah Haji. The Bugis *Yamtuan Muda* preferred the younger son, Abdul Rahman. When Sultan Mahmud died, Hussein was away in Pahang for his wedding with the Bendahara's daughter, and the *Yamtuan Muda* proclaimed Abdul Rahman as the new sultan. Tuanku Putri refused to give up the regalia, which she kept for Hussein, and

while this situation continued no sultan could be formally installed. The succession was still unsettled in 1818 when the Dutch took control of Riau and acknowledged Abdul Rahman as sultan.

When Raffles discovered the Dutch had forestalled him at Riau and determined to found an alternative factory at Singapore, he made a preliminary agreement in January 1819 with the Temenggong Abdul Rahman, who had established a settlement there some years before.<sup>44</sup> Since it was necessary to confirm this agreement with the sovereign ruler, Raffles decided to acknowledge the elder brother, Hussein, as sultan, and the arrangement was confirmed in a second treaty, according to which the East India Company was permitted to set up a factory on Singapore island on payment of \$5,000 a year to Hussein and \$3,000 to the Temenggong.<sup>45</sup>

For the British this was a local arrangement of convenience, which did not imply any wider recognition of Hussein's power over the remains of the Johore-Riau empire. The treaty expressly denied any obligation on the Company's part to uphold the sultan's authority or to intervene in the domestic politics of Johore. Nor presumably did Raffles see in the unimpressive, squat, corpulent Hussein the instrument for regeneration of a lost Malay civilization.

After much resistance from Tuanku Putri, the Dutch forcibly seized the regalia and in November 1823 Abdul Rahman was formally installed as sultan at Lingga. Once this ceremony was carried out, not only Sultan Abdul Rahman's close relative, the sultan of Trengganu, but also the Bendahara of Pahang and the Temenggong of Johore acknowledged Abdul Rahman's overlordship. Attempts by the newly installed sultan to establish his control in Johore, and dangers that the British would be

<sup>44</sup> The Temenggong told Crawford he came to live there in 1811 [J. Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina* (London, 1828, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1967), ii, 403], but there was a pirate settlement on the Singapore river before that, and in 1810 a British man-of-war had rescued captured European vessels in what was to become Singapore harbour. J. R. Logan, 'The Piracy and Slave Trade of the Indian Archipelago', *JIA*, iii (1849), 632.

<sup>45</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, vii (1853), 331-2; W. G. Maxwell and W. S. Gibson, *Treaties and Engagements Affecting the Malay States and Borneo* (London, 1924), pp. 117-19.

drawn into the dispute,<sup>46</sup> were averted when the Dutch and British signed the Treaty of London a few months later. This in effect split the old empire of Johore-Lingga, for the Dutch undertook to restrain Abdul Rahman from intervening in the peninsula. He inherited the prestige and honour of his ancestors, but his practical power was confined to the Riau-Lingga islands, where he ruled as a Dutch vassal. Hussein, sultan in Singapore, had an empty title, unrespected by the Malay chiefs, acknowledged in theory only in Singapore and Johore, and in practice only in the small territory of Muar, which was the one place where he succeeded in raising revenue. The Temenggong lost two of his principal territories, the Carimon islands and Bulang, which lay to the south of the demarcating line in the Dutch sphere of influence, but at the same time this ambitious chief escaped from the control of Sultan Abdul Rahman. The Anglo-Dutch treaty thus opened the way for the growing independence of the states of Johore, Pahang and Trengganu.

To begin with the Temenggong and Sultan Hussein exacted poll taxes, rents and illicit trade dues in Singapore, but in December 1822 Raffles, displeased at this burden upon the commercial development of the settlement, substituted fixed allowances and withdrew their rights to share in the revenue farms. In March 1823 Raffles dislodged the Temenggong from his dominating position on the river and moved him to Telok Blangah, and on the eve of his final departure in June 1823, Raffles made an agreement to buy out all the chiefs' claims to port dues and judicial powers.<sup>47</sup> In January 1824 the Resident, John Crawfurd, advised the Company to buy the whole island of Singapore, with a view to cutting free from Malay politics.<sup>48</sup> Crawfurd regarded both the chiefs as tiresome nuisances and their retainers as parasites. He referred to Abdul Rahman and Hussein as 'illegitimate children', and looked on the Johore succession question as a settlement made by the British and the Dutch for their own purposes, and one out of which Hussein and the Temenggong had profited unduly.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, ix (1855), 459-68.

<sup>47</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, vii (1853), 344-5.

<sup>48</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, ix (1855), 459-68.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 465; Crawfurd, *Embassy*, ii, 382, 403.



The chiefs were naturally reluctant to accept Crawford's terms, but the Temenggong, whom Crawford had to admit was the 'most influential and intelligent individual of the two', was realistic, and in August 1824 a treaty of friendship and alliance was signed,<sup>80</sup> whereby all of Singapore and the nearby islands were ceded to the East India Company in perpetuity. The sultan and the Temenggong were to have increased allowances and could continue to live on the land reserved for them in Singapore, but they were to maintain free trade in their possessions and were not to have any dealings abroad without the Company's consent. If they decided to withdraw from Singapore, the sultan would be paid 20,000 Spanish dollars compensation and the Temenggong \$15,000. Crawford hoped these sums would be sufficiently attractive to induce them to depart,<sup>81</sup> but in this he was disappointed. The consequence was that alone of the three Straits Settlements, Singapore was troubled throughout the Indian regime by the presence of local chiefs and the political complications and conflicting loyalties which this situation produced.

Temenggong Abdul Rahman died in 1825, but his heir, a weak-minded youth, was not installed as Temenggong, and by about 1833 the Telok Blangah community began to look to Abdul Rahman's nephew, Daing Ibrahim, who much resembled his uncle in guile, resource, intelligence and worldly wisdom. Born in 1811, Ibrahim came to Singapore in 1819 and remained there for the rest of his life. In 1841 the Bendahara of Pahang installed him formally as Temenggong at Telok Blangah in the presence of the Governor and Resident Councillor.

Hussein, suddenly lifted out of poverty, idleness and obscurity in 1819, lacked the experience, intelligence and energy to profit by his good fortune, and his household was rent by scandal. Hussein had a son, Abdul Jalil, born about 1810 by a commoner wife, and four younger children born to a younger wife, Tuanku Purbu, an aristocratic woman of considerable spirit, who resented the evaporation of her family's fortunes in the hands of her improvident husband, and enlisted the help

<sup>80</sup> Maxwell and Gibson, *Treaties*, pp. 122-6.

<sup>81</sup> T. Braddell, 'Notices of Singapore', *JIA*, vii (1853), 350-5.

of a young Malacca-born Indian trader, Abdul Kadir, to restore the royal family's finances. Abdul Jalil stirred up the sultan's followers, spreading lurid stories about Tuanku Purbu being the Indian's mistress. The allegations were probably false,<sup>52</sup> but the scandal created so much excitement in Singapore that Abdul Kadir fled to Malacca, and Tuanku Purbu, fearing for her life, persuaded Hussein to follow. When Hussein died in Malacca in 1835, Ali, his eldest son by Tuanku Purbu, was ten years old. Bonham refused to recognize the boy as sultan, and Ali received a reduced allowance of \$250 a month for his entire household, of which he himself was to have only \$70. In 1840 Ali moved to Singapore, where he was permitted to take possession of the property granted by the Company to his father, and his personal pension was raised to \$115 a month, but only his family and dwindling band of followers referred to him as sultan of Johore.

Hussein's misadventures and Ali's youth enabled the more wily Ibrahim to assume more power. The Straits authorities were indifferent to the question of leadership among the Singapore Malays, but by ignoring Ali's claims and recognizing Ibrahim as Temenggong, they encouraged the Malay community to regard the Temenggong as the leader they favoured.<sup>53</sup>

Outwardly Bonham's relationship with the Temenggong was cordial, but the help which Ibrahim gave the authorities, particularly in combating piracy, was minimal until the royal navy's activities made piracy too dangerous and at the same time a legal alternative means of making money through control of the new gutta-percha trade presented itself. In 1843 Dr William Montgomerie drew the attention of the Bengal medical board to the potential use for medical purposes of gutta-percha, then used for making riding-whips, and the same year Sir Jozé d'Almeida took a specimen to the Royal Society of Arts in London. The commercial uses of gutta-percha quickly became apparent. In 1844 less than two piculs of gutta-percha were exported from Singapore, but the following year exports rose to 169 piculs and by 1847 to more than 9,000

<sup>52</sup> T. Braddell, 'The Sultan of Johore', *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857-8), 62-3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

piculs. The price rose from \$8 a picul in 1844 to \$28 in 1848<sup>54</sup> and to \$60 in 1853.

In 1845 the Temenggong diverted his men to the task of establishing a monopoly over the new trade. All gutta-percha brought into Singapore had to be sold to him at a fixed price, and he stationed boats at the harbour entrance to intercept prahus and buy up their cargoes of gutta.<sup>55</sup> In addition, Ibrahim organized his own search parties and diverted several primitive aborigine tribes, who had traditionally been his serfs, to collect gutta in Johore: the Biduanda Kallang, the original inhabitants of Singapore island, and the Orang Sabimba, whom he brought from Battam.<sup>56</sup> The Binua aborigines of the interior of Johore, who were superior to the Temenggong's rather squalid serfs,<sup>57</sup> were not forcibly drafted into collecting gutta, but their labour was exploited from Telok Blangah. Malay *penghulus* and traders, many of them from Singapore, tapped the whole interior for gutta. 'There is hardly a *kampung* that is not visited by them', said J. R. Logan, who explored the interior of Johore in 1847.<sup>58</sup> Outside traders were excluded, and the aborigines had to sell their produce to the *penghulus* and buy all their supplies from them. Collectors bought gutta for \$2.50 to \$3 a picul from the aborigines and sold it to the Temenggong for \$7 to \$10, while goods from Singapore were sold at inflated prices, a cup costing one cent in Singapore selling to the aborigines for nine.<sup>59</sup>

Originally Singapore island itself was rich in gutta-taban trees, but by 1847 nearly all of them had gone. Trees could not be tapped but had to be felled to extract the juice, and it took ten full-grown trees to produce one picul of gutta. Between January 1845 and the middle of 1847 about seventy thousand trees must have been felled to produce the 6,918

<sup>54</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Range of the Gutta Taban Collectors and Present Amount of Imports into Singapore', *JIA*, ii (1848), 531-2.

<sup>57</sup> W. H. Read, *Play and Politics: Reminiscences of Malaya by an Old Resident* (London, 1901), p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> J. T. Thomson, 'Remarks on the Seletar and Sabimba Tribes', *JIA*, i (1847), 341-52; J. R. Logan, 'The Orang Binua of Johore', *JIA*, i (1847), 295-302.

<sup>57</sup> P. Favre, 'A journey in Johore', *JIA*, iii (1849), 63; P. Favre, 'An Account of the Wild Tribes Inhabiting the Malayan Peninsula, Sumatra and a Few Neighbouring Islands', *JIA*, ii (1848), 256-8.

<sup>58</sup> Logan, *JIA*, i (1847), 291.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 287, 291.

piculs of gutta exported from Singapore.<sup>60</sup> By 1848 nearly all the gutta-taban trees in south Johore had been destroyed and supplies had to be brought from Sumatra, Endau, Pahang and as far north as Perak. In 1848 the Singapore chamber of commerce asked the government to put an end to the Temenggong's monopoly, which they estimated was worth between \$150,000 and \$200,000 a year,<sup>61</sup> but by then the Temenggong's co-operation in suppressing piracy was too precious for Butterworth to thwart him in this way.

The opening of Chinese gambier and pepper plantations in Johore from the mid-1840s enhanced the Temenggong's wealth, and in building up his fortunes Ibrahim consolidated his hold over mainland Johore. Originally Sultan Hussein and the Temenggong appointed *penghulus* and other officers jointly, but by 1846 Ali's word carried no authority in most of Johore, where in practice the people recognized the immediate authority of the Temenggong and the overlordship of the sultan of Lingga.<sup>62</sup> Ali issued permits to Singapore Chinese to open plantations and in 1851 gave a licence to the firm of Jozé d'Almeida & Sons to prospect along the Johore river, but the Temenggong's men drove away anyone who tried to act on these permits, and Governor Butterworth refused to admit they were legal.

The Temenggong waxed prosperous and his village at Telok Blangah was becoming very smart with European-style houses.<sup>63</sup> By contrast Ali was in a desperate financial plight, unable to pay his followers and threatened with a debtors' prison. Blundell, who was acting Governor while Butterworth was on leave in 1852-3, was more sympathetic than Bonham or Butterworth to Ali's claims. While he admitted Ibrahim was more intelligent, Blundell considered Ali had been treated shabbily and he asked the Governor General to authorize a final settlement of the Johore dispute and install Ali as sultan as a debt of honour to his father.<sup>64</sup> When Calcutta refused, Blundell tried to negotiate a bargain between Ali and the Temenggong, but neither was willing to compromise. By that time Ali was

<sup>60</sup> T. Oxley, 'Gutta Percha', *JIA*, i (1847), 22-9.

<sup>61</sup> *SFP*, 16 March 1848.

<sup>62</sup> *SFP*, 1 February 1849.

<sup>63</sup> Favre, *JIA*, iii (1849), 51-2, 55.

<sup>64</sup> *SSR*, R 24, no. 79A; *SSR*, S 20, no. 1042.

completely under the thumb of W. H. Read. In later years Read admitted Ali was an imbecile, and that he had confiscated his seal in 1852 and would not let him use it without permission,<sup>65</sup> but with Read's backing Ali insisted that he must be acknowledged as sultan of Johore and owner of all its revenue, with the Temenggong as his vassal. This Ibrahim would not accept.

When Butterworth returned in 1853 he found the tussle between the Johore chiefs was dividing the European commercial community in Singapore and threatening to involve the settlement in Malay politics further afield. Crawford had warned Calcutta in 1824 of the confusion and intrigue which were likely to result from the dismemberment of the Johore empire and the continued residence of the Temenggong and Sultan Hussein in Singapore, but this prophecy did not come true for many years, because neither Ibrahim nor Hussein's family at that time had sufficient influence or wealth to attract attention from the European merchants. Moreover the Temenggong's party acknowledged the overlordship of the sultan of Lingga, and Mohammed Shah, who became sultan of Lingga in 1832, was a man of outstanding personality, intelligent and well-educated, who could command the respect of the Malay world. When he died in 1841 the *Singapore Free Press* commented, 'The glory is departed from the house of Johore and its fame among the nations is no more', and predicted that his son would be 'a mere phantom of royalty likely to flicker over the scene for a while'.<sup>66</sup>

The new Sultan Mahmud of Lingga was eighteen years old, reckless, extravagant and dissolute, but ambitious, with dreams of glory, and longing to revive his authority over the whole of the former Johore empire. His accession coincided with the formal installation of Ibrahim as Temenggong and the consolidation of the power of Omar, Sultan Mahmud's maternal uncle, who seized the throne of Trengganu in 1839 after years of civil war. Omar, a strong and energetic ruler, resented the growing independence of the Bendahara of Pahang and the Temenggong, who as early as 1841 was rumoured to be

<sup>65</sup> Read, *Play and Politics*, p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> *SFP*, 5 August 1841.

aspiring to be sultan of Johore himself.<sup>67</sup> During the next ten years, as Ibrahim's wealth and his influence with the British in Singapore increased, and as his friendship with the Bendahara developed, the other chieftains of the former empire, Mahmud of Lingga, Omar of Trengganu and the disgruntled Ali, began to draw together.

The European merchants of Singapore too began to align themselves into hostile factions. The Temenggong put the European side of his gutta-percha sales in the hands of his friend and neighbour, William Wemys Ker, of Ker, Rawson & Company. This was the beginning of a very profitable business association, which was continued by William Paterson and Henry Minchin Simons, who became Ker's partners in 1853 and continued the firm as Paterson & Simons from 1859, when Ker himself retired to London as manager. In conjunction with William Napier, the senior law agent of Singapore, who acted as the Temenggong's legal adviser from 1855 until he retired to England in 1859, Ker, Paterson and Simons managed Ibrahim's affairs and acted as his agents to their own considerable profit. A few other firms came to be associated with the Temenggong, notably Martin, Dyce & Company, founded in Singapore in 1842, and the Temenggong had the backing of Butterworth and Thomas Church, the Resident Councillor. But most of the European merchants were jealous of Ibrahim's wealth and influence, and both the *Singapore Free Press* and the *Straits Times* supported the cause of Ali against the Temenggong at that time.

The bright lights of Singapore attracted Mahmud of Lingga, who was a frequent visitor to the port and well known in European society. He raced his boats in the annual regatta, of which Read was one of the main sponsors, and became very friendly with Read. At the annual Freemasons' dinner in 1853 he sat on the right hand of Read, the Worshipful Master, and was given a special toast with the air 'Welcome Royal Charlie', a salute which was sadly appropriate to his subsequent career and sorry end. As the *Straits Times* reported: 'Although he did not partake of the good things round him . . . he afforded a gratifying illustration of the beneficial influences of the value of

<sup>67</sup> *SFP*, 5 August 1841.

freemasonry, which can thus bring together in bonds of cordial love and sympathy, men of the most opposite and in some instances the most antagonistic opinions and creed.'<sup>68</sup> Butterworth was alarmed by the evidence of 'cordial love and sympathy' between Sultan Mahmud and the Singapore merchants and by the backing given by Mahmud and Read to Ali's cause against the Temenggong. He feared too that Singapore's trade might suffer from Mahmud's activities on the east coast of the peninsula, for Mahmud went on from Singapore to marry his sister to Omar of Trengganu, thus cementing a friendship which was hostile to Pahang. Butterworth asked the Dutch to prevent the sultan of Lingga visiting the east coast of the peninsula or meddling in mainland politics.<sup>69</sup>

Conflict between Ali and the Temenggong was brought to a head in 1854 when Read persuaded Ali to announce his intention of setting up his government in Johore.<sup>70</sup> Alarmed at this prospect, the Temenggong was prepared to bargain, and after long haggling a treaty of friendship and alliance was signed between them in the presence of Butterworth in March 1855 and approved by the government of India. The Temenggong acknowledged Ali's claim to the title of sultan and agreed to pay him a lump sum of \$5,000 and a pension of \$500 a month, provided Ali gave up all claims on the territory and revenues of Johore, with the exception of the small territory of Muar. Butterworth, the government of India and the Directors considered that this would be a final settlement,<sup>71</sup> but it merely became the basis for new intrigue.

Blundell, who became Governor a few weeks after the 1855 treaty was signed, was unhappy with the agreement, and his relations with Temenggong Ibrahim and his European advisers were bad. Blundell was anxious to see the Temenggong move out of Singapore and begin to govern Johore as an active ruler. But with all of Ibrahim's demands satisfied by the treaty, the new Governor was left with no bargaining counter to cajole the Temenggong into departing.<sup>72</sup> Blundell's immediate worry

<sup>68</sup> *ST*, 4 January 1853.

<sup>70</sup> Tarling, *JMBRAS*, xxx, no. 3 (1957), 60.

<sup>71</sup> *SSR*, S 23, Item 68; *SSR*, S 25, Item 76.

<sup>69</sup> *SSR*, S 21, Item 28.

<sup>72</sup> *SSR*, R 35, pp. 286-7.

was the part played by Singapore residents, and particularly some of the leading British merchants, in Johore politics, and the competition between them to profit from the growing wealth of the state. By contemporary standards the Temenggong was a rich man, and in 1857 Blundell estimated his income at \$100,000 a year,<sup>73</sup> more than £20,000. Ker, Paterson, Simons, Napier and others backed the Temenggong and the Bendahara as intelligent rulers, who were likely to develop prosperous states and co-operate with European merchants. A rival clique, headed by W. H. Read, regarding Sultan Ali as a pliant cipher, pushed his claims as the legitimate ruler of Johore and agitated for the reorganization of the state of Johore under a British Resident as the best guarantee for peace and order.<sup>74</sup> In Butterworth's day the feeling among the majority of the European merchants in Singapore was still hostile to the Temenggong, and the *Singapore Free Press* spoke out in 1855 against the alleged injustice of the Johore treaty and the secrecy with which it had been negotiated:

The transaction altogether conveyed a most painful impression to the minds of those who knew anything of the real motives and causes for the theatrical display which was taking place. They saw the officers of the government of India uniting with the vassal of the Sultan of Johore to strip his imbecile superior of power and territory.<sup>75</sup>

With Read's support, Sultan Ali and his family refused to acknowledge the implications of the treaty and persistently demanded what they claimed to be their share of the increasing revenues of Johore.<sup>76</sup> The sultan was sinking further into debt, and despite Read's vigilance he appears to have been induced by Paterson, Simons and Napier to sign a bond making over to them all the money payable to him by the Temenggong under the terms of the 1855 treaty.<sup>77</sup>

Blundell did not share Butterworth's personal admiration for

<sup>73</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 162-73.

<sup>74</sup> 'Delta', *SFP*, 11 July 1861.

<sup>75</sup> *SFP*, 3 January 1856.

<sup>76</sup> SSR, W 28, Item 414; SSR, BB 111, Item 118; SSR, W 30, Item 241; SSR, V 29, pp. 110-11; IO, India Political Proceedings, 1859, Range 204, vol. 9, nos. 254-6, 259.

<sup>77</sup> SSR, U 36, pp. 49-51.



the Temenggong, while Ibrahim, spurred on by his legal and commercial advisers, was arrogant towards the Governor. They clashed over letting the excise farms, over the treatment of Chinese British subjects in Johore and over the Temenggong's leasing of his land in New Harbour. After the 1855 treaty was signed the Temenggong tried to shake free of the arrangement whereby the Johore farms were sold jointly with those of Singapore. In April 1855 he made a bid to sell the Johore tax farms by public auction, but Blundell forbade this and persuaded Calcutta to insist on the joint disposal of the Singapore and Johore opium and spirit farms, although the government of India was reluctant, fearing this might be a first step leading to the annexation of Johore.<sup>78</sup>

The immigration of Chinese into Johore reached such a scale by the mid-1850s that it produced friction and allegations of ill-treatment, but the Temenggong refused to answer charges in the Recorder's court on the grounds that such cases were outside the Singapore court's jurisdiction.<sup>79</sup> This revealed the anomaly of the Temenggong's position as ruler of Johore and resident of Singapore, and also showed the difficulties, dangers and uncertainties faced by Chinese British subjects in Johore.

Blundell was angry too because Ibrahim was leasing and selling to private firms the land reserved for him in the New Harbour area, and he felt the only solution to the whole situation was to force the Temenggong to leave Singapore and take up residence in Johore. He asked Calcutta in 1856 to forbid Ibrahim to alienate the land at Telok Blangah, pay him his \$15,000 compensation, and expel him from Singapore.<sup>80</sup> Receiving no reply, Blundell repeated his request, but by March 1859 when the government of India reached a compromise, whereby the Temenggong should be allowed to remain in Singapore but was required to lease the remaining sea front to the government permanently, nearly all the land was already occupied by private individuals.<sup>81</sup> The decision

<sup>78</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 161; SSR, S 25, Item 72; SSR, U 32, p. 153; SSR, R 31, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> SSR, W 24, Items 202, 228; SSR, V 22, p. 275; SSR, W 30, Item 234; SSR, R 35, p. 286.

<sup>80</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 78-92, 187-94.

<sup>81</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 162-73; IO, India Political Proceedings, 1859, Range 204, vol. 9, no. 192.

represented a victory for the Temenggong, who promised the discomfited Blundell that he would continue to 'render my presence and position in this island productive of as much benefit and as little inconvenience as possible to the British government'.<sup>82</sup>

Because of Blundell's increasing unpopularity among the European community in Singapore, the press and many of the European merchants began to support Ibrahim as a means of attacking the Governor. Abraham Logan, who up to 1858 consistently criticized the Temenggong in the *Free Press*, dropped his hostility and from 1860 to 1867 acted as legal adviser to Ibrahim and his successor. Companies, such as Jardine Mathesons and the Borneo Company, who had leased land from the Temenggong, supported him because they were anxious not to see it revert to the government.<sup>83</sup>

The Directors and Calcutta were soon disillusioned about their confidence that the 1855 treaty would mark the end of their involvement with mainland Johore. Sultan Ali sent a troop of Bugis to take over the territory of Muar allotted to him and after meeting resistance from the local chief, the dato temenggong of Muar, the Bugis laid the state waste and carried their raiding and cattle thieving to the Malacca border area. The temenggong of Muar appealed for British help, and Blundell, who, as Resident Councillor of Malacca in 1849, had recommended that the Company should buy the area between the Kassang and Muar rivers as 'among the most valuable in the whole peninsula', repeated the plea in 1858, but again met with no response from Calcutta.<sup>84</sup>

Arriving as Governor in 1859, Cavenagh was immediately faced with the Johore problem, its impact on the Singapore mercantile community and the strained official relations arising

<sup>82</sup> SSR, W 30, Item 252.

<sup>83</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 165-8; SSR, W 27, Item 210; SSR, R 33, pp. 207-9; IO, India Political Proceedings, Range 204, vol. 6, nos. 175-92.

<sup>84</sup> SSR, U 33, pp. 239-40; SSR, U 34, pp. 13-14, 90-2; R. C. Macpherson, 'Narrative of a Trip to Dok in the Muar Territory', *JIA*, n.s. ii (1857-8), 295-300; IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 110, no. 3; F. L. Baumgarten, 'Genealogy of the Temenggong of Muar', *JIA*, v (1851), 66-8; E. A. Blundell, 'Notices of the History and Present Condition of Malacca', *JIA*, ii (1848), 753-4; T. Oxley, 'A Trip to the Moar', *JIA*, iv (1850), 350-1; T. Braddell, 'Notes of a Trip to the Interior from Malacca', *JIA*, vii (1853), 96-9; *SFP*, 24 June 1858.

from the treatment of Chinese British subjects. Like Blundell, Cavenagh was no admirer of the Temenggong, whom he considered to be an extravagant and selfish ruler, the dupe of scheming European lawyers and commercial agents. On the other hand, as a newcomer to the Straits, Cavenagh was not hampered by his predecessor's feelings of sentiment and moral obligation to Sultan Ali as son of the chief who had sold Singapore to the British.

Despite individual complaints, the Chinese settlers in Johore caused less friction than their countrymen in Larut and Sungei Ujong. In 1864 there were probably 15,000 Chinese planters in the state, but they occupied formerly uninhabited river valleys and did not normally come into contact with the indigenous population or with other groups of their countrymen. Their territory was clearly defined, they were administered largely by their own *kangchus*, and not by the Temenggong's officials.<sup>85</sup> The Temenggong's physical authority over the state was never in dispute, and the battle which he fought with the sultan was merely for prestige and revenue and staged largely in the offices of Singapore officials and lawyers. The Chinese communities were not threatened by the wars and intrigues of local chiefs, and the nature of their occupation did not give rise to the arguments over watercourses and ore deposits which caused continual friction among the Chinese tin miners of other states.

Disputes arose more frequently between the Johore and Straits authorities about the activities of traders and fishermen from Singapore, and over more prosperous Chinese who visited the mainland on gambling sprees or to try to recruit secret society members. The most numerous complaints came from fishermen operating in the Old Strait which separated Singapore island from Johore and arose largely from the ambiguity of the Johore treaty of August 1824. The British assumed the waters of the Straits belonged to Singapore, but the Temenggong insisted the dividing line should be drawn along the middle. As a result there were frequent fights between Singapore *pukat* and Johore *kelong* fishermen near the shore,

<sup>85</sup> A. E. Coope, 'The Kangchu System in Johore', *JMBRAS*, xiv, no. 3 (1936), 247-63; J. V. Cowgill, 'Chinese Place Names in Johore', *JMBRAS*, ii, no. 3 (1924), 221-51; *SFP*, 5 November 1857.

while the Temenggong's men imposed fines and confiscated boats, nets and fish from Singapore fishermen in the middle of the strait. Further difficulties arose because Johore had no sound judicial system and the British authorities objected to the treatment meted out to British subjects accused of crimes in Johore.

In 1861 Cavenagh complained to the Temenggong of injuries suffered by Singapore fishermen at the hands of villagers and officials in Johore, and about the treatment of five well-to-do Singapore Chinese shopkeepers, who were arrested on a charge of cheating at gambling in Johore, and he made a test case of murder and piracy alleged to have been committed at Padang by Johore villagers against British subjects travelling from Malacca to Singapore.<sup>86</sup> Cavenagh appealed to Calcutta to impose conditions on the Temenggong concerning the trials of British subjects, pointing out that in Johore there was 'no law or even an approach to any system of law . . . the government is a complete despotism and the will of the Temenggong is supreme'.<sup>87</sup> Failing that, he suggested they should expel the Temenggong from Singapore and hold him responsible as an independent ruler for seeing that British subjects were well treated in his territory.<sup>88</sup> Cavenagh was appalled at the Temenggong's neglect of his state:

There is not a road through his territory and the only signs of civilisation that I am aware of are a house built for His Highness's accommodation whenever he may visit Johore and a saw mill recently established, doubtless to enable his advisers to realise a handsome profit from the sale of timber procurable in the forests on the mainland.<sup>89</sup>

By the latter months of 1861 Ibrahim was a sick man and handed over most administrative matters to his eldest son, Wan Abu Bakar. Cavenagh was much impressed by the charm and

<sup>86</sup> SSR, V 33, pp. 56-8, 84-5, 98-100, 130, 135-7, 177-9, 268-71, 283-4, 336-41, 358-9, 365-6; SSR, W 38, Items 206A, 265; SSR, W 39, Items 32, 62, 63, 93; SSR, R 39, pp. 175-9, 197-201.

<sup>87</sup> SSR, V 33, pp. 76-80, 196-8; SSR, R 39, pp. 118-22, 140-3, 153, 170; SSR, W 38, Items 326, 347.

<sup>88</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 310-14.

<sup>89</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 200-1.

quick-wittedness of this 'intelligent lad',<sup>90</sup> who spoke English fluently. The Governor decided the best hope for friendly co-operation between the British authorities and Johore lay in establishing direct communication with Ibrahim's heir and separating him from the advisers who surrounded his father. One day in October 1861, when Abu Bakar was scheduled to accompany the Resident Councillor on the government gun-boat to investigate a fishing dispute in Johore, Cavenagh without any warning came on the trip too, in order to have the young man to himself. This leisurely expedition changed the whole relationship between the Straits authorities and the Temenggong. Cavenagh impressed upon Abu Bakar the serious consequences of his father's conduct, while the young man, recognizing that his best chance for preservation and the advancement of his ambitions lay in co-operation with the British, promised his friendship and agreed to deal personally with future complaints. In the fishing incident they were then investigating, Abu Bakar immediately admitted his people were in the wrong and ordered restitution to be made. Cavenagh believed Abu Bakar was sincere, and was further encouraged when Abu Bakar restored the property stolen at Padang and released the Singapore Chinese confined on gambling charges.<sup>91</sup>

When Ibrahim died in January 1862, Abu Bakar succeeded him and issued a proclamation which Cavenagh agreed to publish in the Straits *Government Gazette*:

It will ever be his greatest aim, with the blessing of God, aided by the friendship and good counsels of the British government, to rule his country so as to promote the welfare, prosperity and happiness of its inhabitants.<sup>92</sup>

The new ruler immediately embarked on a policy of extricating himself from the grip of his father's commercial agents and lawyers, and at the same time freeing himself from the danger of interference by the British by bringing his administration into line with the Governor's wishes and thus removing all sources of friction. While he still employed Simons as his agent

<sup>90</sup> O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), p. 274.

<sup>91</sup> SSR, R 40, pp. 33-6, 136-8, 153-4; SSR, R 41, pp. 133-5, 216-17; SSR, U 43, pp. 446-7; SSR, V 37, p. 35; SSR, W 45, Item 169; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 274, 312-14.

<sup>92</sup> SSR, W 42, Item 126; SFP, 24 April 1862.

and continued to use the legal services of Abraham Logan, which guaranteed him a good hearing in the *Singapore Free Press*, he also employed Thomas Braddell, the crown counsel. Unlike his father, he composed many of his own letters to the British authorities. He began to replace Ibrahim's ex-pirate followers with officials born and brought up in Singapore, many of them like himself educated in the Anglo-Malay tradition of Keasberry's school.

Cavenagh hoped that Abu Bakar might decide to move to Johore himself and the new Temenggong spent much of his time in Johore Bahru,<sup>93</sup> which until 1866 was known as Tanjong Putri. Founded in 1855, Johore Bahru was little more than a village and gambling centre when Abu Bakar succeeded to office, with a police station and a tax collector's office but little else. Abu Bakar used it as a centre for extending his administration of the country, producing a rudimentary framework of government in the 1860s and removing the worst abuses which caused friction with Singapore. In 1863 he revised the Johore law code 'to make it more conformable to European ideas'.<sup>94</sup> He co-operated in surrendering escaped convicts to the Singapore authorities and suppressing piracy in the Johore Strait.<sup>95</sup> He continued to support Keasberry's school in Singapore and in 1865 set up an English school in Johore Bahru, conducted by a Christian teacher. He allowed a church to be built and was tolerant to Christianity and to Europeans. Abu Bakar encouraged vaccination, and sponsored enterprising but unsuccessful experiments with growing cotton, tobacco and sugar.<sup>96</sup>

Johore's prosperity was stimulated by rising gambier and pepper prices in the 1860s, and by 1864 there were 1,200 plantations in Johore. In Singapore 100 gambier shops and over 200 provision stores relied almost exclusively on the Johore trade which was controlled from Singapore. In 1864 Abu Bakar tried to divert the headquarters of the gambier trade to Johore

<sup>93</sup> Cavenagh to Wood, 22 September 1865, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters.

<sup>94</sup> SSR, S 30, Items 67, 90; SSR, V 35, pp. 168-70; SSR, V 38, p. 76; SSR, W 42, Item 192; SSR, W 47, Item 127; SSR, W 48, Item 190.

<sup>95</sup> SSR, W 52, Item 238; SSR, U 41, pp. 105-8.

<sup>96</sup> SSR, V 38, p. 117; *SFP*, 11 September 1862, 12 May, 3 November 1864, 26 October 1865.

and ordered all planters to take their produce to Johore Bahru, but complaints from the Chinese gambier dealers in Singapore and from the chamber of commerce led Cavenagh to force Abu Bakar to abandon his scheme.<sup>97</sup>

Cavenagh refused to accept the Temenggong's claims over waters in the Old Strait,<sup>98</sup> but on the whole the relationship between the two men was most amicable.<sup>99</sup> At Cavenagh's suggestion, the Temenggong paid a visit to England in 1866, which was a great personal triumph. After being lionized in London society and entertained at Windsor and Buckingham Palace, he returned in royal style, dominating the social life on board ship, inspecting the Malay soldiers of the Ceylon Rifles in Colombo and instructing them to be loyal to Queen Victoria. He arrived in Singapore to be greeted by cheering crowds, including many Europeans, and was given an official welcoming reception by Cavenagh.<sup>100</sup> Abu Bakar was by then more powerful than any other Malay chief and his authority in Johore was beyond challenge. In 1868 the British admitted the title of maharajah, which he had adopted at the time of his succession, and in 1885 he was to be recognized as sultan of Johore. Paterson and Simons continued to prosper as the economy of Johore expanded, and Cavenagh could speak of the state on the eve of the transfer as 'virtually under our protection'.<sup>101</sup> In fact neither the Straits government nor any Singapore firm could then claim to dominate Johore. Immensely popular in Singapore society, generous and hospitable, a keen cricketer and an ardent racegoer, Abu Bakar was on the best of terms with the Straits authorities but determined to retain control of Johore for himself, to promote the wealth of his state and to safeguard his independence by giving British subjects no cause for complaint and the Straits authorities no excuse for interference.

<sup>97</sup> C. M. Turnbull, 'The Johore Gambier and Pepper Trade in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *JSSS*, xv, no. 1 (1959), 43-55.

<sup>98</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 246-7; SSR, R 41, pp. 294-300; SSR, V 35, p. 49; SSR, S 30, Item 90; SSR, W 53, Item 219; SSR, W 54, Items 252, 284; SSR, V 41, p. 330.

<sup>99</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 76-81; SSR, W 45, Items 7, 30; SSR, V 36, p. 392.

<sup>100</sup> *SFP*, 19 July, 1, 8 November 1866; *Colombo Observer* in *SFP*, 6 December 1866.

<sup>101</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 381-2.

Cavenagh attributed the change in the conduct of the Johore authorities to his conversation with Abu Bakar in October 1861,<sup>102</sup> and the result was a triumph for both Cavenagh and the Temenggong. Cavenagh achieved in Johore what he aimed to do in other states in the peninsula: to encourage strong, enlightened, independent rulers who would provide peace in their states and security for outside traders, without the necessity for British political intervention. Despite the proximity of Johore to Singapore, Abu Bakar and his successor were able to keep Johore separate and independent of British control for longer than any other state in the peninsula. But the crucial questions of the regulation of Johore's foreign policy, domination of her economy and possession of the Johore Strait remained in the hands of Singapore.

Even Read was forced to admit that Sultan Ali's case was now hopeless. 'The prey to the harpies by whom he is surrounded', as Cavenagh described him in 1862,<sup>103</sup> Ali was reduced to extreme poverty and debt. One *chettiar* held his bond for \$63,000 and received as interest on this the whole of Ali's government pension as well as the \$500 paid by the Temenggong. In 1862 Read persuaded Ali to offer the territory of Muar once more to the British in exchange for a monthly pension and a loan, but Calcutta was not prepared to consider any acquisition of territory.<sup>104</sup> Read then induced Ali to retire from Singapore to live in Muar in order to claim the compensation payable under the 1824 treaty, but after long wrangling Ali failed to secure his \$20,000 and almost lost his pension.<sup>105</sup> After his death in 1877 Ali's son lost the title and the territory in Muar.

The 1855 Johore treaty had an unsettling influence upon the Malay peninsula far beyond Johore itself. With the exception

<sup>102</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 216-17.

<sup>103</sup> SSR, R 41, p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> SSR, W 41, Item 4; SSR, R 41, pp. 14-17; SSR, S 30, Item 48; SSR, U 44, p. 39.

<sup>105</sup> SSR, W 44, Item 218; SSR, V 36, no. 436; SSR, R 41, pp. 100-2, 124-5, 150-1, 152-6, 161-2, 194-5, 248-50; SSR, U 46, pp. 120, 149, 195, 405, 433, 486; SSR, V 37, pp. 272-3, 426-7; SSR, W 47, Items 40, 46, 144; SSR, W 48, Item 180; SSR, V 38, pp. 13, 51, 79; SSR, W 49, Items 72, 164; SSR, S 32, Items 5, 41, 246; SSR, W 50, Items 343, 446; SSR, V 39, p. 89; SSR, G 6, pp. 4, 112, 120; SSR, S 34, Item 35.



of the Bendahara of Pahang, who shared the Temenggong's interest in diminishing the power of traditional authority, nearly all the Malay chiefs regarded Ibrahim's rising fortunes with jealousy. The Temenggong and the Bendahara still recognized the sultan of Lingga as their suzerain, but over the years they allowed the ceremonies of homage to lapse. Neither yet claimed to be of royal rank, but by the middle of the century they were ruling in the sultan's name but outside his control.

Sultan Mahmud's dealings with the east coast states continued to alarm the Straits authorities, and in January 1857 the Dutch promised they would prohibit the sultan from leaving Lingga without their permission or visiting the Straits Settlements without the British Governor's consent.<sup>106</sup> Disregarding these orders, Mahmud left for Singapore in August 1857 and the Dutch deposed him for his 'incurable disobedience and want of respect'.<sup>107</sup>

Mahmud's appearance in Singapore coincided with the beginning of a time of trouble in the east coast states, which originated in a dispute over revenue between Mutahir and Wan Ahmed, the sons of Bendahara Ali of Pahang. The elder son, Mutahir, who became Bendahara on Ali's death in 1857, refused to acknowledge Wan Ahmed's claim that his father had bequeathed him the right to the revenues of Endau, and Wan Ahmed set off for Singapore to seek help. The Temenggong warned Blundell that Wan Ahmed was fitting out an expedition to invade Pahang and tried to get the young man arrested,<sup>108</sup> but Wan Ahmed escaped to Trengganu, where he raised a force and occupied the Bendahara's capital for a short time before being driven back to Kemaman. William Napier, who was legal adviser to both the Bendahara and the Temenggong, called on Blundell to restore the Bendahara's authority.<sup>109</sup> The British had no treaty with Pahang, and Blundell's main

<sup>106</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 22-6, 151-3; SSR, W 24, Item 15.

<sup>107</sup> SSR, W 25, Items 391, 429; SSR, V 23, p. 204; SSR, R 32, pp. 168-9; IO, India Political Proceedings, Range 203, vol. 29, nos. 59, 61, 63; *SFP*, 15, 22, 29 October 1857.

<sup>108</sup> SSR, W 25, Items 334, 335; SSR, U 33, p. 236; W. Linehan, 'A History of Pahang', *JMBRAS*, xiv, no. 2 (1936), 66.

<sup>109</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 170-1.

object was to localize the dispute and prevent outside intervention. He forbade the Temenggong to interfere,<sup>110</sup> but Ibrahim ignored these instructions and made a formal agreement with Adam Wilson, who had recently returned to Singapore following the collapse of his Siak enterprise. Under the terms of the contract, which was witnessed by William Paterson of Ker, Rawson & Company, who had interests in the Pahang trade, Wilson agreed, in return for a down payment of \$500 and a further \$10,000 if he succeeded, to recruit a force of eighty European sailors and eighty Bugis and drive Wan Ahmed out of Pahang. Blundell forbade the expedition and appealed urgently to India for guidance, to settle 'these wretched family quarrels' before they stirred up factions among the European community in Singapore.<sup>111</sup> He visited the east coast himself, ordering Sultan Omar of Trengganu to keep Wan Ahmed under supervision at his capital, and informing the Bendahara Mutahir that the British intended to insulate Pahang against foreign interference but would not support him in his domestic feud.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile in April 1858 Mahmud left Singapore for Pahang, where he stayed some time with the Bendahara. Blundell attached little importance to this at first, but when rumours began to spread that Mahmud had ambitions to seize the state for himself, Blundell advised the Bendahara to remove him.<sup>113</sup>

Singapore's trade with Pahang was at a standstill, and the Singapore chamber of commerce appealed for more forceful British action. Blundell was in some ways sorry that Wan Ahmed had lost his original foothold in Pahang, because, as he reported to India, the younger man, then about twenty years old, energetic and dashing, was far more popular than his brother. Still, he concluded, 'it matters not who rules the country but it is of importance that its trade and general prosperity should not be destroyed' and that the neighbouring states and Singapore merchants should not get involved. He

<sup>110</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 488; SSR, V 24, pp. 17-19.

<sup>111</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 281, 309-16; SSR, V 24, pp. 90-1, 110-18; SSR, W 26, Items 43, 50, 54, 75; *SFP*, 4 February 1858.

<sup>112</sup> SSR, R 33, pp. 12-13, 46-52, 62-8; SSR, U 35, pp. 36-44; SSR, W 27, Items 142, 156; SSR, V 24, pp. 235-9; SSR, W 26, Item 116; *SFP*, 1 April 1858.

<sup>113</sup> SSR, R 33, pp. 137-8.

informed Calcutta that the 'strong party feelings existing in Singapore' about Pahang had determined him to put a stop to the war and if necessary he would force Wan Ahmed to come to live in Singapore.<sup>114</sup>

For the present it appeared that Blundell's warnings to the Malay chiefs were sufficient. A few years of troubled peace ensued, and it looked as if Blundell's attempt to localize the war into a domestic issue had succeeded, but in April 1861 the Bendahara Mutahir appealed to Cavenagh for help in repelling a new invasion of Pahang by Wan Ahmed, allegedly supported by Omar of Trengganu, and at the same time the Temenggong again asked for permission to help the Bendahara.<sup>115</sup> Cavenagh followed Blundell's policy of trying to localize the dispute. He refused to allow the Temenggong to intervene, warned Omar and Wan Ahmed not to attack Pahang, advised Wan Ahmed and the Bendahara to submit their quarrel to the Singapore authorities for arbitration and visited Pahang himself to issue warnings.<sup>116</sup> Wan Ahmed refused to come to Singapore and he succeeded in occupying Kuantan, but Cavenagh refused to interfere when the Bendahara appealed for his help to evict his brother.<sup>117</sup>

Wan Ahmed's seizure of Kuantan interrupted the valuable tin and gold trade. Work at the mines stopped, and the Chinese merchants of Singapore feared they would lose the large advances of money and supplies they had made to the miners. The Singapore chamber of commerce again called on the Governor to act, but Cavenagh was confident he had isolated the dispute and that the Bendahara would easily prevail without British aid.<sup>118</sup> It appeared for a time that this complacency was justified. Wan Ahmed retreated to Trengganu, and boats from Pahang began once more to arrive in Singapore bringing

<sup>114</sup> SSR, W 27, Items 285, 286; SSR, R 33, pp. 243-50; SSR, V 25, pp. 169-72.

<sup>115</sup> SSR, W 38, Items 202, 206.

<sup>116</sup> SSR, V 33, pp. 86-7, 121-3, 138-40, 171-2; SSR, R 39, pp. 88-93, 95-9; IO, India Political and Foreign Proceedings, Range 204, vol. 56, July 1861, (A) 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, August 1861, (A) 155; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 303-5.

<sup>117</sup> SSR, V 33, pp. 211-12, 229-32, 244-6, 306-9; SFP, 20, 27 June, 4 July 1861; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 307; SSR, W 39, Items 5, 19, 34, 71.

<sup>118</sup> SSR, W 39, Item 33; SSR, V 33, pp. 276-8; SSR, R 39, pp. 191-4, 219-20; IO, India Political and Foreign Proceedings, Range 204, vol. 56, September 1861, (A) 107, 108.

tin and other produce. The Singapore merchants set out to profit from the situation, particularly William Paterson, who lent a considerable sum of money to the Bendahara. In return for this and an undertaking to pay off the Bendahara's debts, Paterson and Simons were granted an agreement in November 1861, whereby the Bendahara gave them a monopoly to work tin on the Kuantan river 'now and for ever'.<sup>119</sup> They were to pay a modest export duty of ten per cent and had the right to supply rice, opium and other stores to the Chinese miners at Kuantan. After this many more Chinese flocked to the Kuantan mines and prosperity began to return to the country.

In the middle of 1862, however, the peace of Pahang was again threatened, this time by a formidable combination of Wan Ahmed, Omar of Trengganu, Ali of Johore, the inland chiefs of Pahang and Mahmud, ex-sultan of Lingga. They appeared to have the backing of Siam and this resurrected the spectre of Siamese ambitions in the peninsula which had been laid to rest in 1826. Mahmud had appealed to Siam while he was living with the Bendahara, offering to make Pahang a vassal state if the Siamese would put him on the throne. King Mongkut received this request cautiously, warning him that since the British had influence over Pahang, 'it would not be appropriate to scheme to bring it under Bangkok as a vassal city'.<sup>120</sup> He then invited Mahmud to reside at Bangkok, where the ex-sultan and his retinue established themselves at Mongkut's court in great style. In July 1862 Mahmud moved to Trengganu and it was rumoured that the Siamese planned to install him as sultan of Trengganu and that he was backing Wan Ahmed, who earlier in the year had joined the inland Pahang chiefs and in August 1862 attacked Pahang overland down the Tembeling river, throwing the interior of the state into confusion. Chinese miners fled to the coast, and the rebels intercepted boats bringing supplies to the Kuantan mines. The Bendahara warned Paterson that he could not guarantee to protect his property.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>119</sup> SSR, W 44, Item 187; SSR, R 39, pp. 333-4; SFP, 1, 29 August 1861.

<sup>120</sup> C. Flood (trans.), *The Dynastic Chronicles, Bangkok Era, the Fourth Reign, B.E. 2394-2411 (1851-68)* (Tokyo, 1965-7), i, 213, 242.

<sup>121</sup> SSR, W 44, Item 187; SFP, 4 September, 23, 30 October 1862; SSR, R 41, pp. 74-5.

Paterson and Simons were faced with the alternative of evacuating their 400 miners and so losing the advances which they had made, or leaving them at the risk of their being killed and the large stores of rice, opium and other supplies which they had sent to Kuantan to tide the miners over the coming monsoon season being looted. They appealed for Cavenagh's help, and the plea was supported by an independent call for aid by Singapore Chinese merchants, who claimed to have thirty mining establishments in the Kuantan area. The chamber of commerce estimated that the total property belonging to Singapore Chinese in Pahang was worth at least \$80,000.<sup>122</sup>

During the monsoon season, which starts in mid-November, it was impossible for ships to enter the rivers of Trengganu and Pahang, so that Cavenagh had at the most ten days in which to act. Faced with the possible death of hundreds of Chinese in Kuantan and the loss of property worth thousands of dollars, spurred on by the press, the chamber of commerce, European and Chinese merchants, and fearing that Siam might strike a decisive blow in the Malay states, Cavenagh called on Bangkok to remove Mahmud immediately and took the drastic step of sending the Resident Councillor in a gunboat to remove Mahmud from Trengganu if necessary and escort him back to Siam, with instructions to bombard Omar's fort if the sultan refused to surrender his guest. The ultimatum was ignored, the Trengganu fort shelled, and Mahmud fled inland.<sup>123</sup>

The Bendahara was pleased, and Cavenagh was satisfied the incident would convince Siam, Mahmud, Wan Ahmed and their allies that the British would no longer tolerate their interference in Pahang.<sup>124</sup> But the bombardment was condemned by Calcutta and the India office, and castigated in the house of commons as 'a most disgraceful occurrence to the British name and arms, the most cruel outrage that has taken place in the Eastern seas, and as impolitic as it was unjust and cruel'.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>122</sup> SSR, W 44, Item 199.

<sup>123</sup> SSR, U 45, p. 1; Cavenagh to Wood, 21 June, 5 October 1864, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 303-9.

<sup>124</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 93-4, 104, 105-7, 123-4; SSR, V 36, p. 231; SSR, U 45, p. 31; SSR, W 44, Item 236.

<sup>125</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. clxxii, 586-93, reported in *SFP*, 20

News of the bombardment was received with mixed feelings in Singapore.<sup>126</sup> Cavenagh's intervention did no harm to Wan Ahmed's cause, nor did it help Paterson, Simons and the other Singapore merchants involved on the Bendahara's side. Cavenagh had secured Calcutta's agreement to a treaty between the Temenggong and the Bendahara, which was signed in the Governor's presence in July 1862 and at last gave Abu Bakar the opportunity to send help to the Bendahara.<sup>127</sup> But his intervention came too late, because the cruelty and oppression of Mutahir and his son Koris, 'a brainless opium addict',<sup>128</sup> had stirred up the bitter hostility of the inland chiefs. An unsuccessful attempt by Read to thwart the Temenggong's expedition was superfluous,<sup>129</sup> because the subordinate chiefs were determined to throw off the rule of the Bendahara, who 'treats the people's lives just as monkeys'.<sup>130</sup> The Bendahara's supporters began to desert to Wan Ahmed's side, and in May 1863 both Mutahir and Koris died. The Temenggong invited Cavenagh to mediate in Pahang, as the Governor had already offered to do, but by then support for Wan Ahmed was so strong in Pahang that he took the capital and set himself up as Bendahara.<sup>131</sup>

Mahmud, who went back to Bangkok in March 1863, had ideas of settling in Singapore but abandoned this intention when Cavenagh warned him that, as a resident of Singapore, if he conspired against any foreign country he would be liable to transportation or imprisonment with hard labour.<sup>132</sup> In November 1863 Mahmud disappeared from Bangkok. Cavenagh was suspicious about the possibility of new Siamese intrigues but although King Mongkut was obviously pleased to see the back of his extravagant and unruly guest, whom he described to Tan Kim Ching, the Siamese consul in Singapore, as 'very August 1863; Wood to Elgin, 2 May 1863, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 13; Wood to Cavenagh, 10 May 1864, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 16, 27 June, 9 August 1864, vol. 17; SSR, S 32, Item 128.

<sup>126</sup> SFP, 6, 20, 27 November, 4 December 1862; ST, 22 November 1862.

<sup>127</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 40-1.

<sup>128</sup> Linchan, JMBRAS, xiv, no. 2 (1936), 81.

<sup>129</sup> SSR, V 34, p. 209.

<sup>130</sup> SSR, W 45, Item 136.

<sup>131</sup> SSR, W 46, Item 301; SSR, W 47, Item 21; SSR, V 37, pp. 221-3, 225-6, 291-2; SSR, R 41, pp. 144-5, 148-9; SFP, 2 July 1863; Linchan, JMBRAS, xiv, no. 2 (1936), 84-6.

<sup>132</sup> SSR, W 45, Item 186; SSR, V 37, pp. 299-301; SSR, R 41, pp. 157-8, 178-9.

wild and vulgar',<sup>122</sup> it is unlikely that the Siamese organized his departure, for they appear by then to have acknowledged Pahang as a British sphere of influence.<sup>124</sup> Mahmud passed through Singapore in disguise, went on to join Sultan Ali in Muar,<sup>125</sup> and then proceeded overland to Pahang. Mongkut told Tan Kim Ching how Mahmud was 'most intoxicated and admired with the power of Inche Wan Ahmed',<sup>126</sup> but the new Bendahara was embarrassed at the reappearance of his erstwhile ally, who had served his purpose and was now only likely to stir up new trouble in Pahang and embroil Wan Ahmed with the British.<sup>127</sup> The danger ended with Mahmud's timely death in Pekan in July 1864.<sup>128</sup> Wan Ahmed also cold-shouldered Sultan Ali, who visited Pahang to demand homage from the new Bendahara, but for whom Wan Ahmed had no further use.<sup>129</sup> By the end of 1864 Cavenagh was able to report that the peninsula was quiet and Wan Ahmed anxious to secure British approval.<sup>140</sup>

While Wan Ahmed's victory brought peace with the British authorities and tranquillity to Pahang, it did not restore the prosperity of the Singapore miners and traders involved in Pahang under the old regime. During the 1863 campaign Wan Ahmed's men looted Paterson & Simons's warehouse in Kuantan,<sup>141</sup> and after his victory the new Bendahara repudiated their claim for nearly \$50,000 in respect of damage to property and loss of mining rights. Wan Ahmed confiscated the tin himself and shipped it for sale in Singapore with a rival firm, of which Read's father-in-law was the senior partner.<sup>142</sup> Cavenagh wanted to blockade Wan Ahmed and force him to pay compensation to Paterson & Simons, but Calcutta was not prepared to take any action, and Wan Ahmed would not deign to correspond on the subject.<sup>143</sup> Paterson & Simons met

<sup>122</sup> SSR, W 48, Item 373.

<sup>124</sup> SSR, R 41, p. 200; SSR, W 48, Items 397, 400.

<sup>125</sup> SSR, W 48, Items 381, 383, 387; SSR, R 41, pp. 203-4; *SFP*, 10 December 1863.

<sup>126</sup> SSR, W 48, Item 373.

<sup>127</sup> SSR, W 49, Items 99, 152.

<sup>128</sup> *SFP*, 28 July 1864.

<sup>129</sup> SSR, W 50, Item 446; SSR, R 41, pp. 248-50.

<sup>140</sup> Cavenagh to Wood, 3 November 1864, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters.

<sup>141</sup> SSR, W 46, Items 271, 329; SSR, V 37, p. 198; SSR, R 41, p. 139.

<sup>142</sup> SSR, W 47, Item 103.

<sup>143</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 165-9, 179-80, 190, 230; SSR, W 50, Item 252; SSR, S 32, Item 135; *SFP*, 15, 22 October 1863.

with no better response when they revived their claims after the transfer to the colonial office.

### THE TIN STATES:

#### PERAK, NEGRI SEMBILAN AND SELANGOR

The Straits authorities became even more deeply involved in the west coast states of Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Perak, because of the influx of Chinese to the tin mines. The rising price of tin in the European market and the final abolition of tin import duties in Britain in 1853 stimulated the search for tin in Malaya.<sup>144</sup> Chinese labourers began to pour into the Malay states in their thousands, and Chinese financiers in Penang, Malacca and Singapore became directly involved in mining in the interior. As in gambier, pepper and tapioca production, they provided advances of capital to Chinese labourers in the Malay states, in return for which they monopolized the right to supply the miners with provisions and opium and to buy their produce at favourable rates. By 1860 the amount of Straits capital involved was considerable, and George Windsor Earl considered this 'privilege of unlimited extortion from the collectors and producers' as the worst evil in the relationship between the Straits Settlements and the Malay states.<sup>145</sup> The merchants who financed the tin trade were themselves leaders of secret societies, with headquarters in the Straits Settlements, and disputes between the *hoeyes* in the interior brought disorders in the Straits ports, particularly in Penang. The rapid expansion of the tin trade hastened the disintegration of traditional authority in the Malay states. In Perak and Selangor subordinate chiefs proved more fortunate and astute in the exploitation of tin than the legitimate rulers, and the Malay hierarchy was disrupted.<sup>146</sup> Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan were troubled states, incapable of bearing the strain of absorbing and controlling large numbers of aliens, particularly Chinese who brought their secret society organization, their fac-

<sup>144</sup> Wong Lin Ken, *The Malayan Tin Industry to 1914* (Arizona, 1965), p. 29.

<sup>145</sup> Earl to Governor, 7 June 1860, SSR, W 34.

<sup>146</sup> C. M. Turnbull, 'The Origins of British Control in the Malay States before Colonial Rule', *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, ed. J. Bastin and R. Roolvink (Oxford, 1964), pp. 169-70.



tions and disputes with them, and who in turn provided tempting opportunities for exploitation by minor chiefs over whom the weak central authority in the Malay states had little control.

In the first half of the nineteenth century there were already Chinese mining communities in Lukut, Sungei Ujong, Kuantan and other centres, but tin mining was still done on a fairly small scale. While many of these ventures ended in bloodshed, fighting and exactions by riverside chiefs, which sometimes put a stop to the tin trade completely, mining was controlled by the Malay chiefs, and the troubles did not involve the British authorities nor disturb the peace of the Straits Settlements. The East India Company made no attempt to take over the monopoly of the tin trade of the interior which the Dutch authorities had held from Malacca in the eighteenth century, and left the Dutch and Chinese merchants of Malacca to make agreements with the inland chiefs for the advancing of money and the purchase of tin, leaving the right to supply miners with opium and other wants in the hands of the Malay rulers.<sup>147</sup>

In 1828 there were about 1,000 Chinese miners in Sungei Ujong, but in that year fighting broke out with the Malays in which many Chinese were killed, the rest driven out, their property confiscated, and the basis on which the tin trade had been organized was shattered. By 1830 the Malacca merchants persuaded some of the Chinese to return to Sungei Ujong, lured by material rewards, but strife in the interior almost paralysed the tin trade in the 1830s. From the 1840s Dutch Malacca merchant families, the Neubronners and the Westerhouts, competed against one another in the Sungei Ujong tin trade, privately dragging Eurasian Malacca officials who were related to them into their intrigues.<sup>148</sup> At the same time Malacca Baba Chinese merchants, such as Chee Yam Chuan,<sup>149</sup> See Boon Tiong,<sup>150</sup> and Chan Tek Chiang,

<sup>147</sup> T. Braddell, *JIA*, n.s. i (1856), 227-9; Wong Lin Ken, *Malayan Tin Industry*, p. 19.

<sup>148</sup> Khoo Kay Kim, 'The Western Malay States, 1861-73', M.A. thesis, University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur), 1967, pp. 69-75.

<sup>149</sup> CHEE YAM CHUAN. Fifth-generation Malacca planter and land speculator; elected head of Malacca Hokkiens; died 1862. Khoo, 'Western Malay States', pp. 75-6.

<sup>150</sup> SEE BOON TIONG (1807-88). Born Malacca; went to Singapore 1832; associated with A. L. Johnston; returned to Malacca 1848.

became deeply involved in the politics and tin trade of the neighbouring states. The whole situation was complicated by the conflict of the two chiefs of Sungei Ujong, the Dato Klana Sendang and Dato Bandar Kulop Tunggal, who were both appointed about 1845. The Dato Klana was the chief political officer, but the very able and astute Dato Bandar in charge of trade was able to profit from the growing tin industry and held great influence among the Malacca merchants.

The tin from Sungei Ujong was brought down the Linggi river, which marked the boundary between Malacca and the Malay states and reached the sea about twenty-five miles west of Malacca. During the frequent internal disturbances local chiefs on the river levied crippling exactions on the trade. In 1855 the Malacca merchants petitioned the Governor to remove obstructions on the Linggi, and two years later Blundell sent a naval expedition to destroy forts where illegal tolls were exacted and disperse marauders.<sup>151</sup> This produced a few years of relative peace, but in 1860, taking advantage of the fact that the Dato Bandar had been put into a debtors' prison in Malacca, probably as a result of intrigue, the Dato Klana tried to levy an impost on the Chinese miners, which provoked a rising in which several hundred Chinese miners were slaughtered and the rest fled.<sup>152</sup> When Cavenagh visited Malacca in December 1860, some of the Chinese merchants tried to persuade him that the British should annex the neighbouring Malay states, but such action was contrary to the policy of non-intervention. Precluded from direct action, Cavenagh could only employ the alternative of bolstering up the central authority in the state. He tried accordingly to put pressure on the Dato Klana as the political leader to keep the peace, oblivious of the fact that the Dato Bandar was the more influential chief,<sup>153</sup> and although Chinese miners drifted back to work

<sup>151</sup> SSR, U 32, pp. 147-9; SSR, U 34, pp. 296-302; SSR, U 35, pp. 126-8, 178; SSR, R 33, pp. 14-17, 38-40, 134-6; SSR, V 24, pp. 188-91, 255-6; SSR, S 26, Items 73, 127.

<sup>152</sup> SSR, U 40, pp. 185-7, 235-7; SSR, R 38, pp. 7-18; *SFP*, 6 September 1860.

<sup>153</sup> SSR, R 38, pp. 38-43; SSR, U 41, pp. 185-7, 219, 262-4, 265-7; SSR, W 36, Item 248; SSR, R 39, pp. 36-7, 167-8; SSR, V 32, pp. 91-2; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 292-3.

in Sungei Ujong, their position remained precarious throughout the remaining years of Indian rule in the Straits.

The states of the Negri Sembilan confederacy continued to give trouble, sheltering criminals from Malacca, seizing escaped convicts as slaves, and allowing bands of marauders to invade British territory. Cavenagh put more faith in creating a strong frontier police than in gaining the rulers' co-operation.<sup>154</sup>

In Selangor British subjects were in theory guaranteed trading rights by the treaties made between the British and the sultan of Selangor in 1818 and 1825, but by the middle of the century the sultan's rule was only nominal, and Selangor was divided into five almost independent states: Lukut, Klang, Langat, Selangor and Bernam. Lukut and Klang were ruled by two Bugis brothers, Juma'at, who became rajah of Lukut in 1846, and Abdullah, who came to power in Klang in 1849. They owed their position to rescuing Sultan Muhammad of Selangor from bankruptcy, and both were closely associated with the Malacca merchant, Chee Yam Chuan. Lukut was described in 1850 as 'the chief tin producing basin in the south of the peninsula',<sup>155</sup> and by 1859 Juma'at's tin revenue was estimated at \$15,000 a month. The 1850s were a time of peace and expansion in Lukut, of co-operation with the Malacca merchants and Straits authorities, and in 1860 Cavenagh spoke of Juma'at as 'perhaps the most intelligent of the Malay chiefs and one moreover who has invariably shewn a disposition to cultivate our alliance and to be guided by our advice'.<sup>156</sup> The following year he commended Juma'at as 'the most active and enlightened chief in the peninsula',<sup>157</sup> and encouraged him as a ruler who could provide security and prosperity in a state where British trade could thrive without the need for political intervention. Rajah Juma'at gave the Straits government land at Cape Rachado to build a lighthouse, which was completed

<sup>154</sup> SSR, S 23, Item 68; SSR, V 32, pp. 124-5, 141; SSR, W 36, Item 318; SSR, R 38, pp. 224-7, 250-1, 308-10; SSR, R 39, p. 279; SSR, U 42, pp. 139, 265; SSR, U 43, pp. 396-7; SSR, S 33, Item 277; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 298.

<sup>155</sup> J. R. Logan, 'A Boat Voyage from Singapore to Penang', *JIA*, iv (1850), 754-7.

<sup>156</sup> SSR, R 37, pp. 97-9.

<sup>157</sup> SSR, R 39, p. 279.

in 1863.<sup>158</sup> He bought a gunboat for use against pirates, gave up criminals and convicts who escaped to his territory, and sent his son, Raja Bot, to the English school in Malacca, under the guardianship of Macpherson, the Resident Councillor. Cavenagh instructed Macpherson to hold Juma'at up to neighbouring chiefs as an example,<sup>159</sup> and in token of his approval the Governor paid a personal visit on Juma'at at Lukut fort in 1863.<sup>160</sup> But the following year Juma'at died and the young Raja Bot was incapable of exerting his authority. By that time Klang too was rent by civil strife, and W. H. Read and Tan Kim Ching, who had made an agreement in 1866 to take over the revenue farms of Klang, finding it impossible to enforce their rights, appealed for Cavenagh's help. Cavenagh issued warnings to the sultan, who was in no position to take action,<sup>161</sup> and the Governor had to look on helplessly, unable to gain any redress for the Singapore and Malacca merchants.

The largest influx of Chinese miners was into Perak, where the discovery of tin in the hitherto almost uninhabited Larut district brought a rapid immigration of miners in the early 1850s. Disputes about the succession and the passing over of the legitimate heir to the Perak throne in 1857 opened the way for the rise of non-royal ambitious subordinate chiefs and outsiders, notably the wealthy part-Malay, part-Indian Ngah Ibrahim, Mentri of Larut, whose fortune came from tin. The dissensions between the sultan and his senior chiefs reduced Perak to a state of turmoil, in which the treaties giving rights to British subjects were almost a dead letter. From time to time the Penang authorities intervened to protest against individual outrages,<sup>162</sup> but the government of India had no intention of being drawn into the internal affairs of Perak.

In the words of the *Penang Gazette* in 1860:

Perak's history is made up of domestic strife and devastation by

<sup>158</sup> SSR, R 36, p. 157; SSR, R 39, pp. 167-8; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1862-3*; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 298.

<sup>159</sup> SSR, U 41, pp. 262-3.

<sup>160</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 344-5.

<sup>161</sup> SSR, G 6, pp. 82-3, 86-8, 118-20, 124.

<sup>162</sup> SSR, DD 25, Item 125; SSR, DD 26, Items 145, 212; SSR, U 33, pp. 144-6, 233-5.

foreigners, and the chronic condition of weakness, poverty and rapacious barbarity thereby induced is unrelieved by a single gleam of prosperity.<sup>163</sup>

The civil strife threatened trade on the Krian river dividing Perak from Province Wellesley, and even the half-day's sail along the coast from Larut to Penang was unsafe.<sup>164</sup> The press in Penang and Singapore urged that the British should either annex the Krian district or mediate to establish peace there.<sup>165</sup> Cavenagh reported to India in July 1860, 'It would almost appear as if a state of civil warfare might be deemed the normal condition of Perak', but he had no authority to interfere.<sup>166</sup>

The solution which the sultan adopted to settle the Krian problem created fresh trouble. Lewis retired as Resident Councillor of Penang in 1860 and, seeking alternative employment to supplement his inadequate pension, applied to Sultan Ja'far of Perak for permission to farm the Krian area. Ja'far gave him a twenty-year agreement, on payment of an annual rent of \$5,000. Lewis was at first dubious about his title because the rajah muda was not present to fix his seal, but the sultan assured him this was a mere formality. Lewis's scheme attracted eager support and he induced 700 families to settle in Krian. All was going well until the rajah muda protested the agreement was invalid, whereupon Lewis appealed to the Straits government. Cavenagh, while indicating his approval in principle of the Krian project both to Lewis and the sultan, warned them the British would not intervene in a civil disturbance in Perak. The Straits government issued a proclamation forbidding British subjects to interfere in Perak or 'they will be prosecuted with the utmost vigour', and called on Lewis to return to Penang. This killed the enterprise and Lewis had no choice but to withdraw.<sup>167</sup>

Worse trouble followed in Larut, where the tin trade was largely controlled from Penang. In 1861 there were said to be

<sup>163</sup> *PG*, 2 June in *SFP*, 21 June 1860.

<sup>164</sup> *PG*, 14 April in *SFP*, 24 April 1860.

<sup>165</sup> *PG*, 5, 12 May in *SFP*, 24 May 1860; *SFP*, 17 May 1860.

<sup>166</sup> *SSR*, R 37, pp. 147-60; *SSR*, S 28, Item 172.

<sup>167</sup> *SSR*, DD 34, Items 80, 96, 149; *SSR*, DD 33, Item 60; *SSR*, U 43, pp. 65-7, 135-7; *SSR*, W 39, Items 124, 155; *SSR*, W 40, Item 196; *SSR*, V 33, pp. 441-3, 450-1; *SSR*, R 41, pp. 191-3; *SFP*, 17 January 1861.

5,000 Chinese miners in Larut, all of them members of local branches of the Penang secret societies. The majority of miners belonged to the Hai San society, while only about 1,500 were members of the Ghee Hin, the most powerful of the *hoeyes* in Penang itself. In July 1861 reports reached Penang that fighting had broken out among the Chinese in Larut and that the Hai San, in league with the local chief, had driven out the Ghee Hin. A thousand Ghee Hin refugees fled to Penang, while the rest remained stranded in Larut, homeless, destitute and starving. Penang's deputy commissioner of police was sent to Larut, together with the Ghee Hin and Hai San leaders from Penang, to arrange a settlement between the societies and the local Malay authority, but the promises made in Larut were not kept. Cavenagh protested to the sultan, who promised to make enquiries, but in the meantime the police intercepted two Hai San junks arriving in Penang with fighting men and large quantities of concealed arms. The Resident Councillor immediately took measures to stop possible trouble. He bound the headmen over to keep the peace and sent the police to intercept any other junks. This produced a state of quiet, but the press agitated for the annexation of Larut and Krian since the sultan could not exert his authority there.<sup>168</sup>

Despite his promises, Sultan Ja'far failed to open an investigation into the Larut disturbances, and Cavenagh, fearing an outbreak among the *hoeyes* in Penang, ordered a blockade of the Larut river.<sup>169</sup> The press applauded the blockade, 'firm and prudent if dilatory' as the *Penang Gazette* described it.<sup>170</sup> Eventually the Mentri of Larut agreed to pay compensation to the miners for their loss and to the British government to cover the cost of the blockade.<sup>171</sup> Cavenagh was pleased with the outcome of the affair, and the government of India commended his handling of the crisis,<sup>172</sup> while the *Penang Gazette* hailed his

<sup>168</sup> SSR, DD 34, Items 110, 115, 126, 130, 134; SSR, V 33, pp. 329-30; SSR, U 43, pp. 180-1, 218-19; PG, 20, 27 July, 31 August in SFP, 1, 8 August, 26 September 1861.

<sup>169</sup> SSR, U 44, pp. 4-7, 35-6, 42-6; SSR, R 41, pp. 20-3, 26-30; SSR, W 42, Item 119; SSR, V 35, pp. 163-4.

<sup>170</sup> PG, 12 April in SFP, 1 May 1862.

<sup>171</sup> SSR, W 42, Item 158; SSR, R 41, pp. 30-2; SSR, U 44, pp. 96-8.

<sup>172</sup> SSR, S 30, Items 103, 117, 135; SSR, R 41, pp. 35-8; *Annual Report on the Administration of the Straits Settlements for 1861-2*; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 323-5.

actions as a revival of 'the vigorous and intelligent policy of former days'.<sup>173</sup> The Mentri promised to try to reinstate the Ghee Hin, but they found it very difficult to return to their workings in Larut. Cavenagh refused to help. 'The fraternity of an illegal and secret society can have no claim upon the British government for redress for wrongs endured from a native chief', he maintained, and insisted they had rights only as individual British subjects, on which basis he had extracted compensation for personal losses.<sup>174</sup>

Despite his success on this occasion in Larut, Cavenagh realized that it was almost impossible to enforce treaty obligations when the sultan was so weak. The Governor sought guidance from Calcutta as to whether he was to hold the sultan responsible for infringements of the treaty by his feudatories and help him to coerce them, or hold each individual chief responsible and act against him independently. In reply to this request, Calcutta, dreading a repetition of the Trengganu incident, warned Cavenagh against any extension of British commitments and extracted his promise to confine help to individual cases of wrongs inflicted on British subjects in clear violation of treaty obligations.<sup>175</sup>

These instructions were difficult to follow, because British officials received scant attention in Perak, and in face of threats of further civil war, Cavenagh wanted to negotiate a new treaty. His fears were quickly confirmed. On Sultan Ja'far's death in 1865 Perak plunged into civil war, and in the turmoil Chinese miners, robbed and plundered by petty chiefs without hope of redress, plagued the Governor with petitions for help.<sup>176</sup> Again the press urged the annexation of Larut and Krian: 'We despair of anything in the shape of effectual protection to life and property, or the permanent establishment of peace in Perak until we see the British flag flying there', lamented the *Free Press* in August 1865.<sup>177</sup> Cavenagh was anxious to act, but with his hands tied he could only send an official to investigate,

<sup>173</sup> *PG*, 7 June in *SFP*, 19 June 1862.

<sup>174</sup> *SSR*, U 46, p. 95; *PG*, 25 October in *SFP*, 6 November 1862.

<sup>175</sup> *SSR*, R 41, pp. 162-5.

<sup>176</sup> *SSR*, W 47, Item 150; *SSR*, R 41, pp. 222-5, 239-41; *SSR*, U 46, pp. 362, 440; *PG*, 26 December 1863 in *SFP*, 7 January 1864; *SFP*, 28 January 1864.

<sup>177</sup> *SFP*, 31 August 1865.

while he appealed to Calcutta for instructions as to what he should do in Perak, which was 'the scene of discord and anarchy . . . and all semblance of a supreme power has apparently disappeared'.<sup>178</sup>

Once more the Hai San society took advantage of the disintegration of authority in the state to drive out Ghee Hin miners. The Mentri sided with the victorious Hai San, and as a new influx of Ghee Hin refugees poured in, Cavenagh feared the spread of trouble to Penang. He appealed for permission to enforce another blockade, but Calcutta refused,<sup>179</sup> and condemned even the enquiries he had instigated in Perak as offensive to the sultan:

The Governor General in Council fears that there may be a tendency among the authorities at Penang to push British interference with the neighbouring native states further than is either necessary or desirable. . . . If British subjects choose to live and trade in an uncivilised country like Perak, they must submit to the local customs and practices.<sup>180</sup>

Calcutta maintained this attitude to the end of its administration in spite of all Cavenagh's remonstrances.<sup>181</sup>

By 1855 the East India Company's policy of non-involvement in the Malay states was becoming impracticable to enforce. An isolation policy was doomed to failure when the states of the hinterland offered such tempting prizes to private individuals from the Straits Settlements, and the Straits authorities discovered that, however unwillingly, they were building up obligations and responsibilities for preserving the peace of the peninsula, while the activities of Chinese miners, ambitious Malay chiefs and Straits merchants, both Asian and European, were forcing them to undertake a more positive role in the affairs of the interior.

Blundell realized by 1858 that the non-intervention policy was unrealistic, because, whether they liked it or not, the Straits authorities were in practice deeply involved in the developments

<sup>178</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 315-19.

<sup>179</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 325-8, 330-4; SSR, S 33, Items 241, 274; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 359-60.

<sup>180</sup> SSR, S 35, Item 30.

<sup>181</sup> SSR, S 35, Items 50, 91, 213.



in the interior. In objecting to the Temenggong's proposal to back the Bendahara with military force, Blundell claimed in February 1858 that:

Your Highness is not the paramount authority in the peninsula but the British India government is such, and as its representative I feel bound to use my utmost influence to prevent the spread of war and of its attendant horrors.<sup>182</sup>

When the Singapore chamber of commerce demanded intervention in Pahang in 1858, Blundell agreed he would welcome the power to decide political disputes among neighbouring chiefs and advised Calcutta:

There is no doubt in my mind that much benefit would accrue to the people and to the interests of our trade with them were the natural influence of the local Straits government more prominently exerted in keeping the general peace of the neighbouring Malayan states.<sup>183</sup>

From the beginning Blundell's successor, Cavenagh, shared the merchants' confidence in the advantages to be gained from opening up the hinterland with its promise of great mineral wealth,<sup>184</sup> and was convinced the majority of the Malay rulers, 'for the most part illiterate debauchees', as he described them in October 1860,<sup>185</sup> were incapable of providing the stable government essential for economic development. The problem of how to pacify the Malay states without direct political intervention was to Cavenagh

an enigma, the solution of which, independent of its intimate connection with the commercial interests of our own subjects, would seem to be one of the responsibilities attached to our high position as the dominant power in this quarter.<sup>186</sup>

His suggestions met with no response from India, and in February 1861 Cavenagh could still only warn the Temenggong in vague terms that:

The line of policy hitherto pursued by this government with respect

<sup>182</sup> SSR, V 24, pp. 111-12; SSR, W 26, Item 75; *SFP*, 18 March, 9 September 1858.

<sup>183</sup> SSR, W 27, Item 285; SSR, V 25, p. 172; SSR, R 33, pp. 249-50.

<sup>184</sup> SSR, R 37, pp. 261-5.

<sup>185</sup> SSR, R 38, pp. 17-18.

<sup>186</sup> Cavenagh to India, 13 October 1860, SSR, R 38.

to its relations with the neighbouring friendly native states will not be departed from and that its legitimate influence will always be exercised toward the maintenance of order and quietness throughout the peninsula.<sup>187</sup>

'The whole length and breadth of the peninsula, there can be no doubt, abounds in tin ore', J. R. Logan wrote in 1848, 'a great magazine of tin',<sup>188</sup> and as the riches became more apparent and the political troubles increased, the newspapers put pressure on the Governor to intervene. '“Come over and help us!” this cry is ringing through the Malayan forests from the confines of Perak to Trengganu', the *Straits Times* insisted in April 1861,<sup>189</sup> while the *Free Press* urged that the key to peace lay in a reconstruction of the kingdom of Johore under a good government controlled by a British Resident,<sup>190</sup> and the Singapore chamber of commerce called on Calcutta to assume the role of arbitrator in all disputes in the Malay states.<sup>191</sup>

Cavenagh used the opportunity during the negotiation of the Johore-Pahang treaty at the end of 1861 to urge a review of the relationship and treaty obligations with the states of Sumatra and the peninsula, and pictured the treaty as

perhaps a prelude to other similar engagements, equally recognising our paramount authority and thus enabling us without any undue grasping of power to imperceptibly extend our influence over the surrounding chiefs and to exercise over their actions that legitimate control which our position so justly demands, a control that, whilst enlarging the circle of operations of our own trade and thus improving its prospects, by opening up new fields hitherto but imperfectly explored, could only tend to the benefit of the rulers and people over whom it might be exerted.<sup>192</sup>

Again this advice evoked no sympathetic response in Calcutta, where the treaty was regarded in the same light as the Johore treaty of 1855, and with no more justification, as the final settlement of an existing problem. Cavenagh received no reply from Calcutta to his requests for general instructions and for

<sup>187</sup> SSR, W 37, Item 32.

<sup>188</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Sketch of the Physical Geography and Geology of the Malay Peninsula', *JIA*, ii (1848), 102, 104.

<sup>189</sup> *ST*, 6 April 1861.

<sup>190</sup> *SFP*, 11 July 1861.

<sup>191</sup> SSR, W 39, Item 33.

<sup>192</sup> SSR, R 40, pp. 90-132, 160-1; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 324-5.

the assumption of more responsibility in the Malay states. When Lord Elgin became Governor General of India in March 1862 and invited Cavenagh to submit any special problems to him direct, the Governor grasped at the chance to plead for a ruling on his dealings with the Malay states and support for his quest 'to make the native states look to him as the paramount power', and he repeated the plea officially to India two months later.<sup>193</sup> Once more Cavenagh was disappointed and his appeals for general guidance went unanswered.

The only course the Governor could pursue was to support the authority and cultivate the friendship of co-operative rulers and to find piecemeal solutions to individual problems as they arose. As long as these were successful, they earned him the cautious and lukewarm approval of the government of India. These actions were building up a general extension of British influence throughout the peninsula but were not backed by any clear line of policy from Calcutta, who were still intent on avoiding all commitments in the Malay states and relying on a mere display of friendship.

Up to the middle of 1862 Cavenagh had reason to be pleased with the results of his dealings with the Malay states. He had gained the co-operation of the new enlightened Temenggong of Johore and of the rajah of Lukut, secured reparations in Larut, put a stop to the exactions of the Dato Klana of Sungei Ujong, obtained Calcutta's agreement to the Johore-Pahang treaty and he had apparently succeeded in curbing civil war in Pahang. The merchants and the press in general commended Cavenagh's achievements in the Malay states at that time,<sup>194</sup> but he was only too conscious of the weakness and ambiguity of his position. Despite this, he was only vaguely apprehensive that a major difficulty beyond his scope might some day arise, and the crisis which he feared came upon him far sooner than he anticipated.

Cavenagh was probably right in claiming that his action in Trengganu in November 1862 demolished further Siamese

<sup>193</sup> Cavenagh to Elgin, 20 May 1862, IO, MSS European F 83/24, pp. 73-84, transferred to MSS European F 83/25, no. 11, Elgin Papers; SSR, R 41, p. 47.

<sup>194</sup> *SFP*, 1 May, 26 June 1862; *PG*, 12 April, 7 June in *SFP*, 1 May, 19 June 1862; *Penang Argus*, 9 June in *SFP*, 20 June 1862.

ambitions in the Malay peninsula,<sup>195</sup> but the incident put an end to any chance of positive action in the Malay peninsula as long as the Indian regime lasted and Cavenagh remained in charge, and it ruined Cavenagh's reputation in England and his future career. The government of India became rigid in its determination not to become involved and risk similar failures. Cavenagh appealed in vain in May 1863 for permission to follow up his action effectively:

Without our interference the war . . . may be protracted for months to come. Independent of higher considerations, there is no doubt that the preservation of the tranquillity of the peninsula is essential to the development of our commerce and equally no doubt that it is at present in our power, with the aid of the naval force in the Straits, to enforce that tranquillity by bringing the weight of our influence into the scale between the two contending parties.<sup>196</sup>

Calcutta remained silent and Cavenagh repeated his plea for specific instructions three months later:

I trust I may be pardoned in taking this opportunity of earnestly impressing upon the Supreme government the necessity for adopting some specific line of policy with regard to the native states in the Malay peninsula.<sup>197</sup>

Again he received no reply.

Cavenagh never understood how enormous a crime the Trengganu bombardment appeared in Calcutta and London, and he continued to urge that the government of India should extend its control in the peninsula. He argued the unruliness among Malay chiefs would largely disappear once the European firms with whom they dealt could no longer encourage them into opposition towards the Governor, in the confidence that Calcutta would not support his policy.<sup>198</sup> A personal appeal by

<sup>195</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 89-93; Cavenagh to Wood, 21 June, 5 October 1864, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters; SSR, W 44, Item 334; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 306.

<sup>196</sup> SSR, R 41, p. 139.

<sup>197</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 171-2.

<sup>198</sup> SSR, R 41, pp. 183-4, 206-12; SSR, S 32, Items 51, 128; Cavenagh to Wood, 5 October 1864, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters; India to Secretary of State, 8 April 1864, CO 273/6.

Cavenagh to the secretary of state produced no more constructive reply,<sup>199</sup> and for the remainder of his administration Cavenagh dared not even issue warnings or reproofs since he knew they could not be backed by force.

The outcome of the Pahang war revealed how little power the British actually had in the Malay states, and although John Cameron, writing at the end of 1864, advised that in view of the Pahang fiasco, 'the English government will do wisely to abstain from much interference in the native politics of the peninsula',<sup>200</sup> the majority of the merchants by that time wanted forceful and effective official British intervention. Cavenagh blamed Calcutta for what had happened in Pahang and Johore in allowing commercial firms to meddle instead of appointing a British adviser, although Wan Ahmed had in fact won his victory in face of opposition from one group of European merchants and lawyers and with no help from the rival party. The Governor believed that the best guarantee for future peace lay in building up the authority of Abu Bakar and persuading Wan Ahmed to confirm the treaty made between the previous Bendahara and the Temenggong in 1862. But he feared that the commercial firms were prepared to overthrow this arrangement and to foment trouble in order to weaken Johore and to struggle for a monopoly of the Pahang trade.<sup>201</sup> Cavenagh by that time was obsessed by the dangers created by the intrigues of the Singapore mercantile community and exaggerated the part their rivalry had played in producing troubles in the past. He advised India in October 1864, 'It is indeed owing to the enmity existing between two European firms<sup>202</sup> that the dissensions between the Malay states in a great measure have arisen',<sup>203</sup> and he looked upon official intervention as necessary not so much to restore order or protect the lives and property of British subjects in the Malay

<sup>199</sup> Cavenagh to Wood, 21 June 1864, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters; SSR, R 41, pp. 275-6.

<sup>200</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1865, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), p. 137.

<sup>201</sup> Cavenagh to Wood, 4 August, 5 October 1864, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters.

<sup>202</sup> A. L. Johnston & Co. (W. H. Read), and Paterson & Simons.

<sup>203</sup> Cavenagh to Wood, 5 October 1864, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters.

states, but rather to thwart the machinations of the European merchants and keep peace in the Straits Settlements.

When the petition for transfer to colonial rule was made in 1857, the intervention issue was a minor one, although Calcutta's failure to take a strong line in the Malay states was one example given in the petition of the Company's alleged neglect. The desire for transfer in 1857 was based mainly on domestic and constitutional considerations, but by the time Indian rule in the Straits came to an end ten years later, policy towards the Malay states was a crucial issue. These years had brought disaster to thousands of Chinese miners and severe setbacks to European and Chinese speculators. By 1867 the European merchants had tasted the first fruits of the prosperity to be gained from enterprises in the Malay states, but learned from costly experience that without official backing there could be no security for their capital or for the lives and property of Chinese pioneers already heavily committed in the interior. The Singapore government was by that time aware that official inaction in the past had produced a dangerous situation in which private individuals could involve the Straits authorities in responsibilities towards the Malay states. By 1867 economic penetration and the conflict between immigrants and Malay authorities, and among rival Chinese societies and Malay factions themselves, threatened the stability of the Straits Settlements, bringing bitter commercial rivalry to Singapore and the prospect of actual fighting and bloodshed to Penang. In 1857 the merchants were still prepared to act on their own initiative and called only for vague official backing for their enterprise in the interior, but by 1867 full-scale political intervention sooner or later was almost inevitable.

By the closing years of the Indian regime, Calcutta's policy towards the Malay states was the most bitterly attacked aspect of the whole administration and was satisfactory neither to the merchants nor to officials on the spot. 'It is high time', declared the *Singapore Free Press* in 1865, 'that we should cease to be the laughing stock of the inhabitants of the neighbouring states. . . It is not meet that our prestige in the peninsula should suffer an iota.'<sup>204</sup> There was every indication that a profitable future

<sup>204</sup> *SFP*, 19 October 1865.

awaited commercial enterprise in the interior, and in the last few years before the transfer the painful experiences of firms such as Paterson & Simons in Pahang, and the misfortunes of Chinese miners in the anarchical west coast states, made the reversal of the policy of non-intervention a cardinal aim both of the merchants who were agitating for colonial rule and of the Governors.

In 1867 the European population of the Straits Settlements still knew very little about the Malay peninsula. There were sizeable Chinese communities in the tin mines in Sungei Ujong, Perak, Lukut, Pahang, Kemaman and Kelantan and in other ports in the eastern Malay states, and there were thousands of Chinese planters in Johore. These communities had close contacts with their countrymen in the Straits Settlements, but they were concentrated in a few areas, and most of the peninsula was closed to outside traders, Chinese or European.<sup>205</sup> J. R. Logan described the interior of the peninsula in 1848 as 'an inland region wrapped in all the mystery and attractiveness of the unknown', and complained, 'we have no accurate information respecting the courses and bulk of any of the rivers'.<sup>206</sup>

As late as 1850 the west coast of the peninsula was almost deserted, although the campaigns of the late 1830s had reduced piracy to a local hazard. Apart from Malacca, the only coastal settlements between Singapore and Penang were Padang, south of the Muar river, Jeram in Selangor, and Lukut. The east coast came to life after the dispersal of pirates in the late 1830s. In 1839 Newbold rated Pahang 'the best regulated and wealthiest of the Malayan states on the peninsula'.<sup>207</sup> By 1849 people were once more settling on Tioman island, which had been deserted for twenty years, and the former slave market of Endau was transformed into a legitimate trading centre.<sup>208</sup> Pulau Aur, formerly a pirate supply base, was by 1850 a peaceful island, where shipwrecked sailors could expect to be rescued and returned to Singapore.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>205</sup> J. T. Thomson, 'Description of the Eastern Coast of Johore and Pahang, and Adjacent Islands', *JIA*, v (1851), 145. <sup>206</sup> Logan, *JIA*, ii (1848), 87, 110.

<sup>207</sup> T. J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca* (London, 1839, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), ii, 56.

<sup>208</sup> J. T. Thomson, *JIA*, v (1851), 136-45.

<sup>209</sup> J. R. Logan, 'Pulo Aur', *JIA*, iv (1850), 194.

Europeans knew more about the small states inland from Malacca than about any other of the Malay states, although only one Englishman was known to have followed the old trading route right across the peninsula from Malacca to Pahang. This was Charles Gray, who made the expedition in January/February 1827, in an attempt to open a direct trade of opium and raw silk in exchange for gold. It was a difficult route, impassable in the dry season from March to October because the rivers were too low, and arduous and unhealthy in the wet season. Gray died of jungle fever contracted during the trip barely three weeks after his return to Malacca.<sup>210</sup> This unfortunate experience discouraged other traders, although several Europeans, including Newbold and Begbie, travelled in the Menangkabau states. During the 1840s the sultan and Temenggong of Johore and most of the rulers of the states inland from Malacca were willing to give permits to travel in their territories to Europeans who had no commercial motives, such as the Malacca missionary Father Favre, Dr Thomas Oxley and Thomas Braddell. The keenest traveller of all was J. R. Logan, who visited Naning, the coasts and interior of Johore, Lukut and Kedah.

These individuals were exceptional, and in 1867 the interior was still almost unknown and even the coasts not completely surveyed. In 1861 Cavenagh had to send maps derived from old Dutch charts to Calcutta, since no British survey had been made,<sup>211</sup> and earlier that year, in sending a sketch map of the peninsula drawn by the government surveyor, the Governor had to admit, 'our knowledge of the peninsula is so slight that its accuracy cannot be depended upon'.<sup>212</sup> Anderson's *Political and commercial considerations relative to the Malay peninsula*, published in 1824, was still acknowledged as the standard authority in the mid-1860s.<sup>213</sup> Even knowledge of the treaties was haphazard, and in 1862 the Governor's secretary could not find copies of the agreements made for the cession of Penang or Singapore,

<sup>210</sup> C. Gray, 'Journal of a Route Overland from Malacca to Pahang, across the Malayan Peninsula', *JIA*, vi (1852), 369-75 (from *Malacca Observer*, 27 February 1827).

<sup>211</sup> SSR, R 40, p. 90.

<sup>212</sup> SSR, R 38, pp. 222-3.

<sup>213</sup> *SFP*, 13 March 1862.



nor the treaties made with the Sumatran states in the early 1820s.<sup>214</sup>

The government of India bequeathed to its successor a problem of a hinterland which was virtually unknown but seething with trouble.

<sup>214</sup> SSR, V 34, pp. 118-19.

## CHAPTER IX

### Constitutional Reform: the Transfer Movement

THE SUGGESTION that the Straits Settlements should be separated from India and transformed into a crown colony was first mooted in print by George Windsor Earl in his *Eastern Seas*, published in London in 1837, and taken up three years later by John Anderson, who argued in the preface to a book on Aceh that the settlements were only a burden to Calcutta but as a crown colony could form a strong British base.<sup>1</sup> Anderson's suggestion raised no immediate interest in England or in Singapore, where the merchants had forgotten the irritations arising from the threat to Singapore's free port status, which had goaded the *Singapore Free Press* to declare in 1837 that the Indian government legislated for the Straits Settlements 'either in ignorance of their real wants or in a spirit of the most profound indifference as to their welfare'.<sup>2</sup>

George Bonham, who was Governor at the time, was popular and on most questions worked as one with the Straits merchants in arguing their case with Calcutta. Physically Bonham was unimpressive, small, snub-nosed, speaking with a stutter, but he was approachable and generous, a gregarious, cheerful, warm-hearted man, who delighted in entertaining, and in his day Government House was the scene of a never-ending series of parties and dinners. A bachelor himself, Bonham was completely at home in the informal friendly atmosphere of the small European community, which was still largely a man's world of rough equality. Bonham's natural concern to reduce the Company's expenses in administering the Straits Settlements

<sup>1</sup> G. W. Earl, *The Eastern Seas* (London, 1837, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), pp. 405-6; J. Anderson, *Acheen and the Ports on the North and East Coasts of Sumatra* (London, 1840, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1971), pp. vi-viii.

<sup>2</sup> *SFP*, 30 November 1837.

brought him into occasional conflict with the merchants on specific issues: notably his early attempts to reduce the judicial establishment and his proposal to levy port charges to meet the expense of protecting trade against piracy. But these conflicts passed, and by the end of his time the free port status of the Straits ports was guaranteed, piracy was checked, if only temporarily, the potential threat to trade in Sumatra was removed, largely it was felt through Bonham's vigorous campaigning,<sup>3</sup> and the outbreak of the first Anglo-Chinese war brought a boom to Singapore. Contented with the present and optimistic for the future, the merchants had few complaints about their government, and Bonham retired to England in an aura of success and popularity.<sup>4</sup> Even those who criticized some of Bonham's policies appreciated the honesty of the Governor's stand. John Turnbull Thomson, an uncovenanted official and the most acid-tongued critic of the Company's establishment, described Bonham as upright, open and generous, 'liberal and affable . . . with a great deal of bonhomie about him'.<sup>5</sup> He was warmly greeted when he passed through Singapore in 1848 on the way to take up his appointment as Governor of Hong Kong, and it was only later, with the increasing demands for a share in government, that criticism was levelled in retrospect at Bonham's 'plum pudding policy', which lulled the merchants into political apathy. Ten years after his departure the *Straits Times* criticized him as 'the most standstill Governor ever'.<sup>6</sup>

As the most senior official attached to the Straits Settlements service, Edmund Blundell, then commissioner of Tenasserim, returned in June 1843 to act as Governor, expecting to be confirmed in the appointment. Blundell had spent almost twenty years in Tenasserim and was almost a stranger in the Straits, but his appointment was welcomed, and both he and the inhabitants were stunned to learn about six weeks after his arrival that an outsider, Lieutenant Colonel William John Butterworth of the Madras army, had been appointed as

<sup>3</sup> Singapore Chamber of Commerce to Bonham, 5 December 1841, SSR, W 6.

<sup>4</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses into Life in the Far East* (London, 1864), pp. 187-92; G. F. Davidson, *Trade and Travel in the Far East* (London, 1846), p. 70.

<sup>5</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> *ST*, 14 January 1853.

Governor instead.<sup>7</sup> Blundell left almost immediately for England, a bewildered and embittered man, and he pleaded with the directors to appoint him Governor of the Straits whenever the post became vacant.<sup>8</sup>

The Governor General, Lord Ellenborough, favoured appointing military officers to senior civil posts, and Butterworth's appointment did not indicate any radical change in the Company's attitude to Singapore. Butterworth's early career had been commendable but not outstanding. Educated at the Company's military college of Addiscombe, he joined the army in Madras in 1818 and saw many years of active service in southern India. According to Singapore gossip he owed his promotion to having an uncle who was a Director of the East India Company, a father-in-law who was a member of the Madras council and an uncle by marriage who was a senior member of the council in Calcutta.<sup>9</sup>

When Butterworth arrived in the Straits first impressions did nothing to dispel the resentment already built up against him for superseding a local man. Butterworth seemed the caricature of the 'typical army officer'. In private Sir James Brooke of Sarawak referred to him as 'Butterpot the Great', and this nickname came into general use. The most biting description of the new Governor appears in J. T. Thomson's books, 'This compound of ignorance and pomposity', 'an eccentric and prominent example of an East India Company's official... imbued with many of the weaknesses which a monopoly of power and honour is sure to foster in human nature'.<sup>10</sup> While Thomson was not an altogether reliable witness since he was an irascible man, obsessed with a sense of grievance, 'Butterpot the Great' did not at first sight seem to have the affable qualities that the residents of the settlements were accustomed to see in their Governor. Stiff and pompous, without a trace of humour, always conscious of his dignity, it was said that Butterworth viewed society as a military hierarchy, the senior officials equivalent to senior military officers, the juniors to subalterns

<sup>7</sup> *SFP*, 27 July, 17 August 1843.

<sup>8</sup> Blundell to Directors, 23 November 1844, CO 273/1.

<sup>9</sup> *SFP*, 17 August 1843.

<sup>10</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, pp. 234, 269-70.

and everyone outside of the Company's service to other ranks. The gay bachelor parties of Bonham's day gave place to formal receptions and dinners, at which Butterworth and his wife presided as gracious but condescending host and hostess. And the friendly atmosphere which had so delighted both residents and visitors to Singapore gave way to a more formal society, conscious of the gulf between rich and poor, prominent merchant and young commercial assistant, covenanted official and uncovenanted, official and merchant, European and Asian, a society too in which women came to play a more prominent part. Headed by Mrs Butterworth and the Governor's sister, those who aspired to form the upper ranks of Singapore's female society helped to crystallize divisions on the grounds of wealth, seniority and colour.

In April 1846 Butterworth came into head-on collision with the mercantile community when he protested in open court against the Singapore grand jury's criticism of the government's alleged weakness in organizing the police to combat crime. When the Governor ordered the grand jury not to draw up presentments before consulting the government in future, the local press took up the battle. The *Singapore Free Press* portrayed Butterworth lashing out against the grand jury 'as a lion shakes the dew drops from his mane' and trying to frighten them into 'perennial dumbness'. It accused Butterworth of ignoring the history of the settlements in assuming he had a real Governor's powers when these had in fact been abolished in 1830: 'His royal style of self-arrogation is a ludicrous contrast with the real poverty or rather entire negation of all the functions of a ruler.'<sup>11</sup>

After his outburst Butterworth left for three months in Penang, but was horrified to learn that, overruling his orders and in face of the Resident Councillor's opposition, the Singapore justices of the peace had proceeded to appoint Thomas Dunman full-time superintendent of police and release him from all court duties. Butterworth appealed to Calcutta for confirmation that the 1839 assessment act, which authorized the government to levy assessment on property to pay for the police force, by implication revoked the justices' powers under the charter of

<sup>11</sup> *SFP*, 30 April 1846.

justice to control the police. While disagreeing with the Governor's interpretation, the Bengal authorities decided the government must appoint and control the police force, and with unaccustomed speed prepared a bill 'to provide for the appointment of constables and peace officers at the Settlements in the Straits'. A copy was sent to Butterworth for his comments, but the Governor immediately sent it back with his blessing without even consulting the Recorder.<sup>12</sup>

When the bill was published in the Singapore newspapers, the justices of the peace protested and a public meeting held in November 1846 resolved unanimously to petition Calcutta to withdraw it. One hundred and twenty-seven people signed the petition, including nearly all Europeans outside government service and prominent Chinese, Indians and Malays. An appeal was also drawn up and sent to John Crawford to rouse opposition in England. The agitation was unsuccessful, the measure became law, and apart from officials, all the European justices of the peace resigned.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile the publication of a new assessment bill in June 1846 provoked accusations about wasteful administration. The right of government to control assessment was not disputed under Bonham's administration, and the European merchants showed no interest in creating formal representative municipal institutions when questions such as building a new bridge could be discussed over the Governor's dinner table. The first demands for representation in local government arose in January 1845, when the European merchants, fearing an increase in the rates, called instead for retrenchment and economy and proposed that assessment should be controlled by a committee of three, one to be a government nominee and the other two elected by the ratepayers. The new bill was a disappointment in that it ignored the pleas for elected representatives and provided for a committee of five assessors, two of them officials

<sup>12</sup> Bengal to Butterworth, 15 July, 15 August, 23 September 1846, SSR, S 13; Butterworth to Bengal, 12 October 1846, SSR, R 13; J. W. N. Kyshe, *Cases Heard and Determined in H.M. Supreme Court of the Straits Settlements, 1808-84* (Singapore, 1885), vol. i, p. lxxxvi.

<sup>13</sup> Act III of 1847; Butterworth to Bengal, 16 October 1846, SSR, R 13; *SFP*, 15 October, 12 November, 3 December 1846; *ST*, 11 November, 2 December 1846.

and three non-officials nominated by the Governor.<sup>14</sup> The *Straits Times* devoted almost an entire issue to criticism of the proposed new act, arguing that the administration was top-heavy and the extra revenue could be found by retrenching 'the drones who consume the contents of the hive'.<sup>15</sup>

When the new act came into force in 1848, Butterworth offered to put the nomination of the three non-official members into the hands of the chambers of commerce in Singapore and Penang, but this magnanimous gesture did not soften the resentment against him or the new law. Both chambers refused and insisted control over the municipal committee should be vested in the ratepayers.<sup>16</sup> A petition drawn up at a public meeting in Singapore to ask the Calcutta government to withdraw the act was refused and most ratepayers declined to serve on the new committees. In Penang Butterworth was forced to appoint as his three non-officials two retired Company officials and an American merchant who had taken no previous part in public affairs.<sup>17</sup>

Commercial depression sharpened the irritation with the Governor, and a trading slump in 1848 caused many Asian firms to collapse and brought several big European companies to the brink of bankruptcy.<sup>18</sup> In July 1849, when the leading Asian and European merchants met in Singapore to draw up a petition against an excise bill imposing a tax on siah, which was signed by nearly every European outside of government and by many Chinese, Arab, Malay and Indian merchants, they also petitioned for economy in the administration, beginning with the abolition of the offices of Resident Councillor and Governor, particularly the latter 'who has no proper gubernatorial functions'.<sup>19</sup>

The most vociferous critic, W. H. Read, embarked on his career of opposition to the Company's rule in 1845, when he emerged as one of the principal advocates of securing for the ratepayers more responsibility in municipal affairs, and, under the *nom de plume* of 'Delta', began a life-long voluminous

<sup>14</sup> *SFP*, 18, 25 June, 12 November 1846; *ST*, 20 May, 17, 20 June 1846.

<sup>15</sup> *ST*, 17 June 1846.

<sup>16</sup> *SFP*, 19 April 1849.

<sup>17</sup> *SFP*, 7 December 1849; *PG*, 13 August in *ST*, 6 September 1853.

<sup>18</sup> *SFP*, 4 January 1849.

<sup>19</sup> *SFP*, 20 July 1849.

correspondence to the *Singapore Free Press* criticizing Calcutta's administration. When Read left Singapore for leave in Britain in 1848, the mercantile community was in an angry and worried mood. Read's first home leave was a time of personal tragedy, for his young wife died in 1849. He remained there for three years, leaving his baby daughter behind in England on his return. He never remarried but absorbed his energies in future in the political and commercial life of Singapore.

In London Read met John Crawford, to whom the Singapore merchants had entrusted the task of raising opposition in England to the bill curtailing the powers of the justices of the peace. Crawford, like Read, was a Scotsman. Born in 1783, he joined the East India Company's service in 1803 as a doctor, and after five years in India was transferred to Penang. He held important posts in Java during the British occupation and at the end of the French wars returned to Britain, where he wrote his *History of the Indian Archipelago*, which appeared in 1820. Soon afterwards he was sent to the East again on an abortive mission to Siam and Cochin China, and in 1823 became Resident of Singapore. Three years later Crawford was posted to Pegu, and at the end of the Burma war the Governor General despatched him on a fruitless mission to Ava. He then returned to England, where he remained for the rest of his long life writing many books and pamphlets. He was never again employed by the Company or the British government, but he retained his political ambitions. Between 1832 and 1837 he contested four parliamentary seats without success, and thereafter hovered on the fringe of British politics, acting as the paid agent for the Calcutta merchants for many years and later as the representative of the Straits merchants.

As Resident of Singapore Crawford had won few personal friends. Impatient, quick-tempered, self-opinionated, and, as Munshi Abdullah described him, 'bent down by a love of the goods of this world', he was not a man to inspire affection, and his parties were so frugal and dull that guests attended out of obligation and always departed early. But his period of office coincided with a dramatic expansion of trade, and his name came to be associated with the prosperity of Singapore and the worship of the free trade which he promoted. As a young man



Crawfurd opposed the Company's commercial monopoly, and after his enforced retirement personal resentment strengthened his opposition to the Company's policies. Skinflint with money, but generous with his time and energy, the pertinacity of this crotchety, cantankerous and embittered old man in pressing the interests of the Straits merchants was unbounded, and his services later in life earned him gratitude almost amounting to reverence among the Singapore mercantile community. Until 1853 Crawfurd used agitation over affairs in the Straits as part of his general attack upon the East India Company, but after the renewal of the Company's charter in that year, he concentrated all his efforts on the Straits Settlements, composing lengthy memoranda, seeking interviews with ministers, organizing deputations, and conducting a weighty correspondence with the leading Singapore merchants. In 1856 he was hailed by the Singapore press as the chief instrument in furthering Straits interests in London,<sup>20</sup> and the following year the merchants contributed nearly £300 for his portrait to be painted for the new Singapore town hall.<sup>21</sup> One of the three stained-glass windows in the new St Andrew's church was dedicated to Crawfurd, 'whose sound principles of administration during the infancy of the Settlements formed a basis for that uninterrupted prosperity which the Colony thus gratefully records'. It was fitting that in the last year of his life, at the age of eighty-five, Crawfurd should become the first president of the Straits Settlements Association, founded in 1868 to protect the interests of the new colony.

While Read was in England the two men had many long discussions, and by the time he was due to return to Singapore in 1851, they had decided that the only answer was to agitate for a complete break with India and for the transfer of the Straits Settlements to the colonial office.

Read returned to Singapore to find a changed situation: trade was booming and Butterworth had become a popular idol. After a period of gloom in 1849, the following year saw the beginning of a new wave of prosperity. During the official year 1851-2 the number of vessels calling at Singapore reached a new record,<sup>22</sup> and the trade figures encouraged the Calcutta

<sup>20</sup> *SFP*, 22 May 1856.    <sup>21</sup> *ST*, 3 March 1857.    <sup>22</sup> *ST*, 5 October 1852.

*Friend of India* to hail Singapore in July 1852 as 'this spirited and splendid little colony, the most important of the outlying marts of Great Britain'.<sup>23</sup> The next year was even better. Imports into Singapore rose from \$13,000,000 in 1849 to nearly \$18,000,000 in 1853 and exports from under \$11,000,000 to nearly \$15,500,000.<sup>24</sup> Visitors to Singapore were impressed with its bustle and prosperity,<sup>25</sup> while the merchants' forebodings evaporated in a revival of confidence.

Butterworth was quick to turn this change in attitude to his advantage. After his angry harangue of the Singapore grand jury in 1846 and the rough handling which he subsequently suffered at the hands of the press and the merchants, Butterworth set out to avoid any further trouble. In 1849 he reproved the Resident Councillor of Penang for criticizing a grand jury: 'However erroneous many of the views of the Grand Juries may be . . . putting them to paper gratifies the parties and ensures even imaginary grievances being fully considered.'<sup>26</sup> He went out of his way to win the commendation of the merchants by praising whatever they admired, and he joined in their social entertainments with apparent enthusiasm. 'Although he realised that such things were of no importance', commented Munshi Abdullah, 'he knew how to gain popularity.'<sup>27</sup> J. T. Thomson accused him of angling for years with the bait of dinners, balls and suppers to curry favour with the merchants, who, to Thomson's way of thinking, could be taken in only too easily and 'be kept in humour by trifles'.<sup>28</sup> They were certainly taken in by Butterworth. He was a smooth speaker and a gracious host, and visitors who seemed worth cultivating found him distinguished, impressive and courteous.<sup>29</sup> He was seen to be generous and contributed handsomely to charity.<sup>30</sup>

The Governor and the mercantile community anticipated a change of policy as a result of the visit to Singapore in 1850

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in *SFP*, 6 August 1852.

<sup>24</sup> *ST*, 10 January 1854.

<sup>25</sup> H. St John, *The Indian Archipelago* (London, 1853), ii, 352.

<sup>26</sup> *SSR*, U 17, pp. 118-21.

<sup>27</sup> A. H. Hill (trans.), 'The Hikayat Abdullah', *JMBRAS*, xxviii, no. 3 (1955), 260.

<sup>28</sup> J. T. Thomson, *Some Glimpses*, pp. 278-9.

<sup>29</sup> V. Fontanier, *Voyage dans l'Archipel Indien* (Paris, 1852), p. 171.

<sup>30</sup> *ST*, 3 April 1855.

of Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India, who was greeted with enthusiasm and fêted wherever he went. Dalhousie was the first Governor General to visit the Straits since Bentinck's gloomy mission in 1829. Although he was a sick man, travelling on convalescent leave, Dalhousie showed great interest in the settlements, engaging to remove them from the Bengal presidency to his own direct charge. The Governor's salary was raised, and it was expected that he would have greater powers, a direct hearing in Calcutta and more control over finance. For the moment suggestions about abolishing the office of Governor were stilled, and when Read returned to Singapore in 1851 he found the merchants still enchanted with Dalhousie's promises and with the graceful but useless obelisk which the merchants erected in his honour, and which still stands in front of the main government offices in Singapore, a fitting monument to this pleasant but unfruitful visit.

Disillusionment followed quickly. Calcutta soon made it plain that it had no intention of raising the Governor's status or powers and had increased his salary merely to enable him to meet the demands on his official hospitality.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile the Singapore merchants were taken aback when they learned in September 1851 that Calcutta had decided to impose stamp duties in the Straits. At public meetings in Singapore and Penang the merchants resolved to petition the Governor General and the Directors to drop the proposals,<sup>32</sup> but they confined themselves to the immediate issue. There was no general criticism of the Company's administration and no move to petition the British parliament. Calcutta abandoned the proposed stamp dues and this issue went into hibernation for more than ten years.

The first public meeting which Read attended after his return was called to prepare a memorial of appreciation to Butterworth from the European community for his wise and beneficent administration and to wish him a speedy return from Australia, where he was preparing to go on leave.<sup>33</sup> The

<sup>31</sup> SSR, S 19, Item 84; SSR, S 19, Item 112.

<sup>32</sup> SFP, 19, 26 September, 7 November 1851; ST, 12 August, 23, 30 December 1851.

<sup>33</sup> ST, 11 November 1851.

Governor departed, cheered by addresses of fulsome praise from the chambers of commerce, from the European and Chinese communities, and from the Temenggong of Johore.<sup>34</sup> It was not a favourable moment for Read to begin agitating to overturn the Company's rule in the Straits. But the seeds of discontent were already there, in the lack of representative government, in the constant difficulty of balancing revenue and expenditure and the nagging fear of increased taxation, and in the frustration that the government of India did not understand the problems and circumstances peculiar to the Straits Settlements.

When a public meeting was called in Singapore in January 1852 to agitate for judicial reform, the *Free Press* contrasted Calcutta's dilatory attitude with the prompt action taken by the British government in providing new courts in crown colonies, but no suggestion was raised to sever the connection with India.<sup>35</sup> At a meeting held in Singapore two months later to object to the projected Horsburgh Light dues R. C. Woods proposed that, in order to protect themselves against unfair taxation, the Straits Settlements should agitate for their own representative assembly when the renewal of the Company's charter came up for discussion in parliament in 1853.<sup>36</sup> This suggestion found no favour with the Singapore merchants, since the government of India agreed to meet most of their wishes concerning the light dues and the negotiations ended in a fair compromise ungrudgingly granted by Calcutta. The merchants were pleased with the outcome and for a time had confidence in their ability as a united body to impress their views effectively on a sympathetic government in Calcutta. Even the *Straits Times* had to admit reluctantly that Calcutta's co-operative spirit made a separate legislative council in Singapore unnecessary.<sup>37</sup>

Only the question of judicial reform continued to trouble the settlements. Petitions sent to the Directors and the Board of Control in 1852 to provide a separate judge for Singapore, and

<sup>34</sup> *ST*, 25 November 1851.

<sup>35</sup> *SFP*, 29 January 1852.

<sup>36</sup> *ST*, 16 March 1852.

<sup>37</sup> *SFP*, 28 January, 4 February, 22 July 1853, 6 January 1854; *ST*, 22 February, 26 July 1853.

further memorials directed to the Governor General in April 1853 were ignored, but the *Straits Times* could rally no support for its campaign to petition the British parliament.<sup>38</sup> The Straits mercantile community showed only faint concern with the debates raging in England in 1853 over the renewal of the Company's charter. The newspapers reported the parliamentary debates on India and printed long reports from their London informants, but this did not provoke correspondence, nor was there much editorial comment.

The main grievance of the Straits in 1853 was directed against the British government and its attitude towards the tariff on nutmegs. The Directors of the East India Company refused to take up the Straits planters' cause,<sup>39</sup> but in contrast to this apathy, Crawford, Ibbetson and others of the merchants' friends in London had been most active.<sup>40</sup> While this agitation was not successful, it indicated that the Straits merchants stood a better chance of airing their views through their friends in London than through the Company.

By the middle of the century the Singapore mercantile community was building up strong links with commercial circles in Britain. As early as 1836 the Singapore merchants found a ready supporter in the East India and China Association, which was founded in that year as successor to the East India Association of the Liverpool merchants. This body had been the guardian of Liverpool's interests in the East and a leading opponent of the East India Company's China trade monopoly. On its own initiative the association took up the question of admiralty jurisdiction in the Straits and obtained the board of trade's assurance that port dues would not be levied there. The readiness of members of parliament to support the Straits petition encouraged the Singapore merchants to apply pressure in London whenever they felt their interests to be threatened. The East India and China Association proved a constant support,<sup>41</sup> and the chambers of commerce in Singapore and Penang maintained a close link with their

<sup>38</sup> *SFP*, 14 January, 18 February, 8, 15 April 1853.

<sup>39</sup> *SSR*, S 21, Item 40; *SFP*, 7 May 1852.

<sup>40</sup> *SFP*, 26 September 1851, 16 April 1852.

<sup>41</sup> *ST*, 26 August 1845; *SFP*, 23 April 1852, 26 February 1857.

counterparts in the large industrial cities of Britain, notably Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester.

Singapore's European merchants were also forging close personal links with Britain. The more prosperous could afford to take occasional periods of leave in England as steamer passages became quicker and cheaper. By the middle of the century there was also an influential group of retired officials and merchants in Britain, the doyen of the ex-Straits London group being John Crawford. Many merchants returned as partners in their parent London firms, such as Alexander Guthrie, who worked in close co-operation with his nephew James Guthrie of Singapore from the time of his removal to London in 1847 until his death in 1865, or Edward Boustead, who returned to London in 1850 but maintained his connection with Singapore and was a leader of the Straits pressure group in London, where he died in 1888.

Equally important were men in the British parliament and on the fringes of politics on whom the Straits merchants could rely to sponsor their petitions, such as Ellis James Gilman, who had lived in Singapore for seventeen years and was interested in the problems of the Straits planters. Sir Erskine Perry, chief justice of Calcutta from 1847 to 1852, a critic of the Company, entered parliament in 1854 and in his maiden speech presented a petition for judicial reform in the Straits.<sup>42</sup> S. Gregson, chairman of the East India and China Association and a member of parliament, backed several important Straits issues in the 1850s. The Straits merchants found support from the eccentric Lord Stanley of Alderley, who had visited Singapore in his youth and was president of the board of trade from 1855 to 1858, and from George Keppel, sixth earl of Albemarle who sat in the commons until succeeding to the title and the house of lords in 1851.

By the early 1850s the Singapore merchants looked to London rather than Calcutta as their political and economic centre. Correspondence between Straits merchants and their friends in England was quick and reliable and a Straits pressure group was forming in London. Merchants visiting England could take up their case in person with influential men in London, and

<sup>42</sup> *ST*, 4 July 1854; *SFP*, 7 July 1854.

grievances could be ventilated as quickly and easily in England as they could in Calcutta. The radical improvements in communications in the 1840s provided the basis on which the Straits merchants built up their agitation in London during the next twenty years.

With the renewal of the Company's charter in 1853 and the setting up of a new legislative council for India, the Straits merchants anticipated better government. They were satisfied with Calcutta's representatives in Singapore. Butterworth returned in November 1853 to a tumultuous welcome, with bands at the quayside playing 'Home, sweet home'. To celebrate his return many of the former critics of the hated act of 1847, which clipped the power of the justices of the peace, relented and agreed to accept office, on the understanding Butterworth gave them that the act would soon be repealed. Nineteen new appointments were made in Penang and Singapore in December 1853, including J. R. Logan of Penang, although his brother, along with Read and Woods, stood out against accepting and the *Free Press* mocked the justices of the peace as the 'Great Unpaid'.<sup>43</sup>

To celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Singapore in February 1854, Butterworth invited all the leading European, Chinese, Arab and Jewish residents to a ball. The Governor made one of his most gracious speeches, paying tribute to Raffles and proposing a toast to 'the continued prosperity of Singapore with Free Trade in its fullest integrity'. In response the merchants' spokesman, John Purvis, who had lived in Singapore for thirty-three years, paid tribute to the liberal system of government, which, in his opinion, had combined with the merchants' industry and intelligence to make Singapore a great port.<sup>44</sup> In the happy family atmosphere reigning that evening any desire for divorce from India seemed far away.

During his last few weeks in office, at a time of commercial boom which always mellowed the merchants' feelings, Butterworth enjoyed greater popularity than any of his predecessors. Early in March 1855, when the European community met to

<sup>43</sup> *ST*, 13 December 1853; *SFP*, 16, 30 December 1853.

<sup>44</sup> *SFP*, 10 February 1854; *ST*, 14 February 1854.

draw up a farewell address, Purvis as their chairman declared Butterworth had done more than any other leading official since Raffles and Crawford to promote the interests of Singapore.<sup>45</sup> Three weeks later the governor departed for Europe after a highly emotional farewell scene.<sup>46</sup> The merchants collected a sum of \$4,000 and later presented him with a gift of silver worth £700 and commissioned his portrait to be painted for the town hall.<sup>47</sup> When the new St Andrew's church was completed, Butterworth joined Raffles and Crawford as the benefactors to whom the three stained-glass windows were dedicated, and the Calcutta authorities commended Butterworth for leaving the settlements in 'a tranquil, prosperous and improving condition'.<sup>48</sup> Butterworth did not live to enjoy a long retirement. Already a sick man when he left Singapore, he died in England in 1856.

Despite the sorrow at Butterworth's departure, the community was satisfied with the appointment of Edmund Blundell as his successor. Blundell's supersession in 1843 had brought him sympathy from the press in the Straits, and after a few years in England he returned to become a very able and respected Resident Councillor of Malacca.<sup>49</sup> He was promoted to be Resident Councillor of Penang in 1849 and continued to live there while acting as Governor during Butterworth's absence from 1851 to 1853. While the new Governor was not well known personally in Singapore, by 1855 he had served over thirty years in the East, his reputation in the Straits was untarnished, and when he moved to Singapore as Governor the general feeling was that at last justice had been done, and the stage seemed set for a peaceful, efficient and popular regime.

No-one could have predicted that within four years Blundell would be driven to retire from the East, humiliated and broken, and that he was personally to be largely responsible for the determination of the European merchant community to break the link with India. In some ways Blundell was the victim of circumstance, but his fate was primarily of his own making. Almost nothing was known in the Straits about his

<sup>45</sup> *SFP*, 8 March 1855.

<sup>46</sup> *ST*, 27 March 1855.

<sup>47</sup> *SFP*, 29 March, 19 April 1855; *ST*, 3, 24 April 1855, 30 September 1856.

<sup>48</sup> *ST*, 3 April 1855.

<sup>49</sup> *SFP*, 12 April, 21 September 1849.



twenty years in Tenasserim, but many aspects of his career there were to be repeated in Singapore. As in Malacca and Penang, he had served for several years in Moulmein as an able subordinate, and his promotion as commissioner of Tenasserim was welcomed as a safe appointment.<sup>50</sup> Yet within a few years he was at loggerheads with the Moulmein merchants and the authorities in Calcutta, and he brought the Company to the brink of war with Burma, in consequence of which he was removed from his post.<sup>51</sup> Blundell was an excellent organizer in difficult pioneer conditions, where energy, honesty and paternalism were the virtues most needed in a ruler. But he was unsuited to govern more complicated and sophisticated societies. He saw the function of a ruler to protect and develop the local communities under his care and was suspicious of and hostile to elements which imposed on this simple picture. He favoured informal judicial tribunals, where fair-minded officials should mete out justice according to the dictates of common sense and morality, and he regarded professional lawyers as a menace to true justice. He looked on merchants as money-grabbers corrupting honest Asian communities and viewed newspapers with contempt. He considered the role of Governor to be one high above the community, guiding it wisely and devotedly, protecting simple people from the machinations of lawyers, the greed of traders and the irresponsibility of newspaper editors.

Blundell failed to adjust his outlook to changing conditions in the Straits, just as he had failed to adjust on the smaller stage to change in Tenasserim. He did not recognize that the East India Company's system of government was already out of date in the eastern settlements. Singapore in particular was no longer a mere trading station: it was the hub of British trade in the eastern seas. The Straits were no longer simple pioneer settlements where justice could be meted out according to the decisions of individual officers: they were cosmopolitan towns, with a shifting and often lawless population of mixed and diverse backgrounds, communities requiring the enforcement

<sup>50</sup> *Selected Correspondence of Letters from and to the Commissioner of Tenasserim, 1825-6 to 1842-3* (Rangoon, 1928), pp. 73, 81, 83.

<sup>51</sup> J. S. Furnivall, *The Fashioning of Leviathan* (Rangoon, 1939), reprinted from *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, xxix, no. 1 (1939), 33; *SFP*, 17 August 1843.

of a definite, common and impartial code of law and administration.

While the Governors of the Straits Settlements had little formal power, they had a great deal of influence, since the Calcutta authorities, lacking any direct experience of the Straits, relied largely on the Governor's advice in determining their legislation and policy. The Governor might consult his senior officials or the general public, but he was not obliged to do so. His recommendations were made confidentially to Calcutta, and the Straits community seldom knew how far their Governor was responsible for actions taken by Calcutta. While Bentinck in the 1830s rejected any idea of representation on the legislative council in Calcutta, the presidency Governors could submit draft legislation, and in practice this right was also extended to the Governors of the Straits. The Governor might be the tool of Calcutta, but he did on occasion have a strong influence, which became more important as Calcutta's legislative activity increased during the 1850s. While the Governor's relationship to the supreme government was in theory weak, in practice he was largely responsible for the wisdom or folly of Indian legislation for the Straits and for the popularity or otherwise of Indian administration. An obstinate, short-sighted autocratic governor, such as Blundell, acting in defiance of popular opinion, could encourage Calcutta to pass unwelcome measures and intensify local friction, whereas his tactful successor, Colonel Orfeur Cavenagh, consulted public opinion and did much to secure wise legislation and temper opposition to Indian administration.

Blundell's prickly and suspicious nature soon became apparent. Within weeks of assuming office he refused to forward to Calcutta a strongly worded petition from the merchants about convicts, and the *Free Press* showed surprise that Blundell should 'construe into a personal reflection what an official of less acute feelings would pass over as harmless rhetorical embellishment'.<sup>52</sup> A month later the *Straits Times* criticized him for meanness in not giving the Governor's customary annual cup to the Turf Club and contrasted this refusal with Butterworth's 'unceasing liberality'.<sup>53</sup> Blundell was not a likeable man.

<sup>52</sup> *SFP*, 7 June 1855.

<sup>53</sup> *ST*, 24 July 1855.

Blunt, awkward and devoid of humour, he never charmed the community with a witty or gracious speech and did not try to hide his dislike for lawyers, merchants, journalists and free-masons. He stood aloof from society, and Government House ceased to be the social centre it had been in the days of Bonham and Butterworth.

Many of Blundell's difficulties stemmed from the social stigma of his private life. In Tenasserim he had a Burmese mistress, who bore him eleven children, of whom he was exceedingly fond. He sent some to school in Calcutta and others to England. He launched them in society in Singapore and would open the queen's birthday state ball with one of his illegitimate daughters.<sup>54</sup> Although common among the early officials, such liaisons were regarded in Singapore by the middle of the century as unfashionable anachronisms, particularly in the upper reaches of society. For twelve years the Butterworths had set an example of solid prim respectability, and the increasing numbers of European women looked down on the new Governor's Eurasian family. With the need to support his large establishment, Blundell could not afford to be as liberal with entertainments and donations to charity as the childless Butterworth. Worst of all, the quest for husbands for his bevy of daughters involved him in charges of nepotism.

At the time of Butterworth's departure, most of the Singapore merchants were confident that the administration of the settlements was going to improve. Butterworth had assured them that the unpopular 1847 act about the justices of the peace would soon be repealed. After years of agitation, petitions despatched to the British parliament in 1854 convinced Sir Charles Wood,<sup>55</sup> the President of the Board of Control, of the need to reform and expand the Straits judiciary. Overruling the Directors' caution, he produced a new charter of justice in

<sup>54</sup> M. E. Cosenza (ed.), *The Complete Journal of Townsend Harris* (New York, 1930), pp. 66-7.

<sup>55</sup> SIR CHARLES WOOD, FIRST VISCOUNT HALIFAX (1800-85). M.P., 1832-1865; Secretary to Admiralty, 1835-9; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1846-52; President Board of Control, 1852-5; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1855-8; Secretary of State for India, 1859-66; became Viscount Halifax, 1866; Lord Privy Seal, 1870-4. *DIB*, p. 185; *The Times*, 10 August 1885.

1855, which provided for two Recorders.<sup>46</sup> The Singapore merchants hoped that the arrival of a second judge would relieve the strain on the Resident Councillor, enabling him to devote more time to normal executive work which had been neglected for years.

The first unpleasant shock came soon after Butterworth's retirement with the publication of documents showing that, so far from having the unpopular 1847 act thrust upon him, Butterworth himself had suggested its terms in the first place and had done nothing since to have it repealed. The merchants could scarcely credit this since Butterworth had always denied paternity of the law. He refused to give up his papers and wrote from Paris in July 1855 expressing his annoyance at the accusations levelled at him in the Singapore newspapers. He claimed the act had been drafted in India, which was technically true, but the papers of Thomas Church, published by the *Straits Times* in September 1855, revealed Butterworth's duplicity<sup>47</sup> and shook the merchants' faith in their former respected Governor. In fact it was not the first occasion on which Butterworth had deceived them. In 1845 he had assured the merchants, without any justification, that all charges for the proposed Horsburgh lighthouse would come out of the general revenue and no port dues would be levied in Singapore. In 1845 he also told Calcutta that the chamber of commerce recommended prohibiting copper tokens, when the chamber had in fact specifically asked for permission to import copper tokens freely.<sup>48</sup>

Butterworth's Parthian shaft came with the currency question. The bill 'to improve the law relating to the copper currency in the Straits', introduced in the Indian legislative council in August 1854 to provide for copper currency based on fractions of the rupee, was the Straits' first taste of the policy of uniformity in administration which the new legislative council aimed to enforce throughout the Company's territories.<sup>49</sup> It provoked protests from the Straits press, the grand jury and public

<sup>46</sup> IO, Miscellaneous Letters, Judicial, vol. 12, pp. 1, 101-2; *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. cxxxix, 950-1; *SFP*, 19 July, 20 September, 4 October 1855.

<sup>47</sup> *ST*, 11 September 1855.

<sup>48</sup> Singapore Chamber of Commerce to Butterworth, 11 January 1845, SSR, W 10; Butterworth to Bengal, 21 October 1845, SSR, R 13.

<sup>49</sup> Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. i (1854), 60.

meetings in Singapore and Penang, which sent petitions to the Indian legislative council and the British parliament. But the merchants were satisfied and relieved when Butterworth returned from a brief visit to Calcutta in January 1855 giving the impression he had persuaded the Indian government to withdraw the bill.<sup>60</sup> So far from having pressed the merchants' viewpoint in Calcutta, Butterworth had suggested that the rupee should be made the sole tender in the Straits, leaving the dollar only for external trade. In view of Butterworth's advice, the legislative council discounted the protests from Singapore and Penang, and the currency bill became law in May 1855, to the consternation of the Singapore merchants, who immediately met and drafted petitions of protest.<sup>61</sup>

Still benumbed by the news about the currency act, the Singapore community received a further shock when they learned late in May from Calcutta newspapers that European convicts were to be transported from India to Singapore. A public meeting appointed a committee to draw up a memorial to the Governor General and also produced petitions to the Directors and the Board of Control, which they sent to Crawford to present. Crawford had by then thrown himself wholeheartedly into Straits affairs, leading delegations to the Board of Control to protest about the currency measures, obtaining promises of help from the East India and China Association and the chambers of commerce of other big cities, and preparing, printing and circulating a memorandum on the transportation of European convicts to Singapore.<sup>62</sup>

Opposition to Calcutta's policy over currency and convicts coincided with the peak of agitation about piracy, and at a public meeting in May 1855 James Guthrie and Read won support for resolutions condemning Calcutta's 'long-continued supineness'.<sup>63</sup> Two months later the *Straits Times* urged the

<sup>60</sup> *ST*, 17 October, 14 November 1854; *SFP*, 20 October, 10 November 1854, 1 February 1855; *PG*, 23 December 1854 in *SFP*, 5 January 1855.

<sup>61</sup> Act XVII of 1855, text in F. Pridmore, 'Coins and Coinages of the Straits Settlements and British Malaya, 1786-1951', *Memoirs of Raffles Museum*, ii (1955), 115; Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. i (1855), 289-308, 321-7; *SFP*, 31 May, 7, 21 June 1855; *ST*, 9, 26 June 1855.

<sup>62</sup> IO, Miscellaneous Letters, Judicial, vol. 12, pp. 205-7; full text of Crawford's Memorandum in *SFP*, 30 August 1855; *SFP*, 19, 26 July 1855; *ST*, 25 September 1855.

<sup>63</sup> *ST*, 29 May 1855.

formation of a reform league to agitate for radical changes in administration.<sup>64</sup> At a public meeting held in Singapore early in August 1855, which was attended by representatives of almost every firm, James Guthrie as chairman and Read as principal speaker again accused the government of India of persistent disregard for the true interests of Singapore.<sup>65</sup> The question of transfer to the colonial office was mooted publicly for the first time at this meeting, but a motion that

should the Bengal Legislative Council persist in carrying out ... objectionable measures, ... refuse to grant those administrative regulations which have been so frequently and urgently demanded, and treat the remonstrances of the community with the utter contempt and disregard which is at present manifested, it will be the duty of the inhabitants in self-defence to take such steps as may be deemed expedient to secure relief from its pernicious rule

was rejected by a large majority and expunged from the record of the meeting.<sup>66</sup>

Despite this vote, it was obvious that the idea of transfer to colonial rule was attracting interest among people who had been opposed to the idea only a few years before. In 1852 R. C. Woods of the *Straits Times* had voiced deep distrust of the colonial office,<sup>67</sup> and eighteen months later the *Free Press* published a letter which spoke about the 'almost universal opinion of the community that they did not want to come under the control of the Colonial Office'.<sup>68</sup> But by the end of 1854 the *Penang Gazette* suggested the Straits might do better under the colonial office, which at least had 'got rid of the tendency to centralise irrespective of local conditions and local opinions',<sup>69</sup> and by September 1855 the *Free Press* considered that any further interference from India might lead to the demand for a colonial transfer,<sup>70</sup> while the *Straits Times* advised its readers to place no confidence in the Indian government, the Directors or the Board of Control and to take their grievances direct to the British parliament.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> *ST*, 3 July, 7 August 1855.

<sup>65</sup> *SFP*, 9, 16 August 1855; *ST*, 14 August 1855.

<sup>66</sup> 'Delta', *SFP*, 7 August 1856 (recalling previous year's meeting).

<sup>67</sup> *ST*, 15 June 1852.

<sup>68</sup> *SFP*, 24 March 1854.

<sup>69</sup> *PG*, 23 December 1854 in *SFP*, 5 January 1855.

<sup>70</sup> *SFP*, 27 September 1855.

<sup>71</sup> *ST*, 14 August 1855.

By 1856 Read had supplanted the older merchants, John Purvis and James Guthrie, as the regular chairman of public meetings. Dedicated to breaking the link with India, Read soon came into conflict with the Governor. In April 1856 he launched an attack on Blundell's educational policy,<sup>72</sup> and a few weeks later chaired a meeting called to petition the British parliament against the draft police act, which confirmed the government's control over the police force given by the hated 1847 act and drove all the non-official European justices of the peace to resign, protesting that they had been duped by Butterworth into accepting office.<sup>73</sup>

The British parliament's agreement to let the Company give the currency measure twelve months' trial in the Straits provoked the summoning of another big public meeting in Singapore in July 1856 and further petitions to India. At this meeting the transfer question was raised formally for a second time, when Woods proposed that a committee be chosen to draw up petitions to the British parliament to make Singapore a crown colony. This was carried by a bare majority and Woods subsequently withdrew it.<sup>74</sup> It was expunged from the record of the meeting, but from that time Woods lost no opportunity to urge the break with India in the *Straits Times*, while the *Singapore Free Press* first came out in definite support of the transfer movement in September 1856.<sup>75</sup>

The government of India, puzzled at the continued complaints from Singapore, repeated that the supply of a copper currency based on fractions of the rupee was not intended to interfere with the dollar,<sup>76</sup> but when Blundell released this innocent communication in October 1856, the *Free Press* seized on it as 'very sinister'.<sup>77</sup> That same month Charles Allen, the legislative councillor who was largely responsible for the currency act, called at the Straits ports while on a pleasure voyage to China. A visit from a legislative councillor was rare indeed, but Allen refused to see a deputation of Singapore

<sup>72</sup> *SFP*, 3, 10, 17 April 1856.

<sup>73</sup> *SFP*, 5 June, 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 July 1856; *ST*, 29 July 1856.

<sup>74</sup> *ST*, 5 August 1856.

<sup>75</sup> *SFP*, 16 September, 18 December 1856.

<sup>76</sup> *SSR*, S 23, Item 186.

<sup>77</sup> *SFP*, 9, 16 October 1856.

merchants, insisting he was on holiday.<sup>78</sup> A frank explanation of Calcutta's currency policy might have cleared up misunderstandings, but this act of discourtesy by 'Rupee Allen', as he was henceforth to be known, killed the last vestige of trust in the legislative council of India. The next month a committee of five, including Read, Abraham Logan and Woods, representing the non-official European community of Singapore, petitioned the Indian legislative council, complaining of Allen's refusal to meet them and asking for the various petitions and remonstrances sent over the past few years to be considered. They claimed India's apathy had driven them to petition the British parliament for redress.<sup>79</sup> Woods thought his fellow committee members too restrained and declared in the *Straits Times*:

One of the worst and most stultifying clogs imposed upon British India is the wretched, miserable and—as far as Straits matters are concerned—the uninformed and governmental white-washing body called the Legislative Council, which does much mischief and little good.<sup>80</sup>

The Singapore merchants sent up a howl of protest when the official correspondence revealing Blundell's proposals to impose port dues was released in November 1856, and the Singapore and Penang chambers of commerce drew up petitions to Calcutta against implementing Blundell's recommendations. In forwarding these to India, Blundell poured cold water on the merchants' fears and made no secret of his attitude in Singapore.<sup>81</sup> The *Penang Gazette* regretted 'the Straits communities cannot reckon on finding in him that staunch main-tainer of an untrammelled native trade which they have found in all his predecessors',<sup>82</sup> while the *Straits Times* suggested halving the Governor's salary or dismissing him altogether to save money instead of levying port dues.<sup>83</sup> Asian and European merchants flocked to a public meeting in Singapore in December 1856 to express their disapproval and petition the Indian

<sup>78</sup> *ST*, 7, 28 October 1856; *SFP*, 30 October 1856; 'Delta', *SFP*, 30 October 1856.

<sup>79</sup> Text of petition in *ST*, 18 November 1856.

<sup>80</sup> *ST*, 9 December 1856.

<sup>81</sup> *SSR*, R 30, pp. 162-4, 271; Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. ii (1856), 676, iii (1857), 94.

<sup>82</sup> *PG*, 27 December 1856.

<sup>83</sup> *ST*, 2 December 1856.



legislative council.<sup>84</sup> As soon as the rumours of the proposed port dues reached England, John Crawford organized a deputation, including the Guthries, Boustead, Thomas Church, who had recently retired as Resident Councillor of Singapore, and other former officials and merchants, to take the matter up with the President of the Board of Control, who had heard nothing of any proposal to levy port dues and listened sympathetically.<sup>85</sup>

In 1857 the port dues question was to be settled to the mercantile community's satisfaction, and by that time the Directors too had their doubts about the wisdom of the council's proceedings in dealing with the Straits Settlements. 'This confusion is the result of our own obstinacy', one of them minuted on a despatch from India concerning the unpopularity of the currency act.<sup>86</sup> The Directors' decision in January 1857 to repeal the act came too late to pacify the Straits. In little more than two years the hopes of benefits from the reconstituted legislative council had changed to disillusionment, and the Straits merchants were out of love with 'the mere beauty of uniformity'. In India itself there was disappointment with the council, and resentment was greater in the Straits, partly because of the distance from Calcutta, which was a frequent cause of friction and misunderstanding at a time of centralization. The difficulty became acute because the legislative council's energetic programme was implemented at a period when the Straits had a Governor out of touch and out of sympathy with public opinion, unwilling to consult the general public and obstinate in clinging to his own opinions.

The strains and violence of the year 1857 brought resentment to fever pitch. The controversial police and municipal acts were brought into force on the first day of January 1857 in an atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainty.<sup>87</sup> With no officials who spoke or read Chinese, the government faced great difficulty

<sup>84</sup> *SFP*, 18, 25 December 1856; Text in *SFP*, 19 February 1857; Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. iii (1857), 128-9, 166.

<sup>85</sup> Directors to India, 25 March 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 103; Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. iii (1857), 336.

<sup>86</sup> Directors to India, 14 January 1857, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 102.

<sup>87</sup> More detailed discussion in G. M. Turnbull, 'Communal Disturbances in the Straits Settlements in 1857', *JMBRAS*, xxxi, no. 1 (1958), 96-146.

in interpreting the new laws, which interfered to some extent with rights of private property and the freedom of the individual. The result was that wild rumours concerning the laws spread among the Chinese population, who showed their alarm by refusing to open their shops. This scared many Europeans and some of the leading merchants warned the government it was 'threatened with an open revolt'.<sup>88</sup> Blundell denied this. He ordered the police to be particularly considerate, issued a reassuring proclamation and called together the leading Chinese merchants to explain the new acts. The deputation seemed satisfied and the next day business returned to normal among the Chinese community.

It was more difficult to calm the European community, who summoned a series of public meetings to clamour for strong measures to control the Chinese and their *hoeys*, and to criticize Blundell for being too placid.<sup>89</sup> Read was foreman of a grand jury which in mid-January complained about the riots, disturbances and alleged criminal tendencies of the Chinese and the apathy of the legislative council in dealing with them. Blundell thought legislation would only drive the *hoeys* underground, but despite his outward calm he was worried. He realized this particular incident was sparked off by the novelty of the new acts, but at the same time he feared the power and organization which this movement revealed among the Chinese population. In the long run he put his trust in an effective police force, and to cope with the immediate problem would have liked special powers to deport dangerous characters without trial. This request inevitably shocked Calcutta and the Directors who refused to grant it.<sup>90</sup>

The trouble in Singapore quickly subsided, but in February 1857 rebellion broke out among the Chinese in Sarawak, in which Kuching was destroyed and several of Brooke's officials murdered. Many of the Europeans in Singapore were terrified that the trouble would spread, fearing that the Sarawak outbreak, the demonstrations among the Singapore Chinese in January, and unrest in Hong Kong, formed part of one co-

<sup>88</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 8.

<sup>89</sup> SSR, V 22, pp. 16, 61, 65, 68; *ST*, 6 January 1857; *PG*, 24 January 1857.

<sup>90</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 57; SSR, R 30, p. 304; SSR, R 31, p. 26.

ordinated movement by the Chinese *hoys* to attack British settlements throughout the Far East, in sympathy with their countrymen fighting the British in China. The Singapore merchants were already worried about the lack of military protection, because Blundell, answering an appeal for reinforcements for the China campaign, had sent off a large contingent from the Singapore garrison early in January 1857. Some firms sent a joint protest at that time to Blundell, threatening to hold him responsible for any loss or damage to their goods, and in face of the news from Sarawak they now clamoured for protection in case of a possible Chinese outbreak.<sup>91</sup> News came soon that the Sarawak rising had been put down, but the Singapore merchants remained apprehensive and met to demand measures from the legislative council of India to curb the Chinese.<sup>92</sup> Blundell disapproved of the petition but forwarded it to Calcutta. Despite his worries, he did not want to anger the Chinese in Singapore by imposing restrictions and showing distrust. His moderation provoked only contempt among the European community.<sup>93</sup>

Meanwhile the Governor clashed further with the European merchants when he dismissed a European police inspector and sergeant for allowing their men to open fire in dispersing an Indian Muslim festival in Singapore in February 1857, as a result of which one Indian was killed, a second mortally wounded and several others hurt.<sup>94</sup> More than eighty of the European residents flocked to a public meeting, which agreed unanimously to Read's resolution that the policemen should be reinstated and condemned the Governor for prejudging the case by dismissing the men before their trial.<sup>95</sup> When Blundell refused these demands, the meeting reassembled in an angry

<sup>91</sup> SSR, R 30, pp. 254, 286-7, 299-300; SSR, W 24, Item 152; *ST*, 6, 13 January, 17 March 1857; *SFP*, 19 March 1857.

<sup>92</sup> SSR, R 31, pp. 61-3, 64-71, 93-4; SSR, W 24, Item 158; SSR, W 31, Item 336; SSR, V 22, pp. 208-9, 221-2; *SFP*, 2 April 1857; *ST*, 24, 31 March, 7, 14 April 1857; H. Keppel, *A Sailor's Life under Four Sovereigns* (London, 1899), ii, 334-5.

<sup>93</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 241; *ST*, 28 April, 19 May 1857; *PG*, 25 April in *ST*, 25 May 1857.

<sup>94</sup> SSR, V 22, p. 119; SSR, W 24, Item 172; *ST*, 10, 17 February 1857; Turnbull, *JMBRAS*, xxxi, no. 1 (1958), 101-2.

<sup>95</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 122; SSR, V 22, p. 152; *SFP*, 5 March 1857; *ST*, 3 March 1857.

mood and launched into general criticism of Blundell's administration.<sup>96</sup> One merchant declared 'the sooner the settlement was rid of Mr Blundell the better'.<sup>97</sup> They protested again formally to the Governor, who agreed to refer the dispute to Calcutta.<sup>98</sup> When the trial opened in April, it was not the police officers' guilt but the Governor's popularity which was being judged. The jury included several of those who had attended the public meeting held in protest at the dismissals, and they returned a verdict of 'not guilty', although independent observers considered the police had acted with unwarranted recklessness.<sup>99</sup> The accused were freed but not reinstated, and Calcutta supported Blundell in condemning their behaviour, since they 'appear wholly to deserve the blame imputed to them'.<sup>100</sup>

Blundell's over-hasty action and lack of tact were partly responsible for the sourness of this occasion, but the basic cause of the dispute was the determination of Read and his friends to foster resentment against the government on every possible issue. This was not the last time on which the public were to be stirred to words and deeds which later puzzled them and were a source of regret. While most people forgot the incident quickly, it showed how easily public reaction could be roused, and it widened the gulf between Blundell and the majority of the European population. The Governor played into the hands of Read and his party. In the words of the *Penang Gazette*:

It must be admitted that, with great industry and great honesty of purpose, Mr Blundell has contrived to forfeit the support of even the most moderate and 'conservative', and to give great offence by his absolutism, his strong prejudices, his disregard, verging on resentment, of the opinion and advice of all save a few private friends, his tendency to act on ideas and inferences of his own before they have been tested by the minds of others, and his habit of tenaciously adhering to them, even when their unreasonableness and injustice is obvious to every person but himself.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 125; SSR, V 22, p. 161; *ST*, 10 March 1857.

<sup>97</sup> *SFP*, 5 March 1857; *ST*, 10 March 1857.

<sup>98</sup> SSR, W 24, Item 127; SSR, V 22, p. 172; SSR, R 31, p. 44.

<sup>99</sup> *SFP*, 9 April, 7 May 1857.

<sup>100</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 127.

<sup>101</sup> *PG*, 9 April in *SFP*, 7 May 1857.

It was Blundell's personality, combined with the desire for an active share in government among the most influential and vocal section of the non-official European community, which were to make 1857 one of the most stormy years in the Straits Settlements' political history.

Despite this, even at the height of the storm, the *Free Press* published a letter by one 'Fair Play', which admitted the defects of the Company's rule, but felt India was 'a good nursing mother' and deplored the 'most suicidal' feeling which was gaining ground in favour of transfer to the colonial office.<sup>102</sup>

The difficulties associated with the new police and conservancy acts came to a head in Penang, normally a peaceable settlement, where the Chinese were, in Blundell's words, 'distinguished for their sensible submission to the laws of the country'.<sup>103</sup> Much of this amicability had been achieved by the authorities allowing free rein to the Chinese, resulting in a licence and nuisance to the rest of the community which the new laws were partly designed to stop. Since Lewis, the Resident Councillor of Penang and commissioner of police, was an old man in failing health, the duty of putting the new laws into practice devolved on Bruce Robertson, Penang's young deputy commissioner of police who was Blundell's son-in-law and had been appointed in 1856 against the wishes of the non-official members of the Penang municipal committee.<sup>104</sup> Robertson was energetic and enthusiastic but impetuous, indiscreet and high-handed, qualities which were to bring not only himself but Blundell and the administration into disrepute.

Trouble began in March 1857 when the police forcibly removed a *wayang* stage, which was obstructing a main street, and a clash ensued in which one Chinese was killed, one sepoy injured and a sepoy's musket disappeared. It was almost undoubtedly a spontaneous outburst but Blundell lost the patience and sense of proportion with which he had dealt with earlier trouble with the Chinese in Singapore and refused to see Chinese deputations or permit licences for entertainments until

<sup>102</sup> *SFP*, 7 March 1857.

<sup>103</sup> *SSR*, U 33, p. 28.

<sup>104</sup> *PG*, 24 May in *SFP*, 5 June 1856.

the musket was restored.<sup>105</sup> 'It is necessary for the assertion of our superiority and for the vindication of our national honour, that this musket should be restored',<sup>106</sup> he told the Resident Councillor. The leading Chinese merchants tried to placate the authorities, using as their spokesmen two French merchants, Philip Mathieu and Jerome Boudville, and a Scotsman, Stuart Herriot. When this failed, they hired J. R. Logan as their legal agent to appeal to Calcutta, which was impressed by his skilfully prepared case and 'very temperate and proper letter', and in July 1857 ordered Blundell to hold an immediate enquiry into the grievances of the Penang Chinese.<sup>107</sup> Fortunately for Blundell, the missing musket suddenly came to light and he was able without loss of face to authorize a commission of enquiry. The commission's findings were conflicting and inconclusive,<sup>108</sup> and Blundell exonerated Robertson but drew up rules for licensing festivals which contented the Chinese and Logan.

The original issue was all but forgotten. How Blundell came to adopt the idea that the Chinese had deliberately seized the musket to send as a trophy to China is a mystery, for normally Blundell showed no signs of nervousness or hysteria. Indeed his calmness and common sense had often annoyed the European community, who usually complained that Blundell was only too ready to divert troops from protecting trade and property in the Straits in order to aid their countrymen abroad, in China, in Sarawak or in India. Always an obstinate man, Blundell continued to cling to his ideas about the musket, maintaining in face of the ridicule of the local press and Calcutta's scepticism that events had proved him right. Blundell claimed his policy towards the local communities had been consistent. In Singapore he had protected them against the police when he felt the force had exceeded their duty, despite the clamouring of some European merchants for stern suppression. In Penang he was equally determined to punish the Chinese community for what he regarded as an unjustified display of violence, despite the fact that they had influential European friends to

<sup>105</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 193; SSR, U 33, pp. 30, 76; SSR, U 34, p. 59; SSR, DD 25, Items 65, 77, 86; SSR, R 31, pp. 85, 119, 199; *SFP*, 26 March 1857; *PG*, 18, 23 April 1857.

<sup>106</sup> SSR, U 33, p. 30.

<sup>107</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 193.

<sup>108</sup> SSR, DD 26, Items 228, 245; *SFP*, 12 November 1857.

champion their cause. 'In the one place I have not been unwisely indulgent', he claimed, 'and in the other I have not been unwisely harsh or over-bearing. In both places I have succeeded in restoring and retaining peace and quietness.'<sup>109</sup> But he had shaken the confidence of Europeans in Singapore and of both Europeans and Chinese in Penang and incurred bitter criticism from the press in Singapore, Penang and Calcutta.<sup>110</sup> In May 1857 the Singapore grand jury complained, 'at no period in the history of the settlement have the representations and remonstrances of the European community received so little attention at the hands of the local authorities',<sup>111</sup> while the following month J. R. Logan's *Penang Gazette* described Blundell's activities as 'but the dying struggle of rajalism in the Straits'. Adding that, 'The fight between absolutists and constitutionalists—between Indian and English modes of administration—has been nearly fought out', it urged its readers to throw off their tolerance of the 'easy despotism' under which they lived and fight for representative government.<sup>112</sup>

In the meantime the Straits Settlements had been caught up in the excitement of the Indian Mutiny. The first news of the outbreak reached Singapore at the end of May 1857, and Lord Elgin, the British ambassador and plenipotentiary to China, who had just arrived in Singapore with troops for the China expedition, was so alarmed that he decided to divert his troops to India.<sup>113</sup> To safeguard the Straits, Blundell appealed for the troops he had sent to China six months earlier to be returned, and he refused to send any of his garrison to India.<sup>114</sup>

The European population was jittery after the alarms of the previous months. There was little reason to fear that the mutiny would spread to the Straits, since all the Indian troops came from Madras, but indirect repercussions soon affected the settlements, and there was great bitterness when an Indian

<sup>109</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 117-18.

<sup>110</sup> *SFP*, 23 April, 7 May 1857; *PG*, 4, 18, 23 April, 2, 16, 23 May 1857; *Englishman*, 13 April 1857, in *SFP*, 7 May 1857.

<sup>111</sup> *SFP*, 14 May 1857.

<sup>112</sup> *PG*, 3 June 1857.

<sup>113</sup> *SFP*, 4 June 1857; T. Walrond (ed.), *Letters and Journals of James Eighth Earl of Elgin* (London, 1872), pp. 187-8.

<sup>114</sup> SSR, X 28, p. 16; SSR, W 25, Item 378; SSR, S 25, Item 227.

'Gagging Act' was passed in June 1857, imposing strict censorship on the press throughout all Indian territories for twelve months.<sup>115</sup> It aimed to restrict the publication of seditious literature which might inflame public opinion, but it was a meaningless law in the Straits, where there were no vernacular newspapers and no signs of sympathy with the mutineers, even among the Indian population. Whereas in continental India the rapid expansion of English and vernacular journals had produced a press which many considered 'not only free but licentious',<sup>116</sup> the editors of the local newspapers in the Straits had established themselves, in their own eyes at least, as the bulwark of popular liberty and considered the act a humiliating blow. They attacked the measure as one further proof of the Indian government's refusal to recognize the special position of the Straits Settlements.<sup>117</sup>

The press feared Blundell would use the act to suppress their opposition to his general administration, but in this they were unfair to the governor, who advised Calcutta that the Straits newspapers were 'scarce worthy of the notice which a warning would draw on them'.<sup>118</sup> During its year of life the 'Gagging Act' was never enforced in the Straits, but Blundell did not announce his intention not to apply it, and resentment and apprehension consequently persisted. In July 1857 the European inhabitants of Singapore met to consider petitioning the British parliament to withdraw the act. Read had departed for Britain in April, but his partner, M. F. Davidson, as chairman, identified himself with Logan, Woods and others who wanted to petition parliament to exempt the Straits from the act. A minority of those present argued that this was not the time to stab the Indian government in the back by criticizing its policies, however irrelevant and irritating they were to Singapore. But the majority supported Dr Robert Little's view, 'better British rule fall in Calcutta than pass such an obnoxious measure, which would leave a stain on our rule', and the

<sup>115</sup> Act XV of 1857; Proceedings of the Legislative Council of India, 1st ser. iii (1857), 298-302; SSR, S 25, Item 150.

<sup>116</sup> H. T. Prinsep, *The India Question in 1853* (London, 1853), pp. 61-2.

<sup>117</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 339; *PG*, 13 June, 18 July 1857; *ST*, 7 July 1857; *SFP*, 23 July 1857.

<sup>118</sup> SSR, R 32, p. 68.



meeting appointed a committee including Woods and Logan to draw up petitions.<sup>119</sup>

Early in August a deputation of the leading Singapore merchants waited on Blundell, expressing distrust of the garrison's loyalty, asking that British guards be put over the arsenal and convict lines as an emergency measure and that in future Singapore should be garrisoned by British troops. Blundell dismissed these fears,<sup>120</sup> since there was never any doubt as to the loyalty of the garrison, but a few days later fresh alarm broke out when the Singapore authorities transferred a political prisoner, Khurruck Singh, to Penang, because he was rumoured to be intriguing with Indian convicts in Singapore. Khurruck Singh, a former Sikh colonel and a man of some substance, was a state prisoner from Calcutta, who had been confined in the Singapore jail for several years until he was released in January 1857, to be kept under police surveillance.<sup>121</sup>

There were nearly 3,000 convicts in Singapore at that time. In the early months of 1857 a number of dangerous convicts, including thirty-two dacoits and hardened criminals from Lahore, were sent to Singapore,<sup>122</sup> and in August 1857 the Singapore community was horrified to learn that Calcutta had approved the suggestions made by the commissioner for the suppression of dacoity that 'men of unusual audacity and boldness' should in future be imprisoned for life in Calcutta or sent to Singapore.<sup>123</sup> When Blundell refused to accede to demands from European and Chinese merchants to ban the Muslim convicts' Muharram procession, the press criticized the decision as 'a very humiliating concession'. A panic ensued when several families fled aboard ships in Singapore harbour for safety, but calm was restored when the convicts themselves rejected the permit for the procession.<sup>124</sup>

Meanwhile Khurruck Singh's arrival threw Penang into

<sup>119</sup> *ST*, 28 July, 4 August 1857; *SFP*, 30 July 1857.

<sup>120</sup> *SSR*, W 25, Item 350; *SSR*, R 32, p. 68.

<sup>121</sup> *SSR*, U 33, pp. 112, 268-70; *SSR*, X 27, p. 111; *SSR*, S 23, Item 286; *SSR*, R 31, p. 42; *ST*, 11 August 1857.

<sup>122</sup> *SSR*, S 25, Item 59.

<sup>123</sup> *SFP*, 6 August 1857.

<sup>124</sup> *SSR*, W 25, Items 376, 377, 380; *SSR*, V 23, pp. 179-81; *SSR*, R 32, p. 68; *ST*, 25 August, 1 September 1857; *SFP*, 20, 27 August, 3 September 1857.

panic. Blundell wanted to send him back to India, not because he thought the Sikh dangerous but because the Straits community 'magnified him into a desperate and dangerous intriguer'. Calcutta refused.<sup>125</sup> Fears rose to fever pitch late in August when it was rumoured that the Madras regiment was planning to murder their officers and all the Christians in Penang. Many families fled to Province Wellesley or took refuge on ships in the harbour.<sup>126</sup> More than fifty Europeans met and chose J. R. Logan to head a deputation to the Resident Councillor asking for the garrison to be supplemented by British sailors and for European troops only to man the fort in future. Lewis tried to calm their fears and resisted the suggestion of filling the fort with sailors, who were always notorious for their drunken insubordination ashore. But he agreed to supplement the garrison during Muharram with about thirty policemen and ten or twelve European special constables. This restored calm to the Europeans, but many Penang Chinese barricaded their shops.<sup>127</sup>

It was in this atmosphere of disquiet that Straits officials and merchants alike heard with horror that the government of India had decided to transfer dangerous prisoners from the Calcutta jail to the Straits in order to make room for convicted mutineers.<sup>128</sup> This brought the resentment of the European community against Calcutta and its apparent indifference to the security of the Straits Settlements to a head.<sup>129</sup> It was at this point that the Singapore European merchants learned that their counterparts in Calcutta had petitioned the British parliament to abolish the Company and transfer India to the direct rule of the crown.<sup>130</sup> In mid-September the European inhabitants of Singapore met to consider whether they should support the Calcutta petition. It was the most important of the public meetings held in the Straits and marked the culmination

<sup>125</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 60-4; SSR, S 25, Item 277; SSR, U 34, p. 101.

<sup>126</sup> SSR, DD 26, Item 194.

<sup>127</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 384; SSR, U 33, pp. 301-7; SSR, V 23, pp. 200-3; *PG*, 29 August in *SFP*, 3 September 1857.

<sup>128</sup> SSR, S 25, Item 229; SSR, R 32, pp. 92-4; *SFP*, 10 September 1857.

<sup>129</sup> SSR, W 25, Item 460; *ST*, 22 September, 13 October 1857; *PG*, 19 September in *SFP*, 1 October 1857.

<sup>130</sup> Calcutta petition in full in *ST*, 1 September 1857; *SFP*, 3 September 1857.

of the campaign against the Company's rule so carefully fostered over the years by Read, Woods, Logan and their small group of enthusiastic supporters. Read himself was still in Europe and thus deprived of the opportunity to bring his battle to a climax, and Woods dominated the meeting. A few speakers expressed doubt as to the advantages of colonial rule, but Woods won the day. The meeting resolved unanimously to join the Calcutta residents in petitioning the British parliament to bring India under the direct rule of the crown, and to ask further that the Straits Settlements should no longer be ruled under a delegated authority from India but should themselves be ruled directly from London. A committee was set up under Joaquim d'Almeida to draw up a petition, detailing the specific problems of the Straits Settlements.<sup>131</sup>

The petition was completed by mid-October and signed by most of the non-official European residents of Singapore. It was a long petition, which began by expressing disappointment that the conversion of the settlements into a direct dependency of the government of India in 1851 had produced little change. The petitioners claimed the Indian government had persistently disregarded the wishes of the Straits communities, that they had treated the settlements as part of continental India, regardless of the different circumstances, and that the only improvements had been obtained through appeals to the British parliament. They continued that the legislative council formed in 1854 had given no representation to the Straits, and complained of the despotism of the Governor, with no council to advise or check him. To prove these general complaints the petitioners devoted the bulk of the memorial to specific examples of their grievances and prayed that they should be made a separate dependency of the crown. They complained that the Company had tried to introduce measures damaging to their trade, in attempting to impose duties and tonnage dues and to standardize the rupee as the legal currency. They criticized the Company's failure to provide an adequate judicial establishment, to wipe out piracy or build up influence in the peninsula and the archipelago. They argued that the Indian government's policy towards the Chinese was weak, inconsistent and

<sup>131</sup> *SFP*, 17 September 1857; *ST*, 22 September 1857.

vacillating, and they concluded by dealing at length with the problem then uppermost in their minds: the use of Singapore as a convict station, and the dangers and humiliation which this involved.<sup>132</sup>

The basic objection was the lack of representation in government and of a local legislative council, because the difficulties and discontent in the Straits stemmed mainly from over-centralization in Calcutta. The quarrel between the European community and India was a constitutional one: the anomaly of binding the Straits free ports to the East India Company. The roots of the transfer movement lay in the constitutional re-arrangement in the Straits Settlements of 1830 and the Charter Act of 1833. The system of government was unsatisfactory both for the Governor and the mercantile community. The merchants railed at 'a system of government which merely oscillates between a variously qualified despotism and that nearly absolute one on which we now verge'.<sup>133</sup> Blundell complained the existing situation permitted the residents unlimited licence for criticism and abuse without the restraining influence imposed by the responsibility of power. It encouraged claims that there should be no taxation without representation. Woods declared in the *Straits Times* in 1852,

We strongly object to taxation in any shape, and we re-iterate as we have again and again asserted and proved, that the framers of the Straits Settlements never contemplated that we inhabitants should be taxed—the expense of their maintenance was and ought to continue to be borne by the imperial government.<sup>134</sup>

In the interests of both the government and the governed, it was time to give some political power to influential non-officials.

The success achieved by the small but persistent transfer lobby in getting the petition for transfer drawn up, which represented the triumph of the first stage in the campaign for transfer, was the culmination of a combination of circumstances. The energetic policy of uniformity and centralization pursued by the new legislative council of India from 1854 was particularly irksome and inappropriate to the Straits Settlements.

<sup>132</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, pp. 585–8; full text also in *ST*, 13 October 1857, *SFP*, 15 October 1857.

<sup>133</sup> *PG*, 16 May 1857.

<sup>134</sup> *ST*, 16 March 1852.

The appointment of the obstinate and ill-humoured Blundell as Governor added growing personal bitterness to the constitutional difficulties. Against this background of mounting irritation, the Governor's clumsy handling of the riots and disturbances among the local communities during the early months of 1857 inflamed public opinion. But for the Indian Mutiny, the censorship of the press, the fear of physical violence from dangerous convicts and the lead given by the Calcutta petition, this feeling of discontent might have gradually faded away. But the Calcutta petition came at a time when fear and resentment against the Company's rule had driven the European community in Singapore to breaking point. It began a process which, after many vicissitudes, was to lead to the transfer of the Straits Settlements to the colonial office in 1867.

The petition came from Singapore alone. J. R. Logan and Herriot tried to rouse support in Penang, but at a public meeting held to discuss this in October 1857 only three people voted in favour of transfer. An overwhelming majority voted for a counter-resolution that this was an inopportune time to add to the East India Company's difficulties.<sup>135</sup>

In Singapore itself the community's fears about its safety intensified during the weeks following the drawing up of the petition. The arrival of the first mutineer convicts in the Straits in November 1857 led to a public protest meeting in Singapore to ask Calcutta to discontinue transportation to the Straits altogether. Although the government of India had already decided to stop sending mutineers, a large body of dangerous convicts including another eighty mutineers arrived in Penang in mid-December 1857. As the troubled year came to a close, the European merchants of Singapore had no regrets about having despatched their petition to be transferred to colonial rule and were as determined as ever to throw off the Indian yoke.

The parliamentary debate on the Singapore transfer petition was opened in April 1858 by Lord Bury, heir of the pro-Straits earl of Albermarle. Bury argued that Singapore's geographical position made her a natural centre of British trade and potentially a prosperous crown colony.<sup>136</sup> The debate which followed

<sup>135</sup> *PG*, 19, 26 September, 10 October, in *SFP*, 1, 8, 22 October 1857.

<sup>136</sup> *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. clxix, 986-90; *The Times*, 14 April 1858.

was short. Only four members spoke, two of them representatives of the Indian administration. Baillie, secretary to the Board of Control, challenged the accuracy of the petition, claiming with some justification that many of the grievances listed had already been settled, and pointing out that Singapore's trade had increased more than seventy-five per cent over the past six years. He warned parliament that if the crown took over the settlements they would have to bear an increasing burden of military defence. The next speaker, Sir Edward Horsman, with big sugar interests in Province Wellesley, retorted that the Straits' progress had been achieved in spite of the Company's bad government, and he claimed the interests of India and the Straits were so distinct that the two territories should be separated.

He was followed by Sir James Elphinstone, the only member of parliament with any personal experience of the Straits, but whose brief visit to Singapore took place thirty-eight years before. Elphinstone admitted this was the first he had heard of any proposed transfer to the crown and he had given the matter no thought, but this did not deter him from drawing an eyewitness picture of Singapore, with its lawless multitudes of savage immigrants, and particularly the Klings, 'a most disorderly people', who were the offspring, he asserted, of 'the union of Chinese immigrants with native women'. Elphinstone was pessimistic about the economic development of the Straits, particularly Singapore, where, he alleged, vast numbers of tigers swam over the 'small stream' which separated the island from Johore and devoured the settlers. Altogether he agreed with Baillie that England would be taking on a great burden in accepting such an unpromising commitment.

The debate was concluded rather bitterly by the chairman of the East India Company, who dismissed the fears about convicts and tigers as nonsense. He admitted India had little further interest in the Straits since she intended to develop the Andamans as a convict depot, but he warned that the settlements would be a strain on the imperial revenue and denied the merchants' allegations that they were burdened with unnecessary military or convict charges. On the contrary, he insisted grimly, it was the Indian revenue and the 'poor *ryots*

of India' who subsidized the Straits merchants and enabled them to enjoy virtual exemption from taxation.<sup>137</sup>

For the moment parliament was preoccupied with settling the affairs of India itself, which provided complications enough. After two India bills foundered and the President of the Board of Control resigned, his successor, Lord Stanley, made it clear that he intended to push the third India bill through that summer and would tolerate no side issues, such as the future of the Straits Settlements.<sup>138</sup> But when news arrived in Singapore in September 1858 that the 'Act for the better government of India' abolishing the East India Company had at last been passed, the way seemed clear to settle the question of the Straits, untrammelled by considerations of general Indian policy.<sup>139</sup> The Singapore grand jury welcomed the crown's assumption of the direct administration of India as 'the inauguration of a liberal and enlightened policy' for the Straits,<sup>140</sup> but many of the British residents were sceptical, feeling with justice that the new regime would have enough problems without embarking on a programme of reform in the Straits.<sup>141</sup>

During the long-drawn-out debates on India the sponsors of the Straits transfer had not been idle. The most industrious spokesman was John Crawford, who prepared a long memorandum which he presented to Lord Stanley, now secretary of state for India, late in 1858, and which was to be used as one of the main expositions of the case for transfer.<sup>142</sup> Read, who was still in England in 1858, kept up agitation,<sup>143</sup> and other active advocates of the transfer included Sir James Brooke, who saw in the reorganization of the British settlements in the Far East a chance to gain British protection for Sarawak. At a dinner in Manchester in May 1858 Brooke and his friend, Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Keppel, spoke warmly in favour of the

<sup>137</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser. clxix, 990-5.

<sup>138</sup> *Hansard*, 3rd ser. clxix, 818-46, 858-77, 1690-1, 1710-13, 2047-66, 2093; cl, 404-18, 579-673, 676-761, 858-9, 864-5, 931-1021, 1615-40, 1673-8; *ST*, 7 August 1858.

<sup>140</sup> *SFP*, 20 January 1859.

<sup>141</sup> *SFP*, 25 November 1858.

<sup>142</sup> J. Crawford, *Notes on the Proposal of Annexing the Settlements in the Straits of Malacca to the Colonial Administration of the Crown* (London, 1858), reprinted in PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, pp. 588-90.

<sup>143</sup> Directors to India, 18 March 1858, IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 111.

creation of a Straits Settlements colony. As a result a petition was drawn up and signed by the mayor and many leading merchants and industrialists of Manchester, asking that the Straits Settlements be made a crown colony, with Sarawak either a separate crown colony or united with Singapore.<sup>144</sup>

In Singapore meanwhile Blundell was becoming more unpopular, while Calcutta was impatient with his inefficiency and irritated at the public display which Blundell made of his frustrations. They commented on his report for 1856-7:

Your report . . . being intended avowedly for publication, parades these topics before the world in a querulous tone and in language scarcely respectful to the supreme authority to which the Straits government is subordinate.<sup>145</sup>

Blundell was himself all too conscious of his failing competence. He raised a minor international storm in 1857 over his mis-handling of the case of a Dutch ship, the *Henrietta Maria*, which left Macao for Havana with nearly 400 coolies, who rose in revolt and seized the ship. After several days of aimless drifting they fell in with an American vessel, which brought the *Henrietta Maria* to Singapore. Blundell put the coolies in jail and handed the ship over to the Dutch authorities in Riau against the wishes of the salvors, forcibly hauling down the American flag in the process. The Directors and the British foreign office were appalled by Blundell's action, which was illegal as well as insulting to a friendly nation. This little Anglo-American rift soon healed, but the advocate general in Calcutta decided that the Singapore courts would have awarded the salvors \$10,000, against the \$6,000 awarded by the Batavia court in August 1857, and until the shipowners finally paid over the money two years later, Blundell lived in trepidation that he personally would be called on to pay the difference. This increased the worries hanging over him during his last two unhappy years in the Straits and was one more factor adding to Calcutta's lack of trust in his judgment.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Petition text and commentary in *ST*, 12 June 1858.

<sup>145</sup> SSR, S 25, p. 134; SSR, R 32, pp. 47-8.

<sup>146</sup> C. M. Turnbull, 'The Tale of the *Henrietta Maria*', *Journal of the Historical Society, University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur*, i, no. 2 (1961), 6-8.



Blundell's troubles multiplied after the municipal elections of December 1857, which brought in the first committees containing a majority of elected non-officials. The Singapore municipal commissioners, though firm in defending municipal interests, were generally fair and co-operative in their relations with the Governor, but in Penang the three elected members of the first committee were Stuart Herriot, Philip Mathieu and Jerome Boudville, who had clashed with Blundell over his handling of the Chinese disturbances in 1857, and now banded together in defiance of the Governor, holding that since they formed a majority, the government could not repudiate their decisions. They flouted demands for funds for the police and embarked instead on expensive conservancy measures.<sup>147</sup> The relationship between the Penang municipal committee and Blundell deteriorated into a personal quarrel, and Lewis, who was old, tired and thoroughly exasperated by the whole business, protested that 'the language that was habitually used towards the Governor was most disgraceful'.<sup>148</sup>

Blundell's position was all the more difficult in that he had appointed several of his sons-in-law to senior uncovenanted posts. In 1857 Henry Man, one of the senior covenanted officials, petitioned the Governor General about Blundell's 'abuse of patronage', which led to reproofs from Calcutta and eventually from the India office,<sup>149</sup> and the government of India's decision in 1858 to ban uncovenanted men from the post of assistant Resident was interpreted, incorrectly, in the Straits as a reaction to Blundell's alleged nepotism.<sup>150</sup>

It was the most impetuous of his sons-in-law, Bruce Robertson, who caused Blundell's final undoing. The climax of his indiscretions came as the result of his well-meaning but clumsy handling of a case of gang robbery, which took place in Province Wellesley in 1858, involving some Kedah Malays. The Recorder, Sir Benson Maxwell, believing wrongly that

<sup>147</sup> SSR, W 27, Item 208; SSR, DD 26, Item 278; SSR, DD 28, Items 165, 199; SSR, V 26, pp. 126-30, 276-81.

<sup>148</sup> SSR, DD 28, Item 199.

<sup>149</sup> SSR, R 32, pp. 102-3; SSR, S 25, Item 306; IO, Judicial Letters from India, vol. 2, pp. 448-50; *SFP*, 5 June 1856, 12 March 1857; *PG*, 2 May in *SFP*, 14 May 1857; *ST*, 19 May 1857.

<sup>150</sup> *ST*, 19 May 1858.

Robertson had got rid of a woman witness to prevent her giving evidence, accused Blundell and Lewis of being ready to sacrifice the girl to save the deputy commissioner's reputation. He appealed to Calcutta and the secretary of state to intervene, referring to Blundell's conduct in violently abusive terms, while the Governor countered that Maxwell was unfit to be a judge and that he was sneering at Blundell in public, calling him a liar and scoundrel, 'coupled with adjectives too foul and disgusting to be repeated'.<sup>151</sup>

Embittered and resentful, Blundell was rapidly going to pieces, quarrelling with merchants, the press, the judges, and finding fault with officials everywhere.<sup>152</sup> He was plagued by new difficulties in March 1859 when H. S. Mackenzie, the Resident Councillor of Singapore, retired through ill health, so that Blundell had to take over the duties himself and found the work months in arrears.<sup>153</sup> In Penang Lewis was succumbing to the inefficiency and senility which were to lead to his compulsory retirement the following year. Two of the three posts of assistant Resident were vacant, and Blundell had no means of filling them since he was precluded from appointing any but covenanted officials. The whole administration appeared to be on the point of collapse.

It was in this mood, beset by overwork and violent criticism, that Blundell received a request from Calcutta in May 1859 to comment on the Singapore petition for transfer to the colonial office.<sup>154</sup> Negotiations had progressed very slowly in England. In the absence of reliable financial statements, the colonial secretary was wary of the proposal but was prepared to open negotiations with the India office,<sup>155</sup> and in March 1859 Lord Stanley, secretary of state for India, asked for the Governor General's comments. Stanley himself could see no reason to

<sup>151</sup> C. M. Turnbull, 'Governor Blundell and Sir Benson Maxwell: a Conflict of Personalities and Principles', *JMBRAS*, xxx, no. 1 (1957), 134-63; SSR, W 28, Item 480; SSR, V 28, p. 149; SSR, W 29, Items 30, 52, 142; SSR, R 35, pp. 126, 134; *Proceedings of an Investigation made by the Governor into Charges against the Penang Police, October 1859* (Singapore, 1859), App., p. xxvi; PG, 5, 12 March in ST, 26 March 1859; PG, 18 June in SFP, 7 July 1859; ST, 19, 22, 26 March 1859; SFP, 24 March, 14 April 1859.

<sup>152</sup> SSR, R 35, pp. 167-8, 186-90, 203, 247-50, 265-6, 291-3.

<sup>153</sup> SSR, R 35, pp. 207-11.

<sup>154</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, p. 591.

<sup>155</sup> CO minutes January 1859, CO 273/7.

retain the settlements but wanted to be sure of the reaction of the Asian and European inhabitants, and he asked for clear and detailed statements of revenue and expenditure.<sup>156</sup>

Blundell reported back to Calcutta without enthusiasm, informing the Governor General that the European community's desire for change had melted away in the two years which had elapsed since the petition was made and that the Asian population would undoubtedly be alarmed at any political change.<sup>157</sup> The Governor's estimate of the general attitude to Indian rule was blind to the point of dishonesty: never had the prestige of an Indian Governor or the regime he represented sunk so low as it had in the middle of 1859. While Read was still in England, Woods and other supporters of the transfer had continued to keep the issue alive through the press and public meetings,<sup>158</sup> and only a few weeks before Canning asked for Blundell's report, the *Free Press* was expressing impatience at the delay and silence concerning the transfer petition.<sup>159</sup> Blundell could hardly have been ignorant of these clear expressions of public opinion.

This bad piece of advice was Blundell's last major public act, and in June 1859 he applied to retire.<sup>160</sup> His health was undermined by thirty-eight years' service in the tropics, his eyesight was failing rapidly, and the quarrel with Maxwell and near-collapse of the civil service were the last blows to his confidence. His resignation was received with general relief in the Straits. The Singapore Chinese merchants sent a memorial of appreciation and regret that he was leaving them,<sup>161</sup> but no tributes came from the European community and there were none of the farewell dinners or receptions which were the normal due of departing Governors. When Blundell left Singapore in August 1859 only a handful of officials and close friends came to see him off.<sup>162</sup> In Malacca he was given a lukewarm send-off, and in Penang, when a few Chinese merchants paid tribute to him, the leading Chinese held a meeting to protest that this memorial had been hawked round for signature under

<sup>156</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, p. 597.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., pp. 597-602.

<sup>158</sup> ST, 22 May, 18 December 1858; SFP, 27 May, 3 June 1858, 13, 20 January, 21 April 1859.

<sup>159</sup> SFP, 21 April 1859.

<sup>160</sup> NAI, Home Department Consultations (Public), July 1859, nos. 35-9.

<sup>161</sup> ST, 3 September 1859.

<sup>162</sup> ST, 20 August 1859.

false pretences and insisted that Blundell's treatment of their community did not warrant their showing him any mark of respect.<sup>163</sup> Twenty-eight of the leading citizens of Penang gave him a dinner, including officials, clergymen and some European merchants. It was a pathetic and embarrassing occasion, but Blundell told them with obvious emotion that their friendly gesture on the eve of his departure would do much to make him forget all the bitterness of his last days and the spite of his enemies—'some of them virulent ones'.<sup>164</sup>

Soon afterwards it was learned that he had been stricken with blindness,<sup>165</sup> but this misfortune did not prevent a burst of protest when Calcutta exonerated him from Maxwell's charges. The *Free Press* waxed almost libellous about Canning and urged its readers 'not to accept the acquittal pronounced by the Governor General as conclusive'.<sup>166</sup> Blundell's break with the Straits was complete. Eighteen months later, in January 1861, he remarried in England,<sup>167</sup> and this perhaps brought comfort and a new lease of life to a man who, obstinate, stupid and charmless though he may have been, had devoted his whole career honestly and selflessly to the welfare of the eastern settlements, and had reaped in reward only vilification and abuse.

The European community in the Straits prepared to welcome Blundell's successor warmly, and there was general satisfaction when the post was offered to Colonel Orfeur Cavenagh, who arrived in August 1859. Educated at the Company's military academy at Addiscombe, Cavenagh had served in several Indian campaigns. Serious wounds and the amputation of a leg brought his active military service to an end, but he remained physically energetic, and as town major of Calcutta, he displayed courage and tact during the Mutiny. Tired and jaded after many years in India and the strain of the Mutiny period, Cavenagh gladly accepted this lucrative post in the healthy settlement of Singapore, expecting his term of office to be short, since the transfer negotiations were already

<sup>163</sup> *PG*, 3 September in *SFP*, 29 September 1859.

<sup>164</sup> *Penang Argus*, 3 September in *ST*, 19 September 1859; *PG*, 27 August in *SFP*, 1 September 1859; *SFP*, 15 September 1859.

<sup>165</sup> *ST*, 8 October 1859.

<sup>166</sup> *SFP*, 27 October 1859.

<sup>167</sup> *ST*, 23 March 1861.

under way, and little thinking that he would be there for the next eight years.<sup>168</sup>

In appointing Cavenagh Calcutta considered there were few external problems likely to trouble the Straits. Anglo-Dutch relations were amicable, the peninsula was quiet and the Pahang civil war appeared to have petered out. Internal administration seemed to be the main problem, and Canning considered Cavenagh the ideal man to smooth out the difficulties caused by the tactless Blundell.<sup>169</sup> The new Governor arrived in Singapore with a high reputation, and was praised by the Bengal newspapers. As the Calcutta *Phoenix* commented:

Clear minded, active, determined, without an atom of red tapism about him, and known in private life as an example of conscientiousness, he seems to us the very model of a Governor for a British settlement like Singapore in times such as the present.<sup>170</sup>

Calcutta's choice proved to be admirable, and Cavenagh was the most popular and successful Governor ever appointed by the government of India to the Straits Settlements. At that time Singapore needed a tactful but determined Governor, a man of endless patience and integrity, and above all a ruler with a strong sense of humour and a zest for living. Cavenagh had all these qualities. He was a simple, honest man, who liked 'advancing in a straight line': he thought straightforwardness could 'baffle all the schemes of evil men', and 'as regards diplomacy, whether in the east or the west, that is the proper course for Englishmen to adopt'.<sup>171</sup> In some of the more tortuous dealings in the Malay states this transparent honesty, amounting to naïveté, was to play him false, but in the Straits Settlements, where the smooth running of an anomalous administration depended on trust between the community and the government, Cavenagh's simplicity was ideal. His appearance helped him too. Although he was only thirty-eight years old when appointed to the Straits, his short, chubby, round

<sup>168</sup> NAI, Home Department Consultations (Public), July 1859, nos. 35-9; O. Cavenagh, *Reminiscences of an Indian Official* (London, 1884), pp. 246, 251-2; *SFP*, 21 July 1859.

<sup>169</sup> Minute of Canning in Council, 29 July 1859, CO 273/3.

<sup>170</sup> *Phoenix*, 4 July in *SFP*, 28 July 1859.

<sup>171</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 93.

figure gave him a benign grandfatherly appearance far beyond his years. Cheerful and benevolent, he was innocent of the personal squabbles and prejudices that embittered the everyday life of the settlements and had dragged Blundell down. Cavenagh's amiable wife also helped to promote the spirit of cordiality, playing an active role in social life and charitable work.

Unlike his predecessor, Cavenagh took careful heed of newspaper criticism. He went to endless pains to explain Indian legislation, to discuss the merchants' viewpoint, to compromise where he disagreed or to reinforce their opinions where he coincided with them. He made use of expressions of popular sentiment in the grand jury, in public meetings, in the chamber of commerce, and he was often able to win the confidence of the non-official community into accepting measures which they did not at first like. At the same time his relations with subordinates and colleagues were cordial. Active and energetic, undeterred by his physical disability, he infused new life into the administration, and soon came to command not only the loyalty of his officials, but the respect and support of the judges, the merchants, the chamber of commerce and the press.<sup>172</sup> Like his predecessor, Cavenagh frequently became exasperated by his powerlessness to take executive action without Calcutta's prior approval and by the lack of clear directives on external policy, but unlike the irritable Blundell he kept his complaints to official correspondence and tried to make an impossible situation work. His long years of experience in India and the discipline of his military training helped him. Given the difficult constitutional background against which he had to operate, he was successful in combining responsibility to his subjects with complete loyalty to the government of India.

Cavenagh quickly established a reputation for firmness, fairness, efficiency and energy. Soon after his arrival he made it clear that he did not intend to grant any concessions over Chinese festivals in Penang, and he acted swiftly later in the year to break up the association of other communities with the

<sup>172</sup> SSR, V 34, pp. 17-25, 188; SSR, W 46, Item 250; SSR, R 44, pp. 80-1; SFP, 16 February, 12 April, 13 September 1860, 10 October 1861, 22 January 1863; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 315-16.

Chinese secret societies. On the other hand he was quick to support the cause of the Asian population whenever he considered the European inhabitants were being unfair in their demands, particularly on questions of taxation.<sup>173</sup> He showed great energy in travelling in the settlements, in inspecting schools, hospitals and other institutions, in touring the interior and remote coasts to advise on constructing roads, police stations and frontier posts. His infirmity did not deter him from arduous expeditions in regions where no Governor or even Resident Councillor had ventured before. Out in the field he would wear a wooden leg, which caused some astonishment among those who had seen him with his artificial leg on normal occasions and gave him among the more naïve a reputation, which amused him greatly, of being able to change his legs at will.<sup>174</sup>

With the departure of Blundell, the fire went out of municipal politics. Dogged by lack of funds, most of the energies of the commissioners in Singapore and Penang were absorbed in trying to make ends meet.<sup>175</sup> While acknowledging their difficulties and problems, Cavenagh was firm with the committees but gave them practical help. He favoured extending the powers of the committees to raise loans, impose local taxes and tolls for special services, to help in 'repressing that tendency to lean upon the government for the means to carry out works at present but too apparent in all Indian communities',<sup>176</sup> but he found little response in Calcutta until 1864, when the government of India decided it was time to give more responsibility to municipalities throughout India and asked for suggestions from local authorities. By that time all public criticism of municipal government in the Straits had been dulled. The main recommendation of the Singapore press was for reform of election procedure, the Penang committee merely proposed 'a few clerical alterations', and Malacca had no comments at all.<sup>177</sup> In

<sup>173</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 121-5, 184-94; SSR, R 44, pp. 245-7.

<sup>174</sup> Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 262, 285; *PG*, 4 February in *SFP*, 23 February, 1860; *SFP*, 17 January 1861.

<sup>175</sup> SSR, W 31, Item 346; SSR, U 39, p. 147; SSR, V 27, pp. 158-60; SSR, V 29, pp. 140-1, 174.

<sup>176</sup> SSR, R 39, pp. 268-75; SSR, R 43, pp. 2-4.

<sup>177</sup> SSR, R 46, pp. 19-30, 42-3; *ST*, 1 January 1865.

Singapore there were always sufficient individual enthusiasts willing to take office, although one of the representatives elected for 1865 was a government official. In Penang the Governor had to nominate commissioners in 1865 since no candidates polled sufficient votes to qualify.<sup>178</sup> The press worked hard to keep interest alive and in 1865 the *Singapore Free Press* argued that the municipal committees were the only representative institutions in the Straits,<sup>179</sup> but by the time the settlements were removed from Calcutta's rule municipal politics were almost dead.

Blundell's departure removed the most obvious source of bitterness towards the local government, and the feeling soon gained ground in Singapore that the settlements might do better under the direct control of the India office in London, an arrangement which would provide them with their own local legislative council, which had been the main object of the application for transfer to colonial rule. At a meeting in Singapore in February 1860 the European inhabitants resolved to send another petition to parliament to this effect, but the press continued to argue against this move on the grounds that the secretary of state was fully absorbed in the affairs of continental India, and after a few signatures had been obtained, the petition was abandoned.<sup>180</sup>

The press was right. In June 1859 Lord Stanley was succeeded as secretary of state for India by Sir Charles Wood, formerly President of the Board of Control from 1852 to 1855, upon whom fell the task of the major reorganization involved in bringing India under the direct rule of the crown. During his seven years at the India office, Wood put through an impressive body of reforms in administration and judicial procedure,<sup>181</sup> but in face of the immense complexity of his work in India, he was impatient with apparently irrelevant matters such as the fate of the Straits Settlements. Wood was always disposed to favour speedy action. As President of the Board of Control he had rushed through the Straits charter of justice in 1855 with undue expedition and left many anomalies. Now in 1859 the Straits

<sup>178</sup> SSR, R 46, pp. 19-21.

<sup>179</sup> SFP, 11 May 1865.

<sup>180</sup> SFP, 19 January 1860; report of meeting and text of petition in SFP, 1 March 1860.

<sup>181</sup> A. West, *Sir Charles Wood's Administration of Indian Affairs from 1859 to 1866* (London, 1867); R. J. Moore, *Sir Charles Wood's Indian Policy* (Manchester, 1966).



issue seemed to him equally clear cut and straightforward: the settlements had petitioned to cut the link with India, and Calcutta wanted to be rid of them. Wood wished to satisfy these apparently simple demands without wasting any time. In actual fact his very eagerness to cast off the Straits Settlements became one of the major stumbling-blocks in effecting the transfer of power, because he begrudged wasting time on the detailed investigations which the colonial office required.

In the past the Directors had often acted to moderate or frustrate policies pushed through by Calcutta, sometimes on the advice of the Governor but against the Straits mercantile community's wishes. They were anxious to prevent Governors from suppressing petitions of grievances against the local administration, and in commenting on nearly every narrative of the proceedings of the Straits Settlements, the Directors complained that the Calcutta government was not keeping them informed of decisions affecting the Straits.<sup>182</sup> After 1859 the position was reversed. The secretary of state was impatient with the Straits and his policies inclined to harshness, so that the Governor and the Calcutta authorities sometimes had to put a restraining hand on his attempts to ride rough-shod over the interests of the settlements.

Soon after he assumed office Wood told Canning, 'I have always been for giving up Singapore to the Crown; so I hope soon to receive your opinion in favour of doing so.'<sup>183</sup> Discounting the advice of Blundell, who passed through Calcutta on his way back to Europe, bitter, ill and at his least impressive, Canning gave his official recommendation in November 1859, whole-heartedly supporting the transfer, although he was vague on the all-important question of finance. Canning admitted Indian rule was no longer suitable in the Straits, that communications between the territories were poor, and he felt the settlements needed their own legislative council and a separate civil service. With the development of the Andamans, India would have no further use for a convict station in the Straits.

<sup>182</sup> SSR, S 20, Items 4, 10; IO, Despatches to India and Bengal, 14 January 1857, vol. 102; 25 March 1857, vol. 103; 28 April 1858, vol. 112; 28 July 1858, vol. 113.

<sup>183</sup> Wood to Canning, 27 August 1859, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 1.

The settlements looked to Britain for their naval defence, while in trade and population their interests were orientated more towards China than India, so that officials had to deal with situations and peoples which had nothing to do with India. Altogether Canning concluded there were no good reasons for preserving the link with India and many good ones for transferring the settlements to the colonial office.<sup>184</sup>

Wood at that stage anticipated no difficulty in persuading the colonial office to take over Singapore,<sup>185</sup> but while they had no objections in principle to the transfer, they were suspicious of the confused financial position.<sup>186</sup> As Sir Frederic Rogers, the permanent under-secretary, commented in July 1860, 'The India Office seem to me in the same breath to admit a deficit and claim a surplus.'<sup>187</sup> But at the beginning of 1861 the colonial secretary decided to sink his fears about financial accounts which he could not understand and refer the transfer question for the treasury's approval.<sup>188</sup>

Meanwhile those who wanted the transfer were growing impatient, and in the early months of 1861 the colonial office was bombarded with memoranda demanding action, from John Crawford, from other former Straits residents living in London, and from the Singapore chamber of commerce.<sup>189</sup> Legislation for the Straits was held up while the negotiations went on, and Calcutta was reluctant to pass measures such as those to clarify land tenure in Malacca, to control the Chinese secret societies or to conduct a geological survey.<sup>190</sup> The Straits press kept up a barrage against the alleged indifference and ignorance of the Indian legislative council, and restiveness increased in face of

<sup>184</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, pp. 593-7.

<sup>185</sup> Wood to Canning, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, 3 February 1860, vol. 2, p. 118, 25 May 1860, vol. 3, p. 148; Wood to Newcastle, 7 February 1860, CO 144/18.

<sup>186</sup> CO minutes, 7 February, 9 June 1860, CO 144/18.

<sup>187</sup> CO correspondence and minutes 7-10 July 1860, CO 144/18.

<sup>188</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, pp. 615-20; Newcastle to Fortescue (CO), 15 January 1861, CO 144/18; Wood to Canning, 26 February 1861, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 6; Wood to India, 2 May 1861, CO 273/5; IO to CO, 9 May 1861, and CO minutes 11-17 May 1861, CO 144/20.

<sup>189</sup> PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, pp. 621-51; A. Guthrie and others to Newcastle, 20 April 1861, CO minutes, and Newcastle to Guthrie, 4 May 1861, CO 144/20; ST, 12 January, 2 March 1861; SFP, 7 March, 9 May 1861.

<sup>190</sup> SSR, S 28, Items 194, 222; SFP, 31 January 1861.

reports from London of delays and confusion.<sup>191</sup> At a public meeting called in Singapore in May 1861 to discuss the transfer question, with Read as chairman, no voice appears to have been raised against the proposed change. Resolutions were passed claiming that the revenue was sufficient for internal purposes, and that the imperial government should bear the cost of external defence. A petition was drawn up accordingly, which asked that the Governor should be made her majesty's commissioner and superintendent of trade in the eastern archipelago, 'in order that British interests may be maintained in their integrity and that civilisation and Christianity may be largely promoted'.<sup>192</sup> The *Straits Times* hailed this document as 'the most enlightened exposition of Straits affairs which has ever been placed before the public',<sup>193</sup> but the colonial office was not similarly impressed and was if anything discouraged by its ominous reference to the expensive fortifications under construction.<sup>194</sup>

The question of transferring the Straits Settlements to the colonial office, which hinged on defence expenditure, could not have been raised at a less favourable time, since the British government's attitude to colonial and military policy was changing and was veering towards the withdrawal from military commitments in her colonies. The lessons of the Crimean War, combined with distrust of the French, led in the late 1850s to a review of Britain's defence position and to a reaction against the dispersal of forces among a multitude of scattered dependencies, leaving her own shores weak and unprotected. On the grounds of economy too, Britain wanted to reduce unnecessary expenditure in the colonies. A select parliamentary committee, appointed in March 1861 to report on colonial military expenditure, did not consider Indian territories, since the Indian government paid the full costs of its defence, but its recommendations were to be important for the Straits Settlements.

<sup>191</sup> *ST*, 26 January 1861; *London and China Express*, 26 February 1861; *SFP*, 11 April 1861.

<sup>192</sup> W. H. Read and others to Newcastle, 30 June 1861, CO 144/20; PP, 1862, xl (H. of C.), 259, pp. 657-60.

<sup>193</sup> *ST*, 8 June 1861.

<sup>194</sup> CO minutes 17-19 September 1861 on Read's memorandum, CO 144/20; *ST*, 30 November 1861.

At that time the colonies paid only ten per cent of the total cost of imperial military defence, but the general feeling among the witnesses examined by the committee was that colonies should expect only naval protection and that Britain should concentrate her military forces at home. Many witnesses dwelt on the importance of inculcating an independent spirit in the colonies, and the most important speaker on this aspect was Gladstone, chancellor of the exchequer, who thought it would benefit both the finances of Britain and the character of the colonists to make them pay for their own defence. He considered the existing system of subsidizing colonial defence 'a novel invention of which up to the present time we are the patentees and no-one has shown a disposition to invade our patent'. It was clear that the majority favoured reducing Britain's colonial commitments, and the duke of Newcastle, as colonial secretary, gave an assurance that colonies would only be acquired in future if they were no burden on the exchequer.<sup>195</sup>

In the light of this evidence the committee recommended that the imperial government should continue to bear most of the military expenses of those dependencies kept as military garrisons, naval depots or for other imperial purposes, such as Malta or Gibraltar, but that help should gradually be withdrawn from the colonies of settlement, such as Canada or New Zealand. The report concluded that

The multiplication of fortified places and the erection of fortifications in distant colonial possessions . . . on a scale requiring for their defence a far greater number of men than could be spared for them in the event of war, involves a useless expenditure and fails to provide an efficient protection for places, the defence of which depends on superiority at sea. In conclusion your Committee submit that the tendency of modern warfare is to strike blows at the heart of a hostile power; and that it is therefore desirable to concentrate the troops required for the defence of the United Kingdom as much as possible and trust mainly to naval supremacy for securing against foreign aggression the distant dependencies of the Empire.<sup>196</sup>

The Straits Settlements, with their confused and unconvincing financial accounts, were already unattractive to the British treasury, and at no time could the erection of complicated and

<sup>195</sup> PP, 1861, xiii, no. 423, pp. 69-373.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-5.

expensive fortifications, requiring substantial and costly garrisons, have been more unwelcome in London. It was obvious by then that the Straits Settlements would be acceptable as a crown colony only if their revenue could be increased to cover all their expenses, civil and military, or if they could establish a claim to be of vital strategic and commercial importance to the British empire.

The acquisition of new territory also ran counter to the separatist tendencies then fashionable in Britain in favour of dismembering the empire which attracted a strong following among free traders, notably John Bright, who, in opposing the suggestion that Britain should take Sarawak over as a crown colony, declared in parliament in 1858:

I am inclined to think that there is not a single colony, not a single dependency of this country in any portion of the world, if you take into consideration all that it has cost you, either in war or in protection, which has not been a positive loss to the people of this country.<sup>197</sup>

More surprisingly, separatist tendencies were strong in the colonial office itself at that time, and Sir Frederic Rogers, who was permanent under-secretary during most of the Straits transfer negotiations, was opposed to extending colonial commitments.

When the colonial office approached the treasury in 1861 to consider the Straits' application for transfer to its charge, the treasury was wary of the project, and the confused state of the settlements' finances held up negotiations for years. Even at a time when government departmental accounting was still in an experimental stage in England itself, the Indian accounts were notoriously muddled.<sup>198</sup> The Straits revenue was merged in the general revenues of India, expenditure on convicts and military defence could not be accurately separated, and the accounts were further complicated by the use of different rates of exchange between the rupee and the dollar. Newcastle decided to let the India office fight its own battle with the treasury, since it was that department which wanted to foist the

<sup>197</sup> Quoted in *SFP*, 13 January 1859.

<sup>198</sup> J. Strachey, *India: its Administration and Progress* (1888), 4th edn, London, 1911, p. 119.

Straits Settlements on to the colonial office.<sup>199</sup> Wood was impatient with the treasury's hesitation. Already his relations with Gladstone, the chancellor of the exchequer, were strained,<sup>200</sup> and he wrote to Canning in October 1861, 'Singapore is Gladstone's objection. Heaven help the man who has to do business with him.'<sup>201</sup>

Seeing no reason for the British government to add to its commitments, the treasury made short work of the application, which it rejected in December 1861, and it agreed to reopen the question only if 'specific and satisfactory' evidence could be produced.<sup>202</sup> Raised in England at an inauspicious time, the very enthusiasm of the minority clamouring for the transfer had damaged their cause, while the India office was not prepared to give the time to prove its own arguments.

While the Singapore community had been kept informed by Crawford and other London correspondents and had been well aware for some months of the treasury's doubts and hesitations,<sup>203</sup> the peremptory rejection of their suit came as a surprise both to the advocates of transfer in Singapore and to the Calcutta and Straits authorities. The press immediately urged the need to convince the British government as to the strategic value of Singapore, 'at once the Gibraltar and the Constantinople of the East', potentially a great naval centre and bastion against rising French power.<sup>204</sup>

By the time the news of the breakdown of negotiations reached Singapore in April 1862, Cavenagh's conciliatory rule had soothed the European community sufficiently to dim the majority's disappointment. The standard of administration was improving and Cavenagh was working with public opinion

<sup>199</sup> Treasury to CO, 31 July 1861, and CO minutes 3 August–12 September 1861, CO 144/20; CO to IO, 16 September 1861, Newcastle's minutes, 24 September 1861, CO 144/20.

<sup>200</sup> Wood to Gladstone, 6 May 1860, 12 April 1861, 29 November 1862, Gladstone Papers, 44184, xcix.

<sup>201</sup> Wood to Canning, 26 October 1861, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 9.

<sup>202</sup> Treasury and CO correspondence and minutes November–December 1861, CO 144/20; Wood to India, 23 November 1861, IO, Judicial Despatches to India, vol. 4.

<sup>203</sup> *SFP*, 9 September, 21 November, 5, 19 December 1861, 16 January 1862; *ST*, 21 September 1861.

<sup>204</sup> *SSR*, S 30, Item 5; *ST*, 8 March, 12 April 1862; *SFP*, 20 March, 3, 10 April, 19 June 1862.

wherever he could. Gradually the grand jury abandoned its role as critic of government and after January 1861 made no more presentments. Cavenagh achieved another victory in persuading former critics to accept the office of justice of the peace, which had been shunned throughout Blundell's time. The Governor's great triumph in this campaign came in July 1862 with the recruitment of W. H. Read to the ranks of the 'Great Unpaid'.<sup>205</sup>

The European community took comfort too in the fact that the former unpopular Indian legislative council had been abolished by the Indian Councils act of 1861, which provided for a new Calcutta council including for the first time nominated non-officials, and for similar councils in Madras and Bombay. The Governor General had power to create other councils, and the Straits community was optimistic about having its own legislature if it remained under Indian rule.<sup>206</sup>

The complacency did not last long, since the India office now decided to extend to the Straits taxation measures which had been withheld during the negotiations. In August 1861, when treasury objections to the proposed transfer were first voiced, Wood told Canning, 'Do nothing in fortifying it [Singapore] and as little as you can in any way.'<sup>207</sup> The following month he warned the Governor General that if the Straits budget could not be balanced by rigid economies, he must find new sources of taxation.<sup>208</sup> When the transfer negotiations foundered, Wood ordered Calcutta to introduce income tax, together with any other measures needed to mop up the Straits deficit.<sup>209</sup>

When the subject of income tax had been mooted in 1860, public meetings held in Singapore and Penang to oppose it had provoked bitter feeling in Calcutta. As the *Friend of India* commented:

The whole wealth of Singapore has been created within the last thirty years, and is now increased and protected by the Indian government. Yet intelligent British merchants grumble at and

<sup>205</sup> SSR, W 43, Item 51; SSR, V 36, p. 42.

<sup>206</sup> SFP, 10 April 1862.

<sup>207</sup> Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 8, pp. 170-1.

<sup>208</sup> Wood to India, 14 September 1861, CO 273/5.

<sup>209</sup> Wood to India, 30 April 1862, CO 273/5.

encourage rich Chinamen to resist taxation in return for the security they enjoy.<sup>210</sup>

Now hints about income tax and Calcutta's definite decision to extend the stamp act to the Straits sparked off furious objections from the chambers of commerce and public meetings in Singapore and Penang. Petitions to Calcutta and the India office were drawn up and pleas for help sent to the East India and China Association, to John Crawford, and to various commercial bodies in England.<sup>211</sup> A big public meeting assembled in Singapore in July 1862 to consider renewing agitation for the transfer, at which Read as the main speaker argued that the colonial office should take over the Straits on the grounds of military security, since Singapore was the 'key to the Far East' and as such entitled to imperial expenditure for her defence. The meeting agreed unanimously to send further petitions to parliament.<sup>212</sup>

The agitation against stamp duties failed and the stamp act came into force in January 1863. After a few teething troubles were solved, the controversial act caused little further resentment. Opposition was already fading by the time the act was first introduced, because in November 1862 copies of the parliamentary papers relating to the transfer negotiations reached Singapore and revealed they had broken down solely on the question of finance. The transfer enthusiasts were agreeably surprised to find that the India office was throwing no obstacles in their way, and they realized that if stamp duties could wipe out the deficit, the road to transfer should be clear. Those not fully committed to the transfer cause, who constituted the majority of the Singapore European community, continued to wax hot and cold on the subject according to whether they felt their purses threatened.

Despite this, the protests about stamp duties the previous

<sup>210</sup> Quoted in *SFP*, 30 August 1860.

<sup>211</sup> *SSR*, W 42, Items 185, 194; *SSR*, U 44, p. 197; *SSR*, S 30, Items 121, 159; *SSR*, V 35, p. 258; *SSR*, V 36, pp. 291-5; *SSR*, W 43, Items 24, 48; *ST*, 24 May, 7 June, 12 July 1862; *SFP*, 29 May, 5 July, 7 August 1862; *PG*, 28 June, 12 July in *SFP*, 17, 24 July 1862; J. Crawford, *On the Proposed Imposition of Stamp Duties in the Colonies of the Straits of Malacca* (London, 1862).

<sup>212</sup> *SFP*, 24 July 1862; *ST*, 19, 26 July 1862; full text of petition in *SFP*, 7 August 1862.



year had set in motion a renewed demand for transfer, and in March 1863 Crawford, the Guthries, Purvis, Boustead and other former Straits residents in London petitioned the colonial office once more to take over the settlements, on the grounds that the financial position of the Straits was so much improved that the settlements no longer threatened to be a burden on imperial funds.<sup>213</sup> Impressed with the picture of prosperity, which was confirmed by reports of high yields in the first few months of the operation of the stamp act, Newcastle reopened the negotiations.<sup>214</sup>

In order to clear up any doubts about the financial position, the colonial office deputed Sir Hercules Robinson, Governor of Hong Kong, who was then in London, to visit Singapore on his way back to Hong Kong and report on the Straits Settlements. Robinson was warned that 'under no circumstances will Her Majesty's government be prepared to sanction any imperial expenditure towards either the civil or military charges of the Settlements'.<sup>215</sup> At the same time the war office sent an officer to report in conjunction with Robinson on the state of the military works and the ability of the Straits Settlements to pay for their own defence.<sup>216</sup>

The European community waited in a mood of mingled expectancy and misgiving for Sir Hercules Robinson's arrival. While the transfer had been a remote possibility, few voices had been raised in protest against it in Singapore, but once it became an imminent probability, many of the Singapore community began to murmur apprehensively, and the *Straits Times* in November 1863 compared the merchants to a man 'who had set in motion some ponderous piece of machinery and neither knows how to arrest it nor exactly what may be the consequences of its progress'.<sup>217</sup>

When Robinson reached Singapore in December 1863, Cavenagh had already prepared the outlines of a report on the settlements, which Robinson accepted, apart from a few

<sup>213</sup> SSR, V 34, p. 175; PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 691-2; SFP, 18 June 1863.

<sup>214</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 692-3, 694, 696-7; SSR, W 47, Item 110, CO 273/6; SSR, V 38, p. 22.

<sup>215</sup> CO minutes 1, 8, 26, 28 August 1863, CO 273/7; PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 696-7.

<sup>216</sup> SSR, W 48, Items 231, 272.

<sup>217</sup> ST, 21 November 1863.

matters of detail. He recommended the transfer and reported to London that the financial position was sound, estimating that on the most pessimistic reckoning there would be a surplus of over £200,000 a year.<sup>218</sup> Since Robinson's opinions always carried great weight in the colonial office, particularly with Sir Frederic Rogers,<sup>219</sup> Cavenagh and the European community assumed the transfer was now inevitable.<sup>220</sup>

Robinson's report satisfied the colonial office and the war office, but the treasury was still hesitant concerning the so-called Straits public debt, an item brought to light by Robinson for the first time. This consisted of money paid into the local treasuries on account of the estates of wards of the court of judicature and other judicial trusts, which bore interest at the rate of four per cent a year. Robinson held that Calcutta should make good this debt, but the India office knew nothing of the matter, and negotiations were held up once more pending reference to India.<sup>221</sup> Crawford and other former Straits residents continued their pressure on the India office and colonial office,<sup>222</sup> but at the end of 1864 Wood was writing to the Governor General, Sir John Lawrence, in the same strain as he had addressed Canning years before: 'I cannot get on with the transfer of the Straits. . . The Treasury are not convinced that it will bear its own expenses.'<sup>223</sup> And a few weeks later: 'I cannot get a decision from the Treasury as to Singapore though I press and plague them about once a month.'<sup>224</sup>

In Singapore all was rumour and uncertainty. The temper of the merchant community was fraying, since Singapore found itself in the grip of a commercial crisis. Trade had been in the doldrums since 1858 and declined further in the early 1860s,

<sup>218</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 697-709; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, pp. 351-2.

<sup>219</sup> Rogers to Carnarvon (Secretary of State for Colonies), 15 December 1866, Carnarvon Papers, PRO 30/6.

<sup>220</sup> SSR, R 43, p. 103; *SFP*, 31 December 1863, 21 January 1864; *ST*, 12 March 1864.

<sup>221</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 714-18; SSR, R 38, pp. 135-6; Wood to India, 30 July 1864, CO 273/6.

<sup>222</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 718-19; IO, CO and War Office correspondence and minutes, July-September 1864, CO 273/6; *London and China Express*, 29 June in *SFP*, 18 August 1864; *ST*, 17 September 1864.

<sup>223</sup> Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 18, 24 October 1864.

<sup>224</sup> Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 19, 26 November 1864.

reflecting world-wide recession and the disorganization of the cotton trade during the American civil war. By 1864 the depression had become critical. A number of Chinese merchants went bankrupt, one of them with liabilities amounting to \$750,000.<sup>225</sup> A European firm, Messrs G. H. Brown, was wound up with debts of \$500,000,<sup>226</sup> and in June 1864 came the crash of D'Almeida & Sons, one of the oldest and most respected firms in Singapore.<sup>227</sup> In the whole history of the settlement failures had never been experienced on this scale.

It is a tribute to Cavenagh that the respect he inspired prevented the trade slump of 1864 from bringing down upon him the criticism and strictures which his predecessors suffered when times were bad. But both the Straits authorities and the merchant community wanted a definite decision on the transfer and an end to the current confusion. The Indian government was unwilling to consider new legislation to deal with urgent problems in the Straits or to consider administrative reforms and reorganization, and in October 1864 Cavenagh appealed in vain for legislation on outstanding questions.<sup>228</sup>

A fresh upsurge of anti-India office feeling hit Singapore when, in the course of a British parliamentary debate on the Indian budget in July 1864, Sir Charles Wood indicated that he was prepared to authorize port dues in the Straits. Calcutta, realizing from past experience the strong feeling in the Straits on this score, did not take advantage of the permission granted by the secretary of state, but the mere mention of port dues was sufficient to create a storm. The Singapore merchants formed a committee of protest under Robin Woods, and the *Penang Gazette* urged a fresh determination to fight for the transfer: 'The sooner we are free of Sir Charles Wood and the like of him, the sooner will proper attention be paid to our interests.'<sup>229</sup> Read, who was in London, wrote angry letters to the *Times* and the *London and China Express*,<sup>230</sup> prodded the Singapore merchants to keep life in the transfer movement and co-operated with Crawford and the Straits group, who in February 1865

<sup>225</sup> *ST*, 21 May 1864.

<sup>226</sup> *SSR*, W 50, Item 341.

<sup>227</sup> *ST*, 11 June 1864.

<sup>228</sup> *SSR*, R 44, pp. 174-7, 179-82.

<sup>229</sup> *PG*, 27 August in *SFP*, 15 September 1864.

<sup>230</sup> *The Times*, 22 July 1864 (in *SFP*, 1 September 1864); *London and China Express*, 5 December 1864 in *SFP*, 19 January 1865.

presented the colonial office with a further memorial appealing for the transfer to be pushed through quickly.<sup>231</sup> The Straits press supported this memorial, but Cavenagh warned Wood that it did not represent the overall view of the Straits community, 'the generality of its members being indifferent and a large section decidedly opposed to the proposed change', whereas the one unanimous desire was for a local legislative council.<sup>232</sup>

The India office meanwhile agreed to accept entire responsibility for the public debt, and by January 1865 the treasury was prepared to sanction the change. The minor item concerning the public debt had delayed the transfer negotiations for twelve months. Now the only problem outstanding was the question of defence arrangements, which in turn was to hold up discussions for a further year. The war office was adamant that, since the Straits Settlements were being taken over at their own request and not in the interests of imperial strategy, they must pay their own way and the British government would undertake no part of their defence expenditure.<sup>233</sup> A war office committee was appointed but nothing more was heard of its deliberations for more than a year.

In London, Read continued to present rosy pictures of the Straits' finances and before he left England he had an interview with the colonial secretary and drew up a memorandum for circulation among members of parliament.<sup>234</sup> On his return to Singapore he threw himself with renewed zest into the campaign, and in September 1865, as chairman of the chamber of commerce, he called a meeting of the chamber to 'take into consideration the present state of the transfer question'.<sup>235</sup>

The Governor General was anxious to settle the transfer question, and Wood assured him in December 1865, 'I hope to convert Colonel Cavenagh into a colonial Governor before mid-summer.'<sup>236</sup> He also promised Cavenagh the transfer was

<sup>231</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 720-3.

<sup>232</sup> Cavenagh to Wood, 8 April 1865, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters.

<sup>233</sup> IO, CO and Treasury correspondence and minutes, January 1865, CO 273/7, PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 720, 723-6.

<sup>234</sup> SFP, 15 June, 6 July, 10, 17, 31 August 1865; ST, 30 June 1865.

<sup>235</sup> ST, 11 September 1865.

<sup>236</sup> Lawrence to Wood, 4 November 1865, Lawrence Papers, vol. 6, no. 65; Wood to Lawrence, 16 December 1865, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 22.

imminent.<sup>237</sup> But the Governor was becoming increasingly gloomy about the prospects of the change and depressed about the damage which the delay was inflicting on the settlements. Again in July 1865 he demanded urgent legislation and accused Calcutta of neglecting the Straits.<sup>238</sup> In October 1865, abandoning his customary smooth tact and showing the first signs of strain and weariness, he reproached the Calcutta authorities and claimed the Straits 'should be administered in like manner as any other trust, that is with a view to its general improvement and to the best advantage of those to whose charge it may be eventually confided', not neglected in order to save up a nest-egg for India.<sup>239</sup> In face of revived trouble from the Chinese *hoes*, in October 1865 he submitted a further bill to control them, since no action had been taken on the one he had sent five years earlier. Plagued by problems in the Malay states, he could obtain no statement of policy from Calcutta and was becoming increasingly frustrated at being powerless to act while conditions in the interior deteriorated and the repercussions were felt in the Straits Settlements.

He was unhappy too since his wife, to whom he was very much attached, returned to England in 1864 on health grounds. At that time Cavenagh expected he would shortly be back in England himself and in view of the political uncertainty Mrs Cavenagh did not return to Singapore. This meant that the Governor was separated from his family for three years and domestic strain dimmed his wonted cheerfulness.

The war office made its final decision about defence arrangements in June 1866, agreeing that Britain should bear a proportion of the expense since the high mortality and sickness rate among troops in Hong Kong made it desirable to transfer some of the European troops to the healthier station of Singapore. The total military expenditure in the Straits Settlements would then amount to £66,000 a year, and it was agreed that of this the Settlements would contribute £59,300.<sup>240</sup> It was a large

<sup>237</sup> Wood to Cavenagh, 10 September 1865, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 21, 26 January 1866, vol. 22; Wood to Lawrence, 3 February 1866, Halifax Papers, Letter Books, vol. 22.

<sup>238</sup> SSR, R 44, pp. 57, 231; Cavenagh to Wood, 21 July 1865, Halifax Papers, uncatalogued letters.

<sup>239</sup> SSR, R 36, pp. 68-9.

<sup>240</sup> PP, 1866, lii, C[3672], pp. 727-40; War Office confidential memorandum,

proportion and a much greater sum than the amount demanded from many wealthier colonies.

The last impediment was removed. Sir Charles Wood was deprived of the pleasure of handing over the settlements, because in the spring of 1866 he was forced to retire after a serious riding accident. The drafting of the short Straits transfer bill fell to Sir Charles Adderley, a firm opponent of the extension of imperial commitments, who viewed this task of providing for the acquisition of a new colonial territory with open distaste.<sup>241</sup> The bill was finally enacted in August 1866,<sup>242</sup> and after the years of leisurely negotiation the arrangements for the actual transfer were made with unseemly haste. The India office and the Governor General wished to shed responsibility for the settlements at the end of 1866, but at the insistence of the colonial office the transfer was postponed until April 1867, which was the end of the Indian financial year.<sup>243</sup>

As late as June 1866 Cavenagh was doubtful if the transfer would be approved,<sup>244</sup> and the following month news that the bill had been put before parliament came almost as a surprise in Singapore. Calcutta offered to pass all outstanding bills and there was a spate of legislation in the last few months of the Indian regime. The administration was working smoothly and the budget estimates for 1866-7 showed a healthy surplus.<sup>245</sup> The Governor and his officials continued to command respect, which was shown at a very warm-hearted public dinner in honour of Sir Richard McCausland, when he retired as Recorder of Singapore in March 1866. On that occasion the Governor, the Recorder and W. H. Read vied with each other in December 1865, WO 33/17 (0279); Correspondence on sickness and mortality at Hong Kong, 1864-6, WO 33/17.

<sup>241</sup> Sir Charles Adderley, *Review of 'The Colonial Policy of Lord John Russell's Administration' by Earl Grey, 1853, and of Subsequent Colonial History* (London, 1869), pp. 331-2; Adderley's evidence before 1861 Parliamentary Committee on Colonial Military Expenditure, PP, 1861, xiii, no. 423, pp. 82-3; Adderley's commentary on the committee in *Letter to the Rt. Hon. Benjamin Disraeli, M.P., on the Present Relation of England with the Colonies* (London, 1861).

<sup>242</sup> An act to provide for the government of the Straits Settlements, Act XXIX and xxx Victoria, Capt. 115, British Sessional Papers, H. of C. 1866, v, 327.

<sup>243</sup> IO to CO, 11 September 1866 and CO minutes, 4 October 1866, CO 273/7; Rogers to Carnarvon (Secretary of State for Colonies), 3, 15 October 1866, Carnarvon Papers, PRO 30/6.

<sup>244</sup> SSR, U 51, p. 64.

<sup>245</sup> SSR, U 51, p. 50.

paying tribute to the judiciary, the civil service and the mercantile community.

The months passed and no instructions arrived about handing over the Straits administration. Sir Charles Wood had assumed that Cavenagh would continue in office as the first colonial Governor, as he would have been happy to do. But the colonial office was resolved on a clean sweep of the Governor and his senior officials, 'the main object in view being to get rid of the Indian mode of conducting business'.<sup>246</sup> Cavenagh did not hear until January 1867 that the handover was to take place in April,<sup>247</sup> and, expecting to head the new administration, he was shocked to learn the following month from a letter received from England by a private resident in Singapore that he had been superseded. Deeply hurt, he applied for medical leave in order to depart before his successor arrived.<sup>248</sup> With characteristic loyalty, he pleaded strongly before his departure for generous treatment for the senior officials.<sup>249</sup> Writing privately to the Governor General, he was more outspoken, complaining of the discourtesy shown to him personally and the injustice inflicted on officials who 'having raised the settlements to prosperity, now for no reason were being superseded by colonial office nominees with a fraction of their standing and experience and with no provision being made for them elsewhere'.<sup>250</sup> India did not want to reabsorb them, and the India office could offer nothing but sympathy.<sup>251</sup>

The Singapore community was sorry to see Cavenagh leave. At a public meeting it was resolved to present him with an address and a gift of silver plate, and his portrait was commissioned for the town hall.<sup>252</sup> The *Straits Times* commended his administration as the one which had brought more material progress than any other during Singapore's whole existence, and half regretted the imminent break with India.<sup>253</sup> The press had

<sup>246</sup> CO minutes, 8 August 1866, CO 273/7.

<sup>247</sup> Cavenagh to Carnarvon, 21 December 1866, CO 273/10; SSR, S 35, Item 266.

<sup>248</sup> Cavenagh to India, 7 February 1867, SSR, X 25; SSR, R 43, pp. 345-6; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 368; *ST*, 22 February 1867.

<sup>249</sup> SSR, R 43, pp. 339-41, 348-9.

<sup>250</sup> Cavenagh to Lawrence, 22 March 1867, Lawrence Papers, vol. 15.

<sup>251</sup> Lawrence Papers, vol. 8, nos. 14, 25; Lawrence Papers, vol. 18, no. 65.

<sup>252</sup> *ST*, 9 January, 8 March 1867.

<sup>253</sup> *ST*, 6 February 1867.

nothing but kind words for Cavenagh: 'No Governor has ever associated himself more unqualifiedly with the interests and progress of the place.'<sup>254</sup> More than 120 people attended a public dinner in his honour in March 1867, when Read, the arch-foe of the Indian regime, presided and paid tribute to Cavenagh.<sup>255</sup> On the morning of the Governor's departure all the merchants and officials assembled to present him with addresses. As chairman of the chamber of commerce, Read presented the address from the merchant community, and as captain of the Singapore Volunteers he commanded the guard of honour.<sup>256</sup> In Penang Cavenagh's reception was enthusiastic, and the *Penang Gazette* praised him for having won for himself 'golden opinions from all'.<sup>257</sup>

The warm hopes for Cavenagh's future success were not to be fulfilled. The Singapore merchants had wished him a career 'as prosperous and distinguished as that which has hitherto proved of such benefit to our country and ourselves',<sup>258</sup> but his departure from the Straits marked the end of the Governor's working life. Only forty-six years old at that time, he was doomed to spend the rest of his life in reluctant retirement. Cavenagh drew up his own testimonial, a *Report on the progress of the Straits Settlements from 1859-60 to 1866-7*, which gave a fair picture of the considerable progress made during his eight years in office,<sup>259</sup> but in London Cavenagh's constructive work in the Straits Settlements went almost unnoticed. The Trengganu incident was stamped indelibly on his public image, and his impetuous, irresponsible departure from Singapore dashed his hopes of future employment. Cavenagh's reception at the hands of the secretary of state for India was cool, and he left the India office with a feeling of deflation, lamenting the high honours he could now never hope to win.<sup>260</sup> Seven years later, when his successor came to the end of his period as Governor, Cavenagh applied to have his appointment back, on the grounds that he had received no formal notice of termination

<sup>254</sup> *ST*, 11 March 1867.

<sup>255</sup> *ST*, 13 March 1867.

<sup>256</sup> *ST*, 15, 16, 21 March 1867; Cavenagh, *Reminiscences*, p. 371.

<sup>257</sup> Quoted in *ST*, 30 March 1867.

<sup>258</sup> *ST*, 16 March 1867.

<sup>259</sup> *Report on the Progress of the Straits Settlements from 1859-60 to 1866-7* by Governor Cavenagh (Singapore, 1867).

<sup>260</sup> Cavenagh's Diary.



of office. The colonial office was puzzled but set aside the claims of 'this excellent and deserving officer'.<sup>261</sup>

By the time the transfer was finally effected, many of the grievances cited in the 1857 petition, such as those concerning currency, port dues and convicts, had died away. Others, such as relations with the Malay states and the problem of dealing with Chinese secret societies, had become more serious, while the political uncertainties of the years from 1857 to 1867 had delayed reforms which the Indian regime would probably have introduced if its future in the Straits had never been challenged.

The transfer question had been argued between officials and government departments in London, Calcutta and Singapore, without thoroughly seeking out the views of the Straits inhabitants, and this gave an inaccurate and unbalanced picture of the general feeling of the community. Only the most vocal advocates of the change came to the attention of the British government, which for ten years was plagued with deputations, letters, memorials and petitions, claiming to represent the common views of the Straits residents. No dissenting voice was raised in London or Calcutta, and the colonial office naturally had the impression that the demand for transfer was based on general dissatisfaction with rule from India, with the entire merchant body clamouring for change. In fact it had required years of agitation on the part of Read, Woods and a small minority of enthusiasts in Singapore to arouse interest in the transfer, and apart from the brief period of panic in 1857 when the petition was framed, the majority even of the European merchants in Singapore were not actively in favour of the change, while the Asian merchants showed almost no interest in the movement.<sup>262</sup>

Cavenagh's six years of conscientious and vigorous administration had produced a golden 'Indian summer' for Calcutta's government in the Straits, and as the old regime neared its end the Straits community regarded the coming changes with

<sup>261</sup> Cavenagh to Kimberley (Secretary of State for Colonies), 25 March 1873, CO minutes, CO 273/74.

<sup>262</sup> The only occasion on which a non-European is known to have attended any public meeting on the transfer question was in December 1863 when Seah Eu Chin was present.

mixed feelings. Whatever the future might bring, there was general sympathy for John Cameron's tribute to Calcutta's guardianship:

When the Indian government hands over the Straits Settlements to the Crown, it will deliver a trust honestly kept and well deserving the solicitude of its new guardians. It has shown too an example of high minded forbearance in abstaining to check the growth of a promising colony to save its own Treasury.<sup>263</sup>

<sup>263</sup> J. Cameron, *Our Tropical Possessions in Malayan India* (London, 1864), pp. 205-6.

## CHAPTER X

### Epilogue, 1867-73: The New Colony

THE new Governor, Sir Harry St George Ord,<sup>1</sup> arrived in the Straits Settlements in March 1867, full of enthusiasm for his appointment and expecting to be welcomed by a satisfied community, ready to help him in his campaign to sweep away the inefficiencies of the Indian regime and bring in the benefits of colonial rule. With considerable military and colonial experience behind him, Ord appeared to be admirably fitted to be first Governor of the new colony, and his appointment seemed to guarantee a smooth transition to colonial rule. In July 1866, when he was Governor of Bermuda, Ord had offered his services as a 'new broom' for Singapore,<sup>2</sup> and when news of his appointment was released, the *London and China Telegraph* commended him as 'essentially a man of progress'.<sup>3</sup>

Ord's briefing in London before he left for the Straits was superficial and he was given little guidance on policy except to keep expenses down.<sup>4</sup> He was ordered to investigate and report on Dutch activities in Sumatra,<sup>5</sup> but on the vital issues of a forward movement in the Malay states and a strong line towards the Chinese immigrant population, the colonial office had no policy and issued no instructions.

It was an unpleasant surprise for Ord to discover on his

<sup>1</sup> SIR HARRY ST GEORGE ORD (1819-85). Commissioned Royal Engineers, 1837; served in Crimean War, 1854-5; transferred to colonial service, 1855; Gold Coast mission, 1856, and negotiations over Dutch and French territories in West Africa; Lieutenant Governor Dominica, 1857; Governor Bermuda, 1861-6; Governor Straits Settlements, 1867-73; Governor South Australia, 1877-9. *DNB*, xiv, 1030-1; *ST*, 22 December 1866.

<sup>2</sup> Ord to Parker (CO), 6 July 1866, Carnarvon Papers (additional items), PRO 30/6.

<sup>3</sup> *London and China Telegraph*, 26 January 1867.

<sup>4</sup> Elliot (CO) to Carnarvon, 10 December 1866, memorandum of conversation Carnarvon/Ord, January 1867, Carnarvon Papers (additional items), PRO 30/6; COD, 1, nos. 2, 5, 8, 10, 14.

<sup>5</sup> COD, 1, no. 16.

arrival in Penang that Cavenagh had already left and that the senior officials were resentful and apprehensive about their future.<sup>6</sup> The *Straits Times* greeted the transfer as 'the greatest political event which has occurred since the foundation of the Settlement',<sup>7</sup> but an undercurrent of anxiety remained among the merchants. They were angry at the shabby treatment meted out to the popular Cavenagh, sorry to see the former covenanted officials moved, but above all apprehensive about increased taxation. Despite this, they were pleased at the prospect of having their own legislative council and regarded the new regime as one which 'has the power as well as the will to act'.<sup>8</sup>

The formal inauguration of the new colony took place on 1 April 1867 in the Singapore town hall. The town went on holiday, all offices and businesses were closed, the Europeans and thousands of Asians turned out in strength, and some of the Chinese merchants staged firework displays.<sup>9</sup> Ord was pleased at the general display of goodwill,<sup>10</sup> and immediately after the ceremony he summoned his councils to deal with the formalities involved in the change of regime.

The Straits Settlements were given the normal crown colony constitution, with an executive council consisting of senior officials, and a legislative council made up of officials and non-officials nominated by the Governor.<sup>11</sup> Legislative meetings were to be open to the public and reports given to local newspapers for publication. Official members were required to support government policy, but non-officials were free to speak and vote as they pleased. The official majority was large enough to overrule non-officials, but the Governor was instructed to pay deference to their views when unanimous, particularly on questions of taxation or expenditure.<sup>12</sup>

Within a few months Ord warned the colonial office that there were vocal critics of the new regime, some of whom

<sup>6</sup> GD, 1, no. 1, pp. 1-4.

<sup>7</sup> ST, 21 March 1867.

<sup>8</sup> ST, 21 March 1867.

<sup>9</sup> ST, 2 April 1867.

<sup>10</sup> GD, 1, no. 2, pp. 4-5; Ord to Carnarvon, 3 April 1867, CO, 273/10. C. B. Buckley's celebrated and scathing description of the ceremony was written many years later and is probably an exaggeration, written in bitterness in view of Ord's later unpopularity with Buckley's friend, W. H. Read, and other European merchants. C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, 1902, reprinted Kuala Lumpur, 1965), ii, 787.

<sup>11</sup> COD, 1, Item 1, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> COD, 1, no. 2.

argued that it was unsuitable to call the Straits Settlements a 'Crown Colony'.<sup>13</sup> This angered the secretary of state, who insisted:

There is scarcely any colony under the English dominion in which the authority of the Crown and control of the Home Government is so indispensable as in the Straits Settlements and nothing could be more prejudicial to the public interests than any step which would indicate a disposition to impair that authority or withdraw that control.<sup>14</sup>

The scene was set for a battle which continued throughout the seven years of Ord's administration, for those who had agitated most vigorously for the transfer were disappointed that the normal colonial constitution gave them less power than they wanted, while, whenever difficulties arose, those who had not clamoured for the change looked back nostalgically to the old regime. The Penang community, who had never supported the transfer, were particularly dissatisfied with the change. Penang had only one representative on the legislative council, and resentment at Singapore's alleged neglect of the northern settlement reached such a pitch that in January 1872 the chairman of the Penang chamber of commerce led the way in demanding separation from Singapore and the creation of their own legislative council.<sup>15</sup>

The transfer of power to colonial rule would have been difficult in any hands, but Ord's personality made the transition more painful than it need have been. A difficult and autocratic man, Ord did not inspire the affection and trust commanded by his kindly, unassuming predecessor, and he became in person the object of criticism for everything which was unpopular in the new regime.

Already accused of extravagance and high-handedness, Ord made the fatal mistake of bruising the merchants on their most sensitive spot, the fear of commercial taxation. Irritated by what he considered to be the selfish attitude of the European mercantile community in wanting taxes to fall almost entirely on the Asian population, he made an unwise and unnecessary declaration at a legislative council meeting in December 1867 that if

<sup>13</sup> GD, 1, no. 61.

<sup>14</sup> COD, 2, no. 71.

<sup>15</sup> ST, 15, 18 January 1872; CO minutes, 28 February 1873, CO, 273/74.

extra taxation had to be raised in future he would impose direct taxation, but 'except under the pressure of necessity which could hardly arise', he would not put taxes on commerce.<sup>16</sup> There was in fact no immediate likelihood of further taxation being imposed, but the idea that the sacred principle of free trade might be infringed in any circumstances whatever produced an uproar in Singapore, and led also to a revival of opposition in England and the reunion of the former Straits residents who had fought for the transfer. In January 1868 a large group met in Boustead's London office and decided to form the Straits Settlements association,

to guard against any legislation that might prejudicially affect the interests of the Straits Settlements, and in particular that might be calculated to check or interfere with their commercial prosperity as free ports of trade; to use means to prevent unnecessary expenditure by the local government and otherwise to watch over the general interests of the Settlement.<sup>17</sup>

John Crawford was elected president, William Napier chairman, James Guthrie deputy chairman, and William Paterson treasurer, with a committee of ten including Edward Boustead and Henry Simons. The association decided to seek the co-operation of the Singapore and Penang chambers of commerce. Local branches of the Straits Settlements association were formed in Singapore in March 1868 and in Penang in April, and the association was to be an irritation to the colonial office and a thorn in Ord's flesh throughout his administration.

The Governor's speech unleashed the opposition to the new regime which had been growing over the months and the frustration of those who wanted more power than a colonial legislative council permitted, and who therefore welcomed the build up of extra-constitutional bodies such as the Straits Settlements association. Read, the senior non-official legislative assemblyman, became president of the Singapore branch of the Straits Settlements association. Maxwell, now chief justice of the Straits Settlements colony but resentful of the loss of the unique influence, power and patronage which he had previously

<sup>16</sup> *Straits Settlements Legislative Council Proceedings*, 18 December 1867, 1 E 1, p. 41; ST, 19 December 1867.

<sup>17</sup> COD, 3, no. 27.

enjoyed and which were threatened by Ord's bill to remodel the supreme court on colonial lines, marshalled the non-official members of the legislative council against the Governor and used the Straits Settlements association to agitate in London. While the legislative council was supposed to provide the forum for airing popular opinion, public meetings on the pattern of pre-colonial days continued to be in vogue.

A public meeting was organized in Singapore in July 1868 to protest against the supreme court act, and, with the backing of the Straits Settlements association in London, petitioned the colonial office against the bill, describing the colonial practice of subjecting judges to possible dismissal by the Governor as 'inherently vicious'.<sup>18</sup> Unaware of Maxwell's past record of opposition or how close the India office had once come to dismissing him for insubordination in his dealings with Blundell, and knowing nothing of the organized extra-constitutional opposition which had become normal in the Straits under the Indian regime, the colonial secretary insisted that the Straits Governor should have the same control over the judiciary as in other crown colonies and was irritated at the attempts to give the Straits Settlements a special status.<sup>19</sup>

In reviewing the experience of the Straits Settlements under colonial administration at the beginning of 1869, the *Straits Times* expressed disappointment:

The confident expectation was that the community would have some control over their affairs, and the public wishes and wants would be consulted and deferred to. Instead of that, the whole colony has been placed, tied neck and foot, practically in the power of one man. . . The Legislative Council, which was so much wished for, has proved a delusion, a mockery and a snare, being merely a blind to conceal the real despotic power which the Governor possesses.<sup>20</sup>

In April 1869 the Straits Settlements association in London submitted a memorandum to the colonial office, claiming they had been a peaceful and prosperous community in 1867 but the two years under the new administration had been 'most disastrous to the colony'. They objected to a legislative council in which the Governor could command the votes of officials as

<sup>18</sup> COD, 5, no. 205.

<sup>19</sup> COD, 5, no. 197.

<sup>20</sup> ST, 4 January 1869.

'a mere mockery, representing as it does, the will of the Governor alone; and that such a system is wrong in principle, demoralising and altogether objectionable'.<sup>21</sup>

The publication of these charges and of Ord's reply, in which he claimed with some justice that in its references to 'the interests of the colony', the association meant 'the purely personal interests of the European trading community of the Settlements and more especially of that of Singapore',<sup>22</sup> provoked the calling of a further public meeting in Singapore in April 1870. Read was chairman and the gathering, which was attended by most of the European merchants, confirmed the charges made against Ord and recorded a unanimous vote of thanks to the Straits Settlements association of London.<sup>23</sup>

In 1873 Ord introduced a criminal procedure bill, of which the most controversial clause provided for the abolition of the grand jury, an institution which had already disappeared in India and in many crown colonies. Twenty years earlier the Singapore merchants had agitated for its abolition, but Ord's proposals now provoked a furious outcry from the non-official members of the legislative council<sup>24</sup> and from those attending a public meeting held in Singapore in September 1873. One of the largest political gatherings ever held in Singapore, it was presided over by Read, the 'Nestor of the Settlement', who made a long speech condemning Ord's despotism over the past six years and claiming that abolishing the grand jury would remove 'the last check between arbitrary government and justice to the people'.<sup>25</sup> The meeting resolved by an overwhelming majority to support the non-officials in their stand and a telegram was sent to the Straits Settlements association in London to ask the secretary of state to suspend the ordinance until he had considered the non-officials' protests. Two days later all the European non-official members walked out of the legislative council, and the criminal procedure bill was passed

<sup>21</sup> 'Memorandum regarding the Government of the Straits Settlements', by the Straits Settlements Association, COD, 7, no. 95.

<sup>22</sup> GD, 4, no. 196; COD, 9, no. 48.

<sup>23</sup> ST, 8 April 1870.

<sup>24</sup> Ord to Kimberley (Secretary of State for Colonies), 19 September 1873, CO minutes, 27, 30 October, 2 November 1873, CO, 273/69.

<sup>25</sup> ST, 15 September 1873; CO, 273/70, nos. 290, 291.



without them.<sup>26</sup> A petition headed by Read's name, with seventy-nine signatures from Europeans and fifty-one from Chinese, appealing for ordinances not to be put into force in future until approved by the colonial office, was rejected by the secretary of state, who objected to the principle that the non-official minority should exert even a temporary veto on legislation.<sup>27</sup>

The following month, just before Ord retired as Governor, he submitted to the legislative council a report on his regime, a *Review of the progress of the Straits Settlements since April 1867*, which concluded

that the objects which the promoters of the transfer had in view have not only been fully attained but that even greater advantages and greater prosperity than were anticipated has accrued to the Colony of the Straits Settlements.<sup>28</sup>

The report showed there had indeed been considerable material progress, that efficient administration had replaced the muddle of the Indian regime, that an imposing body of legislation had been introduced, and above all that the revenue was healthy. By 1873 the surplus for the year had risen to \$339,474.<sup>29</sup> As one of the colonial office staff noted, 'With a little discretion Sir H. Ord might have left Singapore a popular Governor.'<sup>30</sup> As it was, Ord's departure from Singapore in November 1873 was a relief to most of the merchant community.

The colonial office, not realizing the strength of opposition which had already grown up before 1867 and never convinced by Ord's argument that the majority had not wanted the transfer, saw most of the troubles of his regime as his own making. They did not appreciate his difficulties with the civil service, disapproved of his 'cat and dog' squabbles with Maxwell and senior officials, and lost trust in his judgment.

<sup>26</sup> *Straits Settlements Legislative Council Proceedings*, 29 September 1873, 1 E 7; Ord to Kimberley (telegram), 29 September 1873, CO, 273/69; ST, 27 September 1873.

<sup>27</sup> CO, 273/70, nos. 296, 297, CO minutes; GD, 10, nos. 297, 343.

<sup>28</sup> *Straits Settlements Legislative Council Proceedings*, 31 October 1873, 1 E 7, xcii, App. 51; GD, 10, no. 353A.

<sup>29</sup> GD, 10, no. 318.

<sup>30</sup> CO minutes, 1 December 1873, on Ord to Kimberley, 1 November 1873, CO, 273/71.

One of the most criticized spheres of Ord's policy was his dealings with the Malay states. By 1867 the call for an extension of British political influence in the Malay peninsula was one of the Straits merchants' most pressing demands. They were destined to disappointment, discovering that, as far as external affairs were concerned, they had changed one negative and inactive master for another, because the colonial office was only too willing to take over Calcutta's policy of non-involvement. Ord was given no authority to bring closer contact with the Malay states, and the colonial office made its attitude clear when Paterson and Simons endeavoured in vain to enlist support in securing compensation for their losses in Pahang:

If merchants or others penetrate disturbed and semi-barbarous independent states . . . they must not anticipate that the British government will intervene to enforce their contracts when the disturbed state of the country and the disputes of rival claimants to power cause embarrassment or losses.<sup>31</sup>

Forbidden to extend his authority in the interior, Ord could do nothing to satisfy the growing demands from the merchants for a more positive policy. He was in a difficult position, similar to that of Cavenagh: prohibited from taking a positive line and yet more than half in sympathy with those who wanted to do so. In May 1868 the colonial office gave him a strict instruction: 'The policy of Her Majesty's government in the Malayan peninsula is not one of intervention in native affairs.'<sup>32</sup> While Ord was in England on leave in 1871-2 he had a long personal discussion with Lord Kimberley, the secretary of state, in which he pressed for a policy of active intervention in the Malay states, but his request for a relaxation of the policy of non-involvement was refused.<sup>33</sup> This explicit prohibition against taking any positive steps to increase British commitments led to Ord's mounting frustration, when he had to watch with hands tied while the nearby states disintegrated in chaos and British subjects, both European and Chinese, clamoured for intervention. By July 1873, when Singapore Chinese merchants submitted

<sup>31</sup> COD, 4, nos. 99, 119, 166.

<sup>32</sup> COD, 4, no. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Ord to Carnarvon (Secretary of State for Colonies), 18 October 1874, CO, 273/78.

a formal complaint about the destruction of long-established trade and loss of property arising from the turmoil in the Malay states, Ord told the colonial office that the whole of the western Malay states south of Province Wellesley were in chaos, and only Johore and the Siamese-dominated states enjoyed peace.<sup>34</sup>

The colonial office was by that time persuaded that a more effective British influence was needed in the Malay states, but Ord's activities over the past seven years convinced them he was not the man to enforce such a policy, for they had no confidence in his tact or judgment. Ord's successor, Sir Andrew Clarke, was given more scope and he was more in tune with the Singapore business community. He offered reappointment to the non-officials of the legislative council who had resigned, and they all accepted.<sup>35</sup> He showed alacrity in favouring a forward policy in the Malay states and adopting here the viewpoint of the leading Singapore merchants. Given instructions to enquire and report on the state of affairs in the west coast states of Malaya, he went further and made the Pangkor agreement in January 1874, which provided for a British Resident to advise the sultan of Perak, and paved the way for similar arrangements in Selangor and Sungei Ujong, beginning the process which led to British domination in these states.

The Straits mercantile community was delighted, and in July 1874 the *Straits Times* commented,

Perhaps the most serious blot in the eyes of an impartial critic upon Sir Harry Ord's government was his supineness or indifference to the disturbances which were chronic in the native states of the peninsula during his term of office, and it says not a little for Sir Andrew Clarke's political sagacity that he at once on his arrival here saw that his first and paramount duty was to put an end to these disturbances.<sup>36</sup>

It was doubly painful to Ord that he should now be criticized for inaction, while his successor should be praised for taking the active line which Ord had recommended but had been expressly forbidden to pursue. He complained bitterly to the colonial office, whose staff had to admit among themselves that

<sup>34</sup> GD, 9, no. 188, pp. 374-85.

<sup>35</sup> Clarke to Kimberley, 10 January 1874, no. 4, CO, 273/75; ST, 2 January 1874.

<sup>36</sup> ST, 21 July 1874.

policy had 'somewhat changed', perhaps because Clarke inspired more confidence than Ord.<sup>27</sup>

The intervention in the Malay states was welcomed by the Straits merchants and by those in Britain who had commercial interests in the Straits, for it represented the logical development of policy which had been artificially held back for nearly twenty years. In its attempts to insulate the Straits Settlements from the affairs of the hinterland, the government of India made various treaties and arrangements, which in practice did not serve as final settlements but drew the Straits government into closer contact with the Malay states. By the early 1860s the repercussions of these treaties and the *ad hoc* decisions made by the Governors to cope with individual problems in the interior, were building up into a pattern of commitment which dictated a change of policy. But the reaction to Cavenagh's bombardment of Trengganu in 1862 led to a rigid insistence on non-intervention, which was subsequently confirmed by the colonial office, and deprived the Governor of the Straits Settlements of any effective influence. Blundell, Cavenagh and Ord all saw that it was unrealistic for the British authorities to stand aloof from the politics of the Malay states, and all sought the opportunity to exert sufficient influence over the states of the interior to ensure protection for British subjects and British interests, to give the background of security for commercial activities in the Malay states, to discourage the secret society feuds which threatened the peace of Penang, and to eliminate the temptations for private intrigue which divided the Singapore merchants into hostile cliques.

Modern historians have laid great emphasis on the change of policy in London in the mid-1870s which led to the forward movement in British colonial development, but in practice it needed no dramatic change of policy in Britain but only the lifting of the brake imposed on the Governor's freedom of action in his relations with the Malay states to release forces which had been building up for many years. If the colonial office had put faith in Ord's judgment, the Straits authorities would have intervened in the Malay states several years earlier than 1874 and in a different manner, but Ord's handling of

<sup>27</sup> Ord to Carnarvon, 18 October 1874, CO minutes, CO, 273/78.

domestic issues in the Straits Settlements left the colonial office distrustful of his capacity to cope with more complex external problems.

The first colonial Governor's difficulties stemmed not only from the defects of his own character but in part from the constitutional position which had emerged as a result of the long years of struggle to build up interest in the transfer movement and of the further years of effort involved in bringing the campaign to a successful conclusion. This period of agitation bred a tradition among the European non-official minority of persistent extra-constitutional anti-government opposition, which the colonial regime inherited. The transfer petition was granted as a concession by the British government, with no thought of strategic military or naval advantage and with no intention of introducing any radical change in the policy of the government of India towards the Straits Settlements and the Malay states. Ord's troubles arose largely from the fact that he came not, as he anticipated, to a territory seething with discontent at Indian maladministration and eager for colonial reform, but to settlements where the majority were apprehensive of change, while the minority were clamouring for a policy of expansion which the colonial office had no intention of promoting and for stronger political powers than the normal crown colony structure permitted. The first stormy chapter of colonial rule ensued not only from the new and impersonal nature of colonial administration, but also from the fact that an influential and ambitious minority of the European merchants of Singapore had acquired during the campaign for transfer a machinery and a training in opposition to authority which they were prepared to use in face of disappointment at exchanging a position of vocal criticism without responsibility for the very limited power provided under a colonial constitution.

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Semi-official papers of Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert, fourth earl of Carnarvon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, June 1866 to December 1868. Most of the Carnarvon Papers refer to Carnarvon's public life after 1867, but additional items 132-40, deposited in the Public Record Office in 1959, relate to his period as Colonial Secretary 1866-8.

**CAVENAGH PAPERS** In the possession of Major Orfeur Cavenagh of Victoria, British Columbia.

Four volumes of personal diaries kept by Colonel (later Major General) Orfeur Cavenagh during his term of office as Governor of the Straits Settlements, 1859-67.

**DYCE, CHARLES** Unpublished manuscript about the Straits Settlements, written about 1846, attached to folio of pictures in Singapore Art Museum.

**ELGIN PAPERS** Housed in the India Office Library, London, in the series MS Eur. F 83.

Semi-official papers of James Bruce, eighth Earl of Elgin, relating to the period when he was Governor General of India, 1862-3. The papers relevant to the Straits Settlements are:

F 83/17. Governor General to miscellaneous correspondents.

F 83/24. Miscellaneous correspondents to Governor General.

F 83/25. Sarawak Papers.

**GLADSTONE PAPERS** Housed in the British Museum.

Semi-official papers of W. E. Gladstone, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1859-65 and Leader of the House of Commons, 1865-6, during the Straits

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**HALIFAX PAPERS** Housed in the India Office Library, London.

(i) Twenty-two bound volumes of official and semi-official letters written by Charles Wood, first Viscount Halifax, relating to the period June 1859 to February 1866 when Wood was Secretary of State for India.

(ii) Wood-Cavenagh correspondence. Letters written by Cavenagh to Wood, 1864-6.

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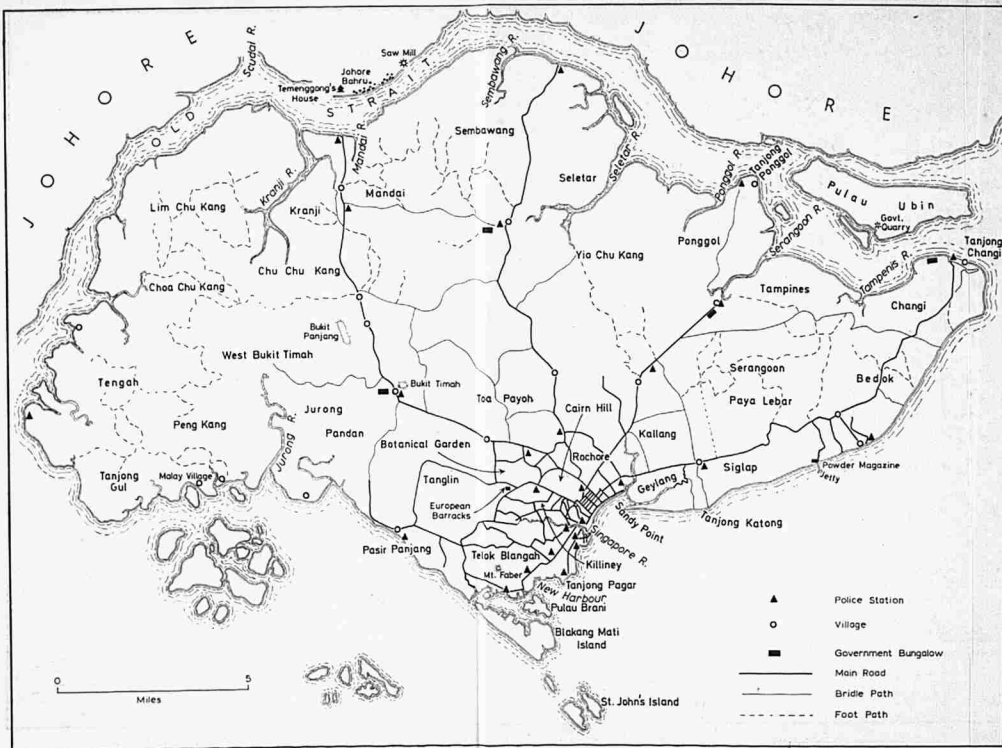
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### Singapore Island in 1867

Based on a map of the island of Singapore and its dependencies, by Quintin, Surveyor General Straits Settlements, 1868, and a map of the island of Singapore and its dependencies by J. F. A. McNair, Surveyor General Straits Settlements 1873

